

Swettenham

Sumbangan

daripada
Khazanah

Tan Sri Dato' Seri Zain

Azraai bin Zainal Abidin



Sir Frank Swettenham, by John Singer Sargent, portrait in National Portrait Gallery, London.

Swettenham

H.S. BARLOW

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Sir Frank Swettenham by J.S. Sargent, portrait in Singapore
(*Courtesy of the National Heritage Board, Singapore.*)

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Foreword and Acknowledgements

At first sight it is remarkable that a man who contributed as much as Swettenham to what is now Malaysia should have had to wait almost fifty years after his death for a full biography. A closer scrutiny reveals some of the reasons. In the years up to her own death in 1970, the second Lady Swettenham showed a steely determination to guard the memory of her 'darling Frank.' (W. Martin, pers. comm.) She was so appalled at the prospect of a biography being undertaken in the sixties by a woman in the form of the distinguished late Emily Sadka that the project was dropped.

When her husband's papers were sorted out in the sixties, with the assistance of her great-nephew, Brigadier N.A.M. Swettenham, who, like her, knew no Malay and little of the country, the second Lady Swettenham authorized those papers deemed to be of significance for Malaysia to be returned to this country, where they now reside in the National Archives. (SP in the references in this book.) However she and Brigadier Swettenham retained a number of items: a folio of paintings, some Malay books in the Jawi script, and certain letters and reviews. Luckily the latter were copied by June Stoodley, at that time herself contemplating a biography. (Hence the Stoodley Papers, see below.) On the death of the second Lady Swettenham, her residual estate passed to a French count, the son of her sister who had married a Frenchman. He, having no interest in Malaysian matters, disposed of the lot, apparently to one or more London junk shops. Some items have since been found. These have included a folio of Swettenham's paintings, (Lim Chong Keat and H.S. Barlow, 1988) and a manuscript of Hang Tuah. (V.M. Hooker, 1991.) There are no doubt other paintings still to be traced.

There were other reasons too for hesitation by potential biographers. How to handle Swettenham's excessively long years of retirement? There was also a need to collate information, some of which was only available in UK, some only in Malaysia. Moreover studies of colonial contributions to Malaysia's development do not for the moment enjoy the same popularity as other periods in the

country's history. Not least of the reasons were certain scandalous and discreditable episodes in Swettenham's private life.

During Swettenham's lifetime, none would have dared for legal reasons, to reveal what they knew. After his death at 96, none were alive to tell the tale, for he had outlived them all. Although it is true that there have been a number of papers which shed bright and sharply focussed beams of light on some aspects of Swettenham's official career, this is the first full biography. At some 750 pages, many would argue that it was too full. The initial work involved matching contemporary and at times allusive newspaper reports, often the only hint that remains of Swettenham's personal life, with the official records. It seemed a waste of effort to jettison such records and references, so they are presented here in full, in the hope that the book may become a useful reference for future scholars dealing with any aspect of Swettenham's long life.

Even so, the shadow of scandal still haunts some, over a century after the event: in this instance the circumstances which placed Swettenham in a position where he was apparently blackmailed for many years. The full but to a large extent circumstantial details have been omitted in this book, in deference to those still alive, who have justified their position by vigorous written objections. These, together with the full story, have been retained for the benefit of future researchers.

In the course of preparing this book, I have received great assistance from a large number of people.

To two however I owe a very special debt of gratitude. John Gullick of London has been indefatigable in his researches on my behalf in UK. He undertook major research exercises in UK on The Times Book Club, Mauritius, Swettenham's involvement in Edwardian society and the Official Press Bureau (Chapters 43-46). These chapters have to a large extent been written by him. He has also been responsible for tracking down almost all that is known in the UK about the Holmes family, Mrs Rome, E.H. Mander and Walter Frith. He also kindly provided relevant excerpts from the unpublished diary of Captain Bloomfield Douglas, and helped with checking the bibliography. His regular letters combining an abundance of scholarly information, perceptive judgement and infectious enthusiasm have been one of the major pleasures of this work.

My second special debt of gratitude is to June Stoodley, in Brisbane, who very kindly made available to me a copy of the microfilm which she made of Swettenham's residual papers in the late 1960s, before these were dispersed. They contain a number of items since lost, notably Gertrude Bell's letters to Swettenham and a revealing Valentine poem quoted in Chapter 28.

The late Mrs Mary Swettenham and her daughter, Mrs Wijsman talked to me of their personal recollections of Sir Frank, and made available certain family papers dealing with the disposal of his estate. To them I am most grateful.

Amongst others whom I would particularly wish to mention are Mr Godfrey Ashmore, Mr Bruce Baillie of the Dollar Academy, the late Mr T.B. Barlow, Mrs B.C. Broughton of the Harrow Association, Dr John Butcher, the late Mr Harry Cazenove of Cottesbrooke, Northampton, Prof. Ernest Chew, Major A.W. Cheyne, Dr Jonathan Chick, Prof. C.D. Cowan, Mr J.C. Delattres, Ms A. Fox, the late Mr Archie Gibson, Lady Gilmore, Miss Lesley Gordon of the Library, University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, Mr Philip Gunton, formerly of Harrisons and Crosfield Plc., Tun Ismail Ali, Mme. J. Khing, Paris, Prof. Dato' Khoo Kay Kim, Dr Paul Kratoska, Dr R. LePage, Datuk Lim Chong Keat, Mr G.C. Madoc, Mr W. Martin, the late Mr H.M. Miller, Mr J.V. Mitchell, St Olave's School, York, Tun Dr Mohamed Suffian, Ingrid de la Motte, the late Mr Muckersie of Dollar, Mrs Nor Azlina Yunos, Penerbit Fajar Bakti, the late Mr G.L. Peet, Mr Hugh Peyman, Prof. W.R. Roff, Major P.L. Rome, Mr Tris Russell, Kuala Lumpur, Lord Sackville, the late Tan Sri Dr Mubin Sheppard, Dr D.H. Simpson and Miss Barringer, formerly Librarians of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Mr K. Soowamber, Librarian at the Mauritius Institute, Port Louis, Mrs Diana Sparkes, Dr Tony Stockwell of the Royal Holloway College, Mr Eric Taylor, Prof. Mary Turnbull, Messrs Gordon and Michael Wilkinson-Cox, Prof. Robin Winks, staff of Unit Penyelidikan Sosioekonomi, Director and staff of Arkib Negara Malaysia, the staff of the University of Malaya Library.

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In respect of the photographs reproduced as plates, in the introduction each caption indicates the source from which the picture has been obtained, with formal acknowledgement as appropriate. I am especially grateful to the Library of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Cambridge, Arkib Negara, Malaysia, Oxford University Press in Malaysia and the Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society for permission to reproduce a large number of photographs.

Many others have in innumerable ways helped in this work. To all of them I am extremely grateful. Despite this expertise, some errors will inevitably remain, and for these I take full responsibility.

Henry S. Barlow

Kuala Lumpur, May 1995.

Currency Note

In 1870, Mexican, Hong Kong and Spanish dollars were used in the Malay Peninsula. The American trade dollar was added from 1874-95. The Mexican and Hong Kong dollars were worth a little over 4 shillings sterling in the 1860s and 1870s, falling to 3 shillings per dollar by the late 1880s. Thereafter rates were as follows, until 1906, by which time the Straits dollar was established at a fixed rate of 2s 4d sterling, where it remained till the late 1960s. (J.C. Jackson, 1968.)

Exchange Value of the Dollar in Sterling, (s=Shillings, d=Pence) 1888-1903.

YEAR	s	d	YEAR	s	d
1888	3	0	1896	2	0 1/4
1889	3	0	1897	1	11 1/2
1890	3	4	1898	1	11
1891	3	2 1/4	1899	1	11 1/2
1892	2	10	1900	2	0
1893	2	6 1/3	1901	1	11
1894	2	1	1902	1	8 1/2
1895	2	1 1/2	1903	1	9

Weights and measures :

- 1 kati = 1.3 lbs.
- 1 pikul = 133.3 lbs.
- 1 orlong = 1 1/3 acres

Abbreviations

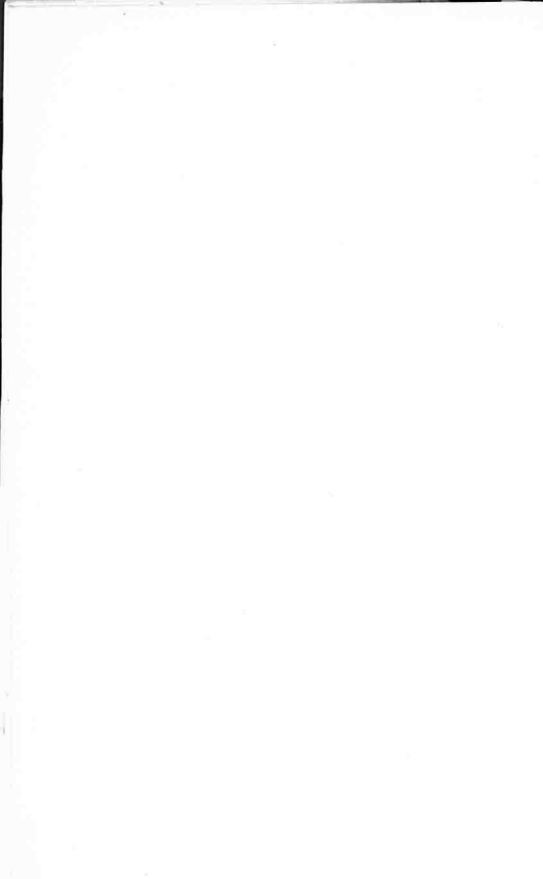
ANM	Arkib Negara Malaysia
AR	Annual Report
BM	<i>British Malaya Magazine</i>
BPDO	Batang Padang District Office Files
C.	British Parliamentary Papers by Command (see bibliography)
CO	Colonial Office
COD/C	Colonial Office Confidential despatches to Governor, Straits Settlements, Singapore National Archives
Col.	Colonial
CP	Chamberlain Papers (on microfilm, University of Singapore)
CS	Colonial Secretary
DO	District Officer
DORA	Defence of the Realm Act
EPO	Enquiry into the complicity of the chiefs in the Perak outrages.
FMS	Federated Malay States
FO	Foreign Office
Gov.	Governor
HC	House of Commons Papers (see bibliography)
HiC	High Commissioner
HCF	High Commissioner's Files
HCO	High Commissioner's Office
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationary Office
JHSUM	<i>Journal of the Historical Society of the University of Malaya</i>
JLA	John Lane Archive
JMBRAS	<i>Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JPWC	Jervois Perak War Correspondence
JSAS	<i>Journal of South-East Asian Studies</i>
JSBRAS	<i>Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JSEAH	<i>Journal of South East Asian History</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of the Siam Society</i>

Abbreviations

MM	<i>Malay Mail</i>
MCS	Malayan Civil Service
NPA	Newspaper Proprietors' Association
OAG	Officer Administering Government (when the Governor was absent)
PAR	Perak Annual Report
PEP	Perak Enquiry Papers
PGG	<i>Perak Government Gazette</i>
PGSC	<i>Pinang Gazette & Straits Chronicle</i>
PP	<i>Perak Pioneer</i>
PPC	British Parliamentary Papers by Command, also HC (see bibliography)
PRO	Public Records Office, London
PSSLC	Proceedings of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council
RG	Resident-General
RGA	Rubber Growers' Association
SAR	Selangor Annual Report
SCM	Selangor Council Minutes
SD	Swettenham Diary (1883)
SDT	<i>Singapore Daily Times</i>
Sec.	Secretary
SFP	<i>Singapore Free Press</i>
SGG	<i>Selangor Government Gazette</i>
SJ	<i>Selangor Journal</i>
SS	Secretary of State
SP	Swettenham Papers in Arkib Negara
SSF	Selangor Secretariat Files
SSGG	Straits Settlements Government Gazette
SSLC	Straits Settlements Legislative Council
SSR	Straits Settlements Records
ST	<i>Straits Times</i>
STD	<i>Straits Times Daily</i>
STW	<i>Straits Times Weekly</i>
Str.P.	<i>Straits Produce</i>
Sw.J.	<i>Swettenham's Journal</i>
TOM	<i>Times of Malaya</i>
UM	University of Malaya



1850-1882



Background and Childhood

I come from a country of which it is said
 'Derbyshire born and Derbyshire bred,
 Strong i' the arm an' weak i' the head.'¹

With these words, Swettenham in 1901 commenced a brief autobiographical article.² Whatever else his faults, no one could ever accuse Swettenham of being 'weak i' the head.' In 1902, a Colonial Office official described him, with rather more accuracy as, 'the last man to be accused of humanitarian sympathies.'³

Like many British imperial pioneers, Swettenham came from a family with a long history, one of careful, respectable security. The first records of the family appear in the reign of Edward I. Late in the fourteenth century, the family was established in the Midlands. Sir Mathew Swettenham, who died in 1416, is commemorated in a brass effigy at Blakesley, Northampton, and he it seems was the founder of the family fortunes. A translation of the Latin inscription reads 'Here lies Mathew Swettenham, sometime Bowbearer and Esquire of the most illustrious King Henry IV who died on 29 December 1416. On whose soul may God have mercy. Amen.'⁴ Mathew Swettenham first appears on 20 August 1385, when King Richard II 'Granted him 6 pence a day being retained as Sagittarius Dei Corona.' (Archer of the Crown). In 1390 he achieved further advancement by being appointed Yeoman of the Chamber, and was at that time described as 'Hitherto Parker of Moulton, Northamptonshire.'

When in 1399, Richard, the last of the Plantagenets was deposed, Henry Bolingbroke, the first of the House of Lancaster came to the throne as Henry IV. Mathew Swettenham however had clearly arranged his life with sufficient care to ensure that he fell foul of neither York nor Lancaster. His fortunes continued to prosper under the King who became known as 'the Sun in splendour'; for that sun shone benignly on Mathew, who was confirmed in the following year in a grant of £30 a year from properties in Northamptonshire, while his wife benefited 100 shillings from the

Swettenham

issue of a Manor. Properties and distinctions continued to come his way, with a tenement in London, a shop in Northampton, and the grant of substantial property in Cheshire, which became known as Swettenham. He became Yeoman of the King's Chamber in 1405, armour bearer and Sheriff of Northampton.

Within three months of Henry IV's death in March 1413, Henry V had confirmed all the previous grants given to Mathew Swettenham. He was clearly by then a powerful man, one indeed whose loyalty must needs be assured, 'so that he be not retained with anyone else.' The Swettenhams continued to live at the village of that name in Cheshire for some 350 years, when in 1780 the Swettenham name died out there. At that stage the property passed to a distant relation, one John Eaton, who assumed the name of Swettenham.⁵

However by that time there were minor branches of the family widespread in Cheshire and Derbyshire. So it is to Derbyshire that we must now turn our attention. Mary Norman, daughter of a lead merchant of Winster in Derbyshire, married in 1728, one William Swettenham of the same village, a barber surgeon. He came originally from Cheshire, and quite possibly forms the link between the main Cheshire family and the Derbyshire branch. Frank Swettenham's great-grandfather, one of William's sons, was described as a gentleman of Winster. Frank Swettenham's grandfather, James, was an attorney-at-law in the same district, and married Ann Oldham, the daughter of a currier or leather tanner from Derby.⁶

Their only son, James Oldham, was born in 1800. Of his three sisters, two married surgeons, and the third never married. James Oldham Swettenham, Frank's father, who also grew up to become a solicitor, practised briefly in partnership with his father and a Mr Ingle at Wirksworth in the late 1820s. Around 1830 the family partnership came to an end, presumably on the retirement of Frank Swettenham's grandfather, and James Oldham Swettenham moved to Belper.⁷

Belper, on the Derwent, was at that time a flourishing small town, with a population of 9,000 to 10,000 inhabitants. The main industry was the making of nails. Some 42,000 blows made 1,000 nails, which was deemed to be a fair day's work though doubtless a noisy one. The other feature of Belper life during that time was the arrival of the railway, through to Matlock. Its construction was the source of fights between the local nailers and the navvies working on the railway.⁸

It is not clear what caused Frank's father to move while still a young man to Belper from Wirksworth. Once arrived, James Swettenham lost no time in making the acquaintance of Charlotte

Background and Childhood

Elizabeth Carr, daughter of the late Mr C. Carr, a banker of Great Portland Street in London. There were a number of Carrs in the neighbourhood, all listed under 'Gentry and Clergy' in the county directories of the time, including 'the Misses Carr of Duffield', both presumably daughters of the late Mr C. Carr, and apparently under the care of a Mrs John Carr, who may well have been the wife of the Revd John Carr of the adjacent hamlet of Holbrook. It thus seems likely, though we cannot be sure, that the Misses Carr were brought up by their uncle and aunt.⁹

Young James Swettenham rapidly overcame the scruples of Charlotte Elizabeth, who became pregnant as a result in early 1834. This problem may well have been concealed from Mrs John Carr, for it was not until August of that year, some four months before the baby was due, that James and Charlotte Elizabeth were married, by license rather than by banns. There were probably two reasons for preferring a license: given a little string-pulling, it was certainly quicker than reading the banns. As there was to be a church service, the sooner the ceremony was over, the less would be the gossip in a small village about an obviously pregnant bride: and moreover one who had been brought up by the vicar and his wife.

Furthermore, the young Charlotte Carr was less than twenty-one years old, and an orphan. The clergyman would require to satisfy himself that there was no impediment to the marriage. Charlotte's father, before his death had evidently not appointed an official guardian. The need for haste, and the fact that Charlotte was under age pointed clearly to a license, which was issued on the application of C.J. Carr, probably the Vicar of Holbrook mentioned above, and one Harriet Spencer, described as Charlotte's mother. Presumably she had either reverted to her maiden name, or remarried after the death of her first husband.

With the license issued, the Revd John Carr and his wife no doubt heaved a sigh of relief, as the position of their wayward protégée was regularized by marriage on 26 August 1834 at Duffield parish church. The Swettenhams' first child, Mary Anne, or Marian, was born later in the same year.¹⁰ Five more children were born in the next twelve years of marriage. The seventh and last was Frank Athelstan Swettenham, born on 28 March 1850.¹¹

James Oldham Swettenham as a country solicitor, enjoyed sufficient prosperity to employ three servants, a modest number in those Victorian days, and to send two of his elder sons to Cambridge. He appeared to Frank Swettenham to be a strange person, who spent much of his time hunting or shooting, or searching curiosity shops in London. He disappeared for long and unexplained periods, returning unexpectedly, and entering, burglar-like, through an unfastened window. His photograph reveals a

bearded balding man in his forties or fifties, of medium height dressed in suit and spats posed in an upright chair with armrests, a knobbly cane resting against his legs.¹²

The family lived at 1, Gibfield Lane, Belper. The house itself stood with one side on the edge of the deep railway cutting. There was a terraced garden, and beyond it a wood through which a grass ride led out to the main Derby road. On a third side was a thick thorn hedge, separating the Swettenham establishment from a village of nail-makers. These were a turbulent crowd, and Swettenham, years later, recalled peering through the thorn hedge with his brothers, to watch them playing skittles and fighting in the yard of a public house.¹³

Of Swettenham's other brothers and sisters,¹⁴ we know most of William Norman (1837 - 1924), and James Alexander (1846-1933.) William Norman, the eldest son appears to have been closest to Frank. He and his large family continued to live at Belper for some years. Richard Paul Agar (1845 - 99) was a scholar at Cambridge, graduating as fifteenth Wrangler in 1868. He then became an inspector of schools, living at Hurworth on Tees, County Durham. James Alexander left Clare College, Cambridge before taking a degree, and joined the Ceylon Civil Service. He also served in Cyprus, before secondment to the Straits Settlements in 1895 - 1901, where, as we shall see there was considerable rivalry between the brothers. Of the sisters we know less. Marian, the first born, died in 1850, while Lucy Maria (1839 - 1933) married Thomas Jones-Parry, and produced a substantial family. Finally there was Charlotte Ann (1844 - 1921) who appears to have been the daughter onto whom family responsibilities devolved on her mother's death.

Swettenham's first recollections were of sitting on the knee of Bishop Colenso in the garden at Belper, long walks through the woods, and fights alternately with his brothers and their neighbours, the nail-makers. His mother taught them the rudiments of Latin, and enthralled them by reading aloud *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas and *Le Juif Errant* by Eugène Sue.¹⁵

In 1860, Swettenham's mother moved to Dollar, in Clackmannan, Scotland. She was accompanied initially by her sons James and Frank and daughter Charlotte. It is far from clear what precipitated this move: there may well have been a disagreement with her husband. He cannot have proved very satisfactory as a father, with his frequent unexplained absences. The choice of Dollar in Scotland was apparently dictated by the presence there of the Dollar Academy. This was a philanthropic institution founded in 1818 from a legacy bequeathed by Captain John McNabb, a poor boy made good, from that village, to provide 'a charity or school for the poor of the parish of Dollar where I was born.' Whatever the

Swettenham Genealogy

Robert Oates of Winster

His daughter **Elizabeth Oates**, baptised 8 May 1688,
married on 2 Dec 1705, **Jethro Norman** lead merchant of Winster

Their daughter **Mary** married on 17 Nov 1728,
William Swettenham of Winster, barber surgeon.
He came from Cheshire (This appears to be the link
with the **Swettenhams** of Swettenham in Cheshire)
and died 31 Oct 1785, aged 81.

She died on 17 Apr 1784, aged 45 leaving

4 children

James Swettenham of Winster Gent, sometimes of Nigwell,
born 1745, died 31 Dec 1803, aged 58, at Winster,
He married secondly, **Mary**, daughter of **Robert Toplis** of Heanor, gent.
She died on 7 Aug 1816, aged 67 without issue and used to live at Youlgrave.

He married firstly **Ann Hemingway**, daughter of **Hemingway** of Swithin, York, gent.
She died in 1780 at Darton, in Yorkshire, leaving

2 daughters

James Swettenham of Wirksworth
baptised Winster on 12 Aug 1775, died on 17 Oct 1848,
aged 73 and was buried at Eccleshall.
He was an attorney-at-law.
He married secondly, **Mary Brown**, daughter of
Peter Nightingale of Wood End in Matlock
She died without issue on 15 Jun 1829 and was buried at Wirksworth.
He married firstly, **Ann** daughter of
George Oldham of Derby, furrier on 22 Aug 1799.
She died aged 31, on 30 Mar 1806
and was buried at Wirksworth leaving

James Oldham
b. autumn 1800
solicitor, married at
Duffield, 26 Aug 1834
Charlotte, Elizabeth
younger daughter
of late **Mr C Carr**
of Gr Portland St London
(see family tree, p 7)

Ann Toplis
b. Wirksworth
d. 1880, spinster
at York

Mary
married on
29 Apr 1830
Wilson Overend
surgeon

Frances
m. **Henry Jack**
of Sheffield
surgeon and produced
6 sons



Ex sudore vultus
(by the sweat of the brow)

reasons behind the move, Mrs Swettenham, her daughter Charlotte and her two youngest sons established themselves in a seven bedroom cottage called Charlotte Place, on the edge of the school grounds. Times had indeed changed, for whereas in 1841 the family had been able to afford three servants in Belper, modest enough in those Victorian days, in Dollar they were reduced to one.¹⁶

Tragedy was not long in striking, for in 1861, Mrs Swettenham died of cancer of the womb which had apparently been diagnosed shortly after Frank's birth. This came as a severe blow to the eleven-year old Frank, who had been very close to his mother. Responsibility for the household thereupon devolved onto his sister Charlotte, a mere seventeen years old. One might have expected that Frank Swettenham, brought up by his elder sister after their mother's death, would have developed some special affection for her. Curiously there is no sign of this. Nor is there any indication that Charlotte had anything further to do with her brother after he left home. It seems likely that for some reason there was a degree of tension in the impecunious Swettenham household at Dollar in the 1860s.

The school was, and still is agreeably set in parkland, against the backdrop of the Ochil hills. The simple classic building had been designed earlier in the century by William Playfair, the creator of some of Edinburgh's finest buildings. The school's academic reputation was good, and in the course of the nineteenth century it educated members of the Clunies-Ross family, who were to make names for themselves in the Cocos Islands, William Archer, the drama critic, and two successive presidents of the Royal Society, Sir David Gill, the astronomer and Sir James Dewar, inventor of the vacuum flask and co-inventor of the explosive, cordite. Another student ultimately became Botanical Adviser to the Indian government, and developed quinine. There was a strong colonial tradition.

Initially, both brothers attended as day-boys, on subsidized terms, for their house was only two minutes walk from the school. They were joined early on, probably before Mrs Swettenham's death, by their sister Charlotte, for the school also encouraged adult education with evening classes. The school records indicate that both brothers were well above average in their work. Frank distinguished himself particularly in French and mathematics.¹⁷ There were the normal schoolboy excitements, such as when James fell through the ice when skating on Gartmore Dam, and was rescued by a sailor.¹⁸ Frank enjoyed his time at the school, and was later to regard himself as fortunate 'to sit at the feet of men who not

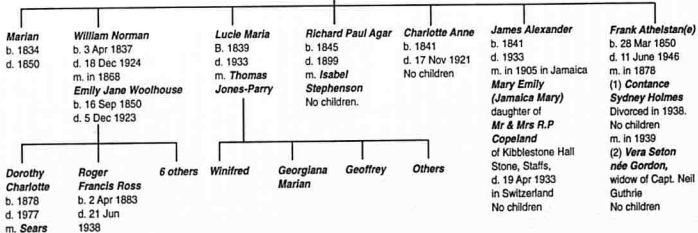
Family of James Oldham Swettenham & Charlotte Elizabeth Carr

James Oldham Swettenham

b. 1800

d. 31 May 1881

m. on 26 Aug 1834 Charlotte Elizabeth (1815-1861) younger
daughter of the late Mr C. Carr of Gr. Portland St., London



only professed the knowledge they possessed, but knew how to impart it.'¹⁹

James Alexander went on soon after to finish his education in England, with a scholarship at Clare College, Cambridge, leaving Frank to absorb the atmosphere 'of the Valley of Devon, and the enclosing hills, from one of which the ruined Keep of the Castle of Gloom looks sadly down on the burns of Sorrow and Care as they unite at the foot of the wooded rock on which the castle stands.' He developed there in the Ochil hills an abiding love for the Scottish countryside, and its solitude which was later to find expression in his painting and his story-telling. The solitude undoubtedly also contributed to the self-reliance which he so often exhibited, to good effect later in his career.²⁰

Of this period in his life we have one fleeting, independent but anonymous glimpse: 'He (Swettenham) was a bright-faced, laughing-voiced boy with an almost girlish complexion and mobile mouth like Mr Winston Churchill's. The two men also resemble each other in an apparently invincible self-confidence, which is often to be found in those who succeed as well as they deserve to succeed.'²¹

Sometime around this period, his father reappeared, and settled with his son and daughter at Dollar in Scotland. During the five years he was at school there, the young Swettenham went fishing and shooting with his father during the holidays. His enthusiasm for shooting lasted all his life: a passion which he indulged to the full throughout his Malayan career. Swettenham thus developed a deep affection for his father, however unsatisfactory he may have been as a bread winner. He had by then completely retired from his profession as solicitor, but made a name for himself in the locality for his knowledge of old and titled families, whose histories he liked to recount.²²

In mid-summer 1866, Frank was sent away to St Peter's, a boarding school in York, where he missed the pleasures of Scottish country life, but found other compensations: sailing on the rivers: rowing behind Robert Leslie, who came to his house from Radley, was a direct contemporary and went on to stroke the Oxford eight for three successive years: attending the afternoon services at York Minster, where he revelled both in the excellence of the singing and the ambience. The headmaster of the school at that time was Canon Richard Elwyn, formerly of Charterhouse, a classicist and later Master of the Temple. Swettenham many years after spoke highly of his abilities as a teacher, and headmaster. Thus he passed two years in the fourth and fifth forms, proving himself academically more than adequate, and enjoying what he later regarded as the happiest years of his life. He claimed to have got into trouble only

once: for climbing onto a roof with a friend to watch an open-air show.²³

Why he left school before the sixth form we shall probably never know, more particularly as at the end of the Easter term, 1868, he came first out of sixteen in the fifth-form examinations.²⁴ His elder brothers had meantime been to Cambridge, after a boarding school education, and it seems quite possible that family funds were by then insufficient to allow him to continue at school. That at least would explain why James Swettenham left Clare College before taking a degree. There can have been little family income, with James Swettenham already retired.

Back at home with his father in Scotland, he spent the following two years 'in cramming various special subjects, seeing places of interest, and in cricket, fencing and other sports'. He was uncertain what to do for a living, and considered joining the Emperor of Austria's Foreign Guard, but was advised against this by a friend who was already serving there. He also considered joining the Indian Civil Service, in the Woods and Forest Department. Eventually, on the advice of his elder brother James Alexander, who was by then in the Ceylon Civil Service, he decided to apply for a cadetship in the Straits Settlements.²⁵

William Patrick Adam, Liberal Member of Parliament (1859-80) for Clackmannan and Kinross, the constituency in which Swettenham was living had recently been appointed Lord of the Treasury (1868-73) in Gladstone's government. He supported Swettenham's application which was first recorded in the Colonial Office files in mid-1869.²⁶

NOTES

1. The chief sources for this chapter are *Footprints in Malaya* by Sir Frank Swettenham, Hutchinson, 1942, hereafter referred to as *Footprints*, MM, 10 July 1901, p. 3 and Professor Ernest C.T. Chew's thesis of 1966, for the University of Malaya, Singapore, entitled 'Sir Frank Swettenham's Malayan Career up to 1896,' hereafter referred to as Chew Thesis. I am grateful to Professor Chew for making available to me a revised first chapter of this thesis, which draws on the personal reminiscences of the late Lady Swettenham, and the late Brigadier Norman Swettenham, a great-nephew. Professor Chew's thesis is a particularly important work covering Swettenham's career up to 1896.

2. The article was published in *Mainly About People*, a light Victorian magazine of the end of the last century, and subsequently reproduced in MM, 10 July 1901, p. 3. The journalist who secured the reminiscences was Mr Tay Pay O'Connor. He was alleged to have been unduly discreet in the matter. See ST, 10 July 1901.

3. CO 273/280:62 Comment on Swettenham to CO, 301 of 10 July 1902.

Swettenham

4. This early information derives from the text of a BBC Programme, *Enquire Within*, broadcast on 8 May 1985, Studio B16 Tape Number SLN19/601 G783.
5. *Magna Britanica*, Vol. II part II, London, 1810.
6. Ince's Pedigrees, Derbyshire County Record Office, Matlock. Local 8022. See also Worsley of Platt, Box 57.
7. Family tree on p. 5, Glover's *Directory of the County of Derby*, 1829.
8. Pigot's *Directory of Derbyshire*, 1835 and White's *Directory*, 1857.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Duffield Parish Register.
11. Swettenham added an e to Athelstan later in life
12. *Footprints*, p. 1 and photo on pl. 1.
13. *MM*, 10 July 1901.
14. Family tree on p. 7.
15. *Footprints*, p. 9.
16. 1861 Census.
17. Old school records at Dollar Academy, courtesy of Mr B.E. Baillie.
18. *Dollar Magazine* (VI) 21, 1907.
19. *MM*, 10 July 1901.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *MM*, 19 July 1901, quoting anonymous comment in *ST* on the *Mainly About People* article.
22. *Alloa Advertiser*, 18 June 1881, obituary of James Oldham Swettenham.
23. *Footprints*, pp. 11-12, *The Peterite*, Vol.38, (313), October 1946, pp. 1-5.
24. Mr J.V. Mitchell, St. Olave's School (St. Peter's Junior School), York, pers. comm.
25. *Footprints*, p. 13.
26. CO 273/28:169 Civil Service Commission, 11 June 1869, to Cox at CO.

Early Days and Apprenticeship

When the Colonial Office took over the Straits Settlements from the India Office on 1 April 1867, they had inherited an administration composed of British officers posted from the Indian Service, some of whom had served in the Straits Settlements for many years. With the change in administration, it was no longer possible to recruit from the Indian Service, where, in any case, the training was inappropriate for the Settlements of the Malay Peninsula. Thought was therefore given to establishing a Straits Settlements service, with entry to be based on a competitive examination administered by the Civil Service Commissioners.

Sir Hercules Robinson's report of 1864, which had resulted in the separation of the Straits Settlements from the India Office, had recommended the establishment of such a service by means of cadetships: 'As soon as ever the transfer shall be decided upon, arrangements should without delay be made for the establishment of not less than three cadetships, and for the early departure from England of the gentlemen selected for the first appointments.'¹ The cadets so chosen were contracted with the Crown Agents to study Malay or Chinese for the first two years, or until they passed the examinations in these languages. Herein lay a source of confusion, for they were referred to as 'Government Interpreters' a task which Sir Harry Ord, the first Governor after the transfer reasonably thought better suited to local personnel. The Colonial Secretary, the Earl of Granville, was obliged to explain that the acquisition of fluency in a local language was a stepping stone to vacancies in the Straits Civil Service. The first two cadets were appointed under 1867 regulations based on the Ceylonese and Hong Kong models: Dudley F.A. Hervey, grandson of the Marquess of Bristol, and Allan Maclean Skinner. But there were more vacancies than could be filled in this way, so in the early years, the Governor was allowed under certain circumstances to appoint outsiders.²

After Ord's misunderstanding with Granville, the terms of the cadet scheme were slightly modified in 1869, and eight applicants, Frank Swettenham amongst them, were nominated to sit the

examinations for a further two vacancies. Only Swettenham and E.H.Watts passed the compulsory tests in English composition, handwriting and orthography, foreign languages and arithmetic. Granville's immediate reaction was to reduce the vacancies from two to one, and allow the two remaining candidates to compete against each other. Luckily for Swettenham, Granville was replaced at the crucial moment on 6 July 1870 as Colonial Secretary by the Earl of Kimberley who was persuaded by the Civil Service Commissioner to reverse Granville's decision. The final examination results showed Watts to be academically better than Swettenham.³ Swettenham, at that moment staying with friends at Lyzzick Hall, Keswick in the Lake District, thus received his letter of appointment from the Colonial Office, slightly more than a year after his name had been put forward.⁴

The Colonial Office, acutely conscious of the barrage of criticism aroused by Sir Harry Ord's allegedly spendthrift activities in Singapore, was at great pains to cut costs. For this reason they chose to dispatch Swettenham and Watts to Singapore on board the newly acquired *Pluto*, a secondhand paddle steamer, said to have been used as a blockade runner in the American Civil War, and totally unsuited to the rough conditions encountered on the high seas. She had been acquired by the Crown Agents under circumstances which subsequently gave rise to allegations of financial malpractice.⁵ The *Pluto* was under the command of a Captain Thatcher, who had contracted to deliver the vessel to Singapore, and feed the passengers en route for an agreed sum. He was a large man, who had at one time also been involved in blockade running during the American Civil War, and now took on odd contract jobs of this nature. His main recreation when not drunk was playing chess.⁶

Swettenham joined the *Pluto* in the Clyde, and headed for Swansea, where they were held up for two weeks by bad weather. Eventually they sailed on 2 November 1870, leaving behind Watts, who, impatient with the delay had left to visit his fiancée in the West country. As a result of the *Pluto's* slow progress, Watts eventually caught up with them in Port Said, thereby missing an extremely rough and uncomfortable crossing of the Bay of Biscay, and three days' sightseeing in Malta. Apart from Watts, and the crew of twenty five, Swettenham's fellow passengers consisted of four cadets for the Ceylon Service, and four sergeants destined for the police force in Labuan.

The Suez Canal had been opened on 17 November 1869, and was still far from complete when the *Pluto* passed through it, en route to a refuelling stop at Aden. The rough seas which the *Pluto* had earlier encountered had ripped some of the planks from the

cover of the paddle-box, so that when the paddle was working, the passengers could take turns to sit on the afterdeck, clutching at any available rail while being deluged with water thrown up by the paddle. Thus refreshed, they passed through the Red Sea.

By the time they reached the Indian Ocean, the monsoon was against them: they exhausted most of their fuel, stopped the engines, put the boat under sail for two days and lost six miles in the process. Captain Thatcher took to drink and his bed. According to Swettenham's own account, not always to be taken at face value, it was left to him, the youngest of the passengers, but the one who knew the captain best, to remonstrate with him. This involved obtaining his agreement to an instruction to the steward that no more drink should be supplied to him under any circumstances. Thatcher once more took command, and by adding old packing cases and rubbish to the little remaining fuel, they just reached Cochin on the coast of Travancore. Here they obtained enough fuel to take them to Trincomalee, on the north-east coast of Sri Lanka, where they left the Ceylon Service men.⁷ Their next port of call was Malacca, which they reached on 2 January 1871.⁸ Here again they were delayed, as no fuel was available. Eventually they were obliged to take on board mangrove wood as fuel to get them to Singapore, which they reached on 4 January 1871 after a voyage of slightly over two months. There they were met by the harbour master, and one of the two earlier appointed cadets.⁹ Ord, the Governor, was away on a visit to Penang till the end of January, so they reported instead to the Colonial Secretary, E.A. Irving, and were billeted in a hotel on the beach.¹⁰

The nature of the colonial society in which Swettenham moved will become apparent in the next few chapters. However a short digression is required at this stage to see the Straits Settlements and the Malay States of the Peninsula in the context of the times, if only to help measure Swettenham's achievements by the end of his official career in 1904.¹¹ The Straits Settlements comprised Penang, founded by Francis Light in 1786, the island having been ceded by the Sultan of Kedah to the East India Company. To the island there had been added in 1800 a strip of land on the Peninsula, stretching from the Muda River in the north, to the Krian River in the south, inland for about twenty miles from the coast. This came to be known as Province Wellesley.

The second settlement, Malacca, had had a longer and more chequered history. First captured from the Malacca sultanate by the Portuguese in 1511, it had passed by conquest into Dutch hands in 1641, to the British in 1795, back to the Dutch in 1818, and was finally ceded to the British in 1824. Apart from the town of Malacca

itself, the settlement included an area of hinterland, the total amounting to about 1,000 square miles.

Singapore had been founded by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles in 1819, by a treaty which allowed a trading post to be established on the island. Singapore was then uninhabited except for a few fishermen. Raffles successfully played off two rival factions from the declining sultanate of Riau and Johore by some swift double-dealing. This once powerful eighteenth century Bugis empire had thus been split, leaving in the southern part of the Malay peninsula Sultan Hussein of Johore, while his relations presided over the Riau islands, to the south of Singapore. The Dutch were infuriated by this move, but powerless to act. Their eventual loss of influence throughout the Peninsula, though not of course in Java and Sumatra, was effectively conceded when Malacca finally passed out of their hands by the Treaty of London in 1824.

In the north, relations with Siam were maintained by Henry Burney's Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1826,¹² under which Kedah, including Perlis, acknowledged Siamese suzerainty, although this was of a distant nature. It involved sporadic payments of *bunga mas*, literally golden flowers by the rulers of these states to Bangkok, signifying in the Siamese view, the tributary nature of these states. Ambiguity covered relations with Kelantan and Trengganu. Bangkok's writ was never strong in these areas, and although the Siamese were never subject to direct colonial domination like their neighbours, they were obliged to have European consuls in Bangkok, who wielded considerable pressure and influence. There was a change of approach, though not of structure in Siam's relations with the Malay states in the north of the Malay Peninsula from the 1890s onwards, in that Siam became more interventionist, for a variety of reasons.¹³ However, the political position remained effectively unchanged till 1909 when the northern states of the Malay peninsula were brought into the British sphere of influence, despite earlier unsuccessful attempts by Swettenham himself from the 1880s onwards. Thus by 1826, the British had, through a series of treaties with the Siamese, the Dutch and the Bugis effectively precluded the aggressive establishment of foreign spheres of influence in the peninsula south of Kedah and Kelantan. This did not preclude the possibility of one or more of the Malay states asking for outside assistance from a power other than the British. The issue was raised on at least two occasions in the early 1870s, and influenced the British decision to become involved in the affairs of Selangor.

In 1826 the three settlements were combined under Penang into the fourth presidency of the Indian empire. In the same year, by a treaty with the Sultan of Perak, the island of Pangkor off the west

coast, together with a small coastal area of land around Dindings were added to Penang, this time to the fury of the administrators in Calcutta who were pursuing a policy of strict non-intervention. The East India Company had looked to the Straits Settlements as a means of ensuring control of its shipping routes for the lucrative China trade, which involved sending opium to China from India, and returning with cargoes of tea. Settlers in Penang and Singapore had also seen the advantages of planting spices, particularly nutmegs.

However the China trade monopoly was lost by the Charter Act of 1833, and from that time the Company regarded the Straits Settlements as tiresome, distant and expensive. Successive governors were urged to balance their budgets under conditions very different from those in India. At the same time, in response to a call for centralization in India, the Straits governors were relieved of much of their executive power, by transfer to the Bengal residency. In 1851 they were transferred to the direct supervision of the Governor-General. This was seriously to weaken the position of the Straits governors with commercial interests in the Settlements. The chief corollary of this policy, as far as Calcutta was concerned, was the imperative need to avoid political entanglements with the increasingly disturbed hinterland of the Peninsula.

Men of greater vision, such as Raffles, thought differently, realizing from the first the political and commercial potential of Singapore. What neither he nor his reluctant colleagues in Calcutta could have realized in 1819 was the effect which the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 was to have on trading patterns in South East Asia. Up till that moment, all European shipping bound for China and Japan rounded the Cape of Good Hope and passed through the Sunda Straits into the South China Sea. After 1869 the shortest route was through the Straits of Malacca, controlled, for shipping purposes, by the island of Singapore off the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula. W.F. Drummond Jervois, then Deputy Director of Works in the War Office, and later to become the Governor of Singapore realized this in a memorandum he wrote at the time in connection with the defence of Singapore:

There are only two direct routes, from the West to China and The Eastern Seas, one through the Straits of Malacca, the other through the Straits of Sunda, the former under British, the latter under Dutch control.

The Straits of Malacca, being our highway from Suez, Aden, India and Ceylon, to China and the Eastern Seas, Singapore at the narrowest part of these Straits, where the channel is only about four miles wide, is most favourably situated as a coaling station both for our Mercantile marine and for our men of war.¹⁴

The year 1858 saw the abolition of the East India Company, in the wake of the Indian Mutiny of the year before, and the transfer of all its territories to the India Office. By the early 1860s, demands by the commercial community of Singapore for the complete transfer of the Straits Settlements from Indian jurisdiction to the status of a full crown colony were becoming more insistent.

One of the most vocal promoters of the transfer movement, as it came to be called, was William Henry Read (1819-1909), who arrived in Singapore in 1841, and played a prominent part in its affairs, and those of the Peninsula generally till his retirement in 1887. He was a partner in A.L. Johnston & Co., a leading firm of Singapore merchants, and had extensive, though not always successful, business operations throughout the Peninsula.¹⁵

As a result of his and other commercial representations in London, particularly one in March 1863, Sir Hercules Robinson, at that time Governor of Hong Kong, was commissioned by the British government to report on the feasibility of transferring the Straits Settlements to direct Colonial Office jurisdiction. Robinson reached Singapore in December 1863. His final report was favourable, and as a result it was eventually agreed that the transfer should take place with effect from 1 April 1867. The commercial community of Singapore were delighted with what they foresaw as a great opportunity to extend their interests into the states of the Peninsula. They were however to be seriously disappointed from the very first day when the new colonial governor, Colonel Harry St. G. Ord, arrived in Singapore to take over from General Orfeur Cavenagh, the last of the India Office incumbents.¹⁶

Local enthusiasm for the new Governor was to be short-lived. Where Cavenagh had been friendly and accessible, Ord was distant and aloof, expecting to be called 'Your Excellency' during the two weeks between his arrival in Singapore and his installation as Governor on 1 April, in the Singapore Town Hall. When the Acting Governor, the Hon. Lieutenant-Colonel Man, entered the hall, he shook hands with the ladies. Ord by contrast stalked into the room oblivious of the company, and sat down on the dais without even removing his hat. The contrast was heightened by the arrival immediately afterwards of Admiral Sir Henry Keppel, the popular naval commander-in-chief of the China Station, who greeted all the ladies on his arrival, and refused a seat on the dais.¹⁷

The informality of earlier governors was signified by the lack of any permanent official residence: since 1862 the Governor had rented a house on Grange Road for £800 a year. Ord hastened to correct this undesirable state of affairs, by seeking Colonial Office permission to erect a new Governor's Residence at an estimated cost

of over £37,000. This estimate was rapidly exceeded, in the face of local criticism, which alleged that the building was extravagant and wasteful, being built by Ord to impress the Duke of Edinburgh, who visited Singapore in December 1869. When Ord in his address to the Legislative Council in Singapore in early 1868, had the temerity to suggest that the commercial community should be prepared to contribute towards the cost of government by paying taxes, the wrath of W.H. Read and his colleagues knew no bounds. In the same year, a Straits Settlements Association was established in London to 'advise' the Colonial Office on matters affecting those territories. It consisted of the chairmen and senior partners of the leading Singapore firms. Read was in London at the time of its formation, and it rapidly busied itself with submitting memoranda to the Colonial Office, criticizing every step that the unfortunate Ord took. In this it received the full and vocal support of the Singapore press, over which, of course, the Governor had no control. This organization, and those which succeeded it, where Swettenham was to become deeply involved, exercised a strong influence on Colonial Office policies. It was an influence which the Colonial Office did not always find welcome.

The opposition even went so far as to publish anonymously in London a vituperative booklet entitled *The Straits Settlements, or How to Govern a Colony by a Singapore Merchant*, criticizing the Colonial Office in the roundest terms: 'The truth is that people in England ask no questions about their colonies, but leave them to be managed by a few gentlemen in Downing Street who are more Chinese than our own Chinese in worshipping the wisdom of their ancestors.'¹⁸ When Ord went on leave in February 1871, the *Singapore Daily Times* editorialized: 'When he [Ord] takes his leave from us on Monday, we question if there will be one honest thinking man who will wish him soon back again'.¹⁹

When criticisms were levelled against him by the businessmen of Singapore, Ord made a strong case for intervention in the affairs of the Native States on commercial grounds, concluding: 'I feel it would be greatly to the advantage of the Settlement if our influence could be thus extended over the Peninsula, and I shall not fail to avail myself of any opening that may present itself for doing so.'²⁰ The Secretary of State, the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos in reply, rapped him over the knuckles:

HM's Government are not disposed to adopt the responsibility directly or indirectly of taking steps for the security of life and property in independent countries where that security cannot be given by the lawful rulers. HM's Government are clearly of opinion that the true policy of the Government of the Straits Settlements is not to attempt to interfere in, but to keep entirely

clear of any disorders which may occur in the neighbouring Native States which do not directly affect or threaten the peace of the Settlements themselves. They cannot therefore countenance the policy which the last sentence of your dispatch appears to contemplate.²¹

This was reflected in the following communication of the Colonial Secretary, Singapore, to the firm of Paterson Simons:

He [Colonial Secretary, Singapore] is of the opinion that if merchants or others penetrate disturbed and semi-barbarous independent states, make contracts with the Princes or Rajahs of these States, they must rely on the good faith of those with whom they contract, and their ability to make an enduring agreement binding on their successors, and that 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 loss.²²

If the affairs of the Straits Settlements were marked at this time by the ordered niceties of any far-flung Victorian outpost, conditions in the hinterland of the Malay Peninsula provided a dramatic contrast. The country was almost totally inaccessible, except on foot. The main rivers of the west coast were navigable for a certain distance, and they formed the main thoroughfares of the country, each river basin divided from the next by a ridge of low hills extending west from the central range of mountains which form the backbone of the Peninsula. The state boundaries were unmarked, except where they followed river courses. Otherwise, so far as was possible in such rough and ready times, the boundaries were roughly similar to those of today. There was considerable trade across the border between Siamese-influenced Kedah and Province Wellesley.

Pahang was ruled from Pekan by a Bendahara or prince, an offshoot of the Johore royal family, who thus exercised a considerable influence on the affairs of the state. Johore itself, in 1871 under the effective rule of the self-styled Maharaja, Abu Bakar, had enjoyed closer contacts with the British of the Straits Settlements, through Singapore, than any of the other states. The Maharaja of Johore, alone amongst his fellow rulers, maintained an establishment in Singapore, where he entertained handsomely, kept racehorses, and played a leading part in the social life of the expatriate community. His fellow rulers in the Malay States viewed Abu Bakar as a parvenu, and for most of his life tended to disregard him for this reason. As a result, he was at pains to ingratiate himself in foreign courts, and became known as one of the most anglicised Malays.²³ He was also shrewd enough to realize that by following

assiduously all suggestions made to him by the British, he would avoid any pretext for British interference. Johore was thus ultimately to enjoy a greater degree of independence than other states on the west coast. Indeed, it was not till 1910 that his successor was obliged to accept a Resident. In the twenty to thirty years up to 1870, many Singapore Chinese started to plant pepper and gambier in south Johore where there had emerged by then a thriving and stable agricultural community.

Further north, what is now known as Negeri Sembilan consisted of a number of small feuding states, originally settled by Minangkabau immigrants from Sumatra. They brought with them the matrilineal system of inheritance which survives in certain parts of Negeri Sembilan to this day. A small amount of tin mining took place at Sungei Ujong, one of these small states, in the middle of the century, the ore being exported down the Linggi river, which formed the boundary with Malacca. But constant intrigues and fighting between the local rulers ensured that tin mining there was never profitable for very long.²⁴

By far the most turbulent were the two states with which Swettenham was to be most closely concerned, Perak and Selangor. The chief reason for the disturbed conditions which prevailed was the existence in these states of large quantities of tin ore. The industrial revolution of the previous seventy years in Europe and north America had created an enormous market for tin. The mining of this metal in the Peninsula was almost entirely in the hands of immigrant Chinese, based for the most part on, and very largely financed by, the settled business communities of Singapore, Malacca and Penang. The miners themselves were invariably immigrants who had fled from the disturbed conditions in their native provinces of southern China. They were recruited in large numbers, and shipped under miserable conditions to the Peninsula, where they were indentured to the local Chinese businessmen until such time as they could pay off the costs of the passage advanced to them. Since the majority were addicted to opium, which could be bought on credit only from their employers, this effectively meant slavery.

Another source of revenue in both the Straits Settlements and the states was gambling farms. The rights to run gambling farms or to control the monopoly of opium were, in the Straits Settlements, tendered out to the highest bidder. This represented an attempt by the Straits Settlements authorities to cut down on administrative costs by subcontracting the arrangements. It was rough and ready, but provided a guaranteed income to the government at little expense. The policy was continued by the Colonial Office until the early years of the twentieth century. Similar if more arbitrary arrangements were agreed between the rulers of the states and

Chinese businessmen in the areas outside the Straits Settlements. Prostitution was also a particularly profitable business, since only men came from China.

Perhaps the most important feature of the immigrant Chinese communities of nineteenth century Malaya was the secret societies. These societies had their origins in the disturbed countryside of southern China, the birthplace of most of the immigrants. They were set up as self-help, mining, finance and defence organizations in which members swore under threat of death and to the accompaniment of extensive and often, to those who did not understand, blood-curdling mumbo-jumbo, not to betray the activities of the society to the authorities. In exchange they could count on the society to support them in all brushes with the authorities.

In the troubled conditions of the Malay Peninsula, these societies rapidly developed into rival gangs, whose members came originally from the same dialectal areas of southern China. The leaders of the societies were the senior Chinese businessmen in Penang, Malacca and Singapore who financed the tin mining operations. Two groups wielded substantial political power, the Hai San and the Ghee Hin. In a lawless country, they formed alliances with whichever senior Malay leader appeared to be best placed to help them, defended their mining rights, and provided the only modicum of security which was available to the illiterate immigrant from South China.²⁵

The fact that their senior members were Chinese of wealth and distinction in the Straits Settlements ensured, to the chagrin of the Colonial government, that disturbances would not necessarily be confined to the tin areas outside British control. Rioting frequently threatened, and on occasions occurred in the Straits Settlements, notably in Penang where there were considerable disturbances in July and August 1867. A committee was set up to enquire into the position, and particularly to recommend measures to be taken to curb the activities of these societies. It reported in 1868, recommending either total suppression of the societies, or, more practically, that societies should be registered, oath-taking prohibited, and the heads of the societies to be held liable for all disturbances. Administrative measures along these lines were instituted, and although they by no means prevented any recurrence of the problem, they appear to have provided a modest measure of control.²⁶

The mining operations themselves were, to say the least, primitive. The Malays had been accustomed to wash for tin in the beds of streams. Soil believed to contain tin ore was thrown into fast flowing water so that the earth was washed away, leaving the heavier tin at the bottom. The Chinese miners adopted, or may

even have developed a more efficient, but more capital and labour intensive system, which involved open cast or 'lombong' mining. Here some three metres of overburden were removed, to lay open the ore-bearing strata beneath. However, the holes so created had to be prevented from flooding by pumping or bailing out water. This in turn entailed the diversion of streams to operate water wheels: a capital-intensive operation.²⁷

The Malay ruler negotiated as best he could with the miner for a royalty on all tin produced. If between him and the coast the river ran through territory he did not control, the downstream ruler additionally charged as a levy as much as he could obtain from the miner. Needless to say, nothing was ever evidenced in writing. Nor were troubles at an end when goods reached the coast, for the Straits of Malacca were a notorious haunt of pirates. The extensive mangrove swamps which in those days covered much of the coast provided an ideal refuge for them, making pursuit by British gun boats difficult if not impossible.

This brief summary will serve to indicate the more important influences affecting the Malay Peninsula in the early 1870s. Economic factors dictated by the industrial revolution, the opening of the Suez Canal and the consequent breakdown of traditional, if tenuous Malay authority in riverine communities on the west coast of the Peninsula were at work. Ultimately, not only were the Straits Settlements administrators all but powerless: even their political masters in London had options which were strictly limited. Having by a series of treaties isolated the Peninsula from aggressive colonization by other European powers, they could either wait, inactive, until one of the Sultans was persuaded to invite in a power hostile to British interests, or encourage, cajole, and even prod those same Sultans to invite them to play a role in the vacuum in the Malay Peninsula so effectively created by the forces of the industrial revolution. They chose the latter course, and, quite by chance Frank Swettenham was the man, in the right spot, at the right time to make the largest individual contribution to this exercise.

On arriving in Singapore, Swettenham rapidly found his feet. He already had two friends there, and with their assistance swiftly made acquaintance with a number of the other colonial officers and businessmen.²⁸ Initially Swettenham and Watts lodged at the Clarendon Hotel. This lay at the junction of Beach Road and Middle Road, and consisted of a large compound house, with a separate building for bachelors, which contained bar facilities and a billiard table. It was run by Charles Emmerson, nicknamed 'Colonel', who was well known in the town as the proprietor of Emmerson's Tiffin Rooms.²⁹ Later, Swettenham and Watts were moved, with Skinner and Hervey, to two small flats attached to married officers'

bungalows in the army barracks, which were then situated in the Tanglin area, quite close to the Botanic Gardens. From here, they hired a gharry, drawn by a Sumatran pony to take them to the office every day.³⁰

An elaborate system of social conventions prevailed in the expatriate community at that time. A newcomer was expected to deliver visiting cards to the houses of those whose acquaintance he wished to make. The lady of the house would invariably be 'not at home' when the card was delivered. However, the new arrival was thus assured within a week or two of an invitation to dinner, where white dinner jacket and white trousers were *de rigueur*. At five o'clock every afternoon, when the offices had closed, tennis and cricket were played on the Esplanade, watched by the ladies taking the afternoon air in their carriages. Every week or so the military band provided a concert of light classical and current music, which was enthusiastically reported in the press. Swettenham was a keen cricketer coming second in the Singapore Cricket Club's list of batting averages for 1871, and first for the next year. Curiously, few of these matches were reported in the press, Swettenham's name appearing only once in 1872, when he scored nineteen not-out for the Singapore Cricket Club against the Army and Navy in August. It was remarked that the team had fallen off in standard from what it used to be not long ago.³¹

Although he was officially posted as a cadet in the office of the Assistant Colonial Secretary, Swettenham cannot have seen much of Sir Harry and Lady Ord in his first fifteen months in Singapore, since they left on leave occasioned by a recurrence of Ord's malaria at the end of February 1871, only returning on 24 March 1872. Nevertheless, in later years Swettenham spoke well of the Ords' kindness to him as a young cadet.³² This did not prevent him in his *British Malaya*, published in 1906, from attacking Ord for what he perceived as the latter's attempts to undermine Raffles' policy in Sumatra by abandoning British interests there 'in return for Dutch concessions of doubtful advantage on the west coast of Africa.'³³

In Ord's absence, the officer administering government was A.E.H. Anson, later to be knighted.³⁴ His somewhat officious attempts to institute changes while he was in charge during the absence of the Governors earned him the distrust of the Colonial Office. He clashed with both Ord and his successor Sir Andrew Clarke. Many years later, Anson recollected with waspish relish the visit of the Duke of Edinburgh, accompanied by Ord, to Penang in 1869. When they went together to see a collection of live animals, a present to Anson from the Sultan of Kedah, Ord worried the leopard with his umbrella, and the leopard in revenge clawed his hands through the rails. Anson recorded with satisfaction the Duke's

comment, 'Serve him right,' delivered in a stage whisper which Ord must have heard. Anson also appears not to have been particularly congenial or friendly towards the two cadets. Certainly Swettenham gave him no very favourable mention in his autobiography and Anson, significantly under the circumstances, omitted all mention of Swettenham's name from his. It may well be that Anson sympathized with the older members of the expatriate community, who, in those years at least, looked upon the young cadets as tiresome interlopers, who contributed nothing to the government. Moreover Anson, with his ear to the ground in Penang, almost certainly came to know more about Swettenham's activities in Perak than most of the other government officers.³⁵

The press in Singapore commented: 'The system as we have seen it applied here in the Straits during our five years' experience of Colonial rule appears to be to keep up a constant supply of young Cadets from England, who are made hangers on upon one or other of the public offices, whether needed or not.' It went on to argue that local candidates and Eurasians should be promoted to such posts.³⁶ On a more provincial note, Penang re-echoed the complaint shortly after: 'Young men from Singapore have lately been appointed to situations, in this place, which should fairly be given to those who have just claims in the employment they now hold.' Herein perhaps lay the origins of the hostility which Swettenham was later to encounter in his early appointments in the government service.³⁷

The cadets were required to study Malay for a substantial part of their time. After Ord's contretemps with Granville on this issue, he was particularly insistent that the cadets should have their noses kept to the grindstone. He even gave instructions to the examiners that Swettenham in particular was not to be passed unless he was of sufficient standard to qualify as a court interpreter, a requirement not imposed on Watts. While this might be interpreted as evidence of a vindictive streak on Ord's part, Swettenham's own recollections of him would suggest that Ord had little doubt about Swettenham's likely success, and this was merely a jocular encouragement to greater efforts.³⁸

Swettenham's teacher was the Government Munshi, Haji Mohamed Said, whom Swettenham himself regarded as the best informed Malay of his time. He had been a teacher at Penang and Singapore before he became government interpreter, and was also notable for editing the first Malay newspaper, *Jawi Peranakan*.³⁹ Mohamed Said was a key player in the Malay world of Singapore, for his house appears to have become something of a Malay expatriates' rest-house in that city.⁴⁰ Several of the Malay leaders who were subsequently banished from their Malay states to the north eventually took up residence with Mohamed Said, and there can be

little doubt that at this early stage Swettenham would have found the company of Mohamed Said's colleagues of more than passing interest.

Anson however was not content to allow the cadets to study in this relaxed manner, and proposed to the Colonial Office that they should be given acting appointments, to help fill existing vacancies. The Colonial Office consulted Ord, by then in England, who disagreed entirely with this policy, and Anson was instructed not to alter the existing arrangements.⁴¹ Anson's concern that the cadets would become indolent was not justified in this case, for Swettenham passed his Malay examination on 2 July 1872, within eighteen months of arrival in the Settlements, half the time allowed by the regulations.⁴²

Early in 1872 Swettenham had his first taste of Selangor. He was attending a case in the Supreme Court in Singapore in which the head of the Ghee Hok, one of the Chinese secret societies was being tried on the charge of abducting a Roman Catholic Chinese girl from Macao. The case attracted quite some attention at the time, since the defendant, Chuah Cheng Moh, alias Choa Moh Choon was a man of standing in the Chinese community, and was reported in the press as having assisted the government on various matters in the past. The woman had left the brothel where she had been working to live with one Chiah Ah Pow, a vendor of congee. Chiah alleged that the defendant had subsequently abducted her by force.⁴³

Chuah was defended by James Guthrie Davidson, senior partner in Rodyk & Davidson, one of the leading legal firms in Singapore at the time, and a man who was closely involved in business in the Malay States, especially tin in Selangor.⁴⁴ Seventy years later, all that Swettenham recollected was sitting in court and being mesmerized by the way the sunlight, filtered through the chinks, caught a patch of incipient leprosy on Chuah's cheek-bone, and was reflected in the large emerald ring he wore.⁴⁵

Conflicting evidence was heard, and the jury were divided, so the case was set for retrial. The papers reported gossip in the town of threats that if the case went against Chuah, the secret societies would act against the European community: the press concluded by urging that the secret societies be crushed. In the event, there were no incidents.⁴⁶ Davidson had a hunch that the woman was in Selangor, and proposed a visit there to find her and prove his client's innocence. He was aware of his younger colleague's interest in the hinterland and invited Swettenham to join him. Swettenham was surprised to find his application for leave granted, and accepted this invitation with alacrity.

They travelled together by steamer from Singapore, to the mouth of the Klang River, and then some seven miles up the river to

Klang, where they were welcomed by one of Davidson's Malay friends, Tunku Kudin, brother of the Sultan of Kedah. Tunku Kudin was partly English educated: he was later described as 'a needy adventurer with his wits about him.'⁴⁷ Tunku Kudin, recently married to the daughter of old Sultan Abdul Samad of Selangor, had persuaded his father-in-law to appoint him in 1868 Viceroy of Selangor, in exchange for the revenues of Langat. Sultan Abdul Samad was one of a number of the Malay aristocracy of Bugis descent who devoted their attentions to warfare in Selangor, with a view to controlling the rich tin mines at the confluence of the swampy Klang and Gombak rivers, some twenty miles upstream from Klang itself. This site in those days was marked by a squalid double row of attap-thatched Chinese huts, and was known as Kuala Lumpur.⁴⁸

Kuala Lumpur was under the direct control of Yap Ah Loy, the Kapitan China, the most powerful Chinese in the state. He was a man of very considerable ability, who had risen from penniless immigrant origins to his position of wealth and influence by hard work, swift thought and equally swift action. This had on occasion in the recent past involved him in offering a bounty of fifty silver dollars for each enemy head delivered in front of his house in the market-place in Kuala Lumpur. He admitted to Swettenham that he did a brisk business. Since his tin ore had to be exported through Klang, it was logical that he should at that time be allied to Tunku Kudin, who controlled the town. Klang was therefore the major point of access to Selangor, and had been the focal point of commercial activity in the state since the 1850s.

Tunku Kudin arranged for a boat to convey Davidson and Swettenham up the Klang river to Kuala Lumpur, a journey which took three days, rowing and poling. At Kuala Lumpur they were entertained to a dinner by Yap Ah Loy. He had thoughtfully prepared for his visitors spoons and forks, made out of Mexican dollars. But the silver was so soft that they bent under the slightest pressure, and were effectively useless. Davidson pursued his enquiries for two days or so, without success. This allowed Swettenham the opportunity to look round and form his own impressions of the place. They were not favourable. He entered an apparently deserted hut, to find, slumped against a wall, a dead Chinese with a bullet in his chest. Later, walking out to a tin mine, he was led by a young Chinese nonchalantly carrying a loaded ten-chamber revolver slung over his shoulder on a stick.⁴⁹

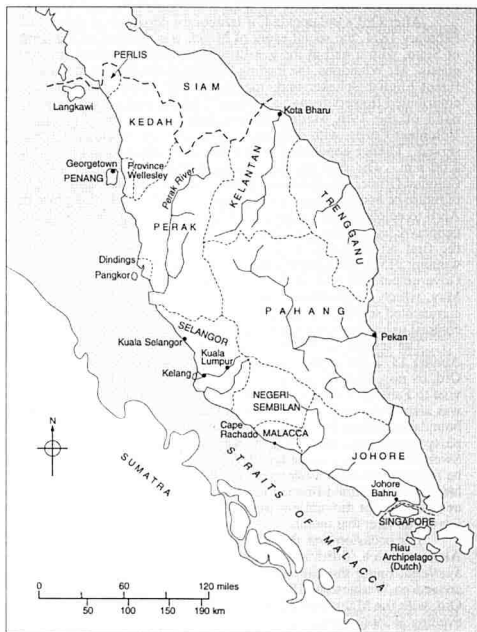
They decided to walk back to Klang. This involved twelve hours' arduous struggle through swamp land, much of it up to their waists in water, for although they had a guide, there was no regular path. As they stumbled along, they were not to know the fate a few

months later, of two European mercenaries, Van Hagen and Cavaliero, on the same path. Swettenham had met Cavaliero, an Italian in Singapore, and subsequently heard that he and Van Hagen had taken service with Tunku Kudin. These two, with a ragged force, were besieged and all but surrounded on Bukit Nanas in Kuala Lumpur. They decided that their safest course was to retreat to Klang, in this instance without a guide, through hostile territory. They lost their way, walked in a circle to Petaling, were captured and taken back to Kuala Lumpur, where their heads were cut off and stuck on poles.⁵⁰ Subsequently, when Swettenham was Resident of Selangor, and foundations were being built for permanent houses in Kuala Lumpur, two skeletons, deduced from their larger size, to be European, were found, headless, locked in each others' arms.⁵¹

The journey to Klang was so arduous that Davidson was laid up for three days. Eventually, and with difficulty they found a small local boat, a crew which turned out to know less of navigation than they, with no provisions but rice, salt fish and durians. Thus they limped back to Singapore, ramming a Chinese vessel which cut across their bows near the Tanjong Pagar docks. The whole episode brought home clearly to Swettenham the problems posed by the lack of communications and the slowness of transport: problems which he was in due time to tackle with considerable vigour.

When the case came up again the following year, Davidson's hunch proved correct: the girl had indeed been held in Klang, but by another Chinese named Chiah, who was bringing the case against Chuah for precisely the same crime. The jury were directed to return a verdict of not guilty, and Chiah was subjected to the full severity of the Chief Justice's tongue. The makeshift nature of the court was illustrated at the time by a report that when the wind blew the rain in, the Chief Justice was obliged to suspend proceedings and take refuge under his bench.⁵²

The official records of 1871 and early 1872 contain few references to Swettenham, which is scarcely surprising in view of his lowly status as a cadet, moreover one whose presence as we have seen was resented by many of the older hands who had influence in the town. But it is not unreasonable to assume that as a bright and personable young man in government, liked by the Governor and Lady Ord, with prospects, if not a particularly distinguished background, he would have attended most of the official and social events of the staid Singapore of 1871 and 1872. The first could well have been towards the end of January 1871 with the investiture of Abu Bakar of Johore with the Order of the Crown



Map 2. The Malay Peninsula, 1870.

of Italy by the commandant of a visiting Italian frigate, the *Principessa Clotilde*.⁵³

After Ord's unlamented, if temporary departure at the end of February 1871, the social event of March was the visit of the King of Siam, with a ball at the gas-lit town hall on 20 March for 400 guests. Mr Whampoa, the leading Chinese in the town at the time, a fluent English-speaker and member of the Legislative Council, contributed flowers from his garden.⁵⁴ Music was provided by the band of the 19th Madras Native Infantry and the Singapore Volunteer Corps, with dancing until 11:00 p.m. when dinner was served. Dinner concluded with toasts and dancing continued till 2:00 a.m. The cost of this was considered extravagant by the Colonial Office, one of whose officials minuted that the King should in future be encouraged to stay in Siam. A similar ball took place in April to celebrate the retirement of Sir Peter Benson Maxwell, the peppery Chief Justice, and his wife. May saw the Singapore races, the first on the card being for the Maharaja of Johore's Cup, winning \$150. The Queen's birthday was celebrated with a levée at Government House given by Colonel and Mrs Anson at the end of May, which Swettenham definitely attended. On this, the press commented sourly: 'Colonel Anson promises to afford an agreeable contrast to his predecessor Sir Harry Ord in point of popularity.'⁵⁵

The tempo of life for Swettenham must have increased in August 1872, for in the first week of the month he accompanied Ord, by now back from sick leave, on the *Pluto* on a brief official visit to Pahang, Trengganu and Kelantan. The Maharaja of Johore was also in the party. This enabled Ord to resolve a long-standing boundary problem between him and the Bendahara of Pahang. The party was well received in Kelantan and Trengganu, and Swettenham clearly made his mark, since he was recognized when he returned there on a later visit in 1875.⁵⁶ It seems probable that his newly accredited fluency in Malay was noted by the Maharajah of Johore, for he called upon Swettenham's services as an interpreter later that month.

The occasion was the official visit of the Grand Duke Alexis Alexandrovich, third son of the Czar of Russia, on the frigate *Svetlana*, under the command of Admiral Possiet. The *Svetlana* arrived on Wednesday 28 August, and the guests were greeted by Ord, with the Maharaja of Johore once again in attendance. On the evening of 29 August, Captain Denison and the senior naval officers gave a ball for the Russian party at the City Hall, attended by Ord and his party, which no doubt included Swettenham. 'The ball, we learn, was a very pleasant one, and a great success, and the community, especially the gentler half, are distinctly in the debt of the gallant Naval Officers of all nationalities for an agreeable

interlude in the sleepy monotony and sameness which characterises life in this so-called Paradise of the East.⁵⁷

After an 'At Home' given by Lady Ord at Government House on 30 August, the party went on the following day to Johore, where some ninety guests were entertained by the Maharaja to breakfast in a large tent behind his bungalow at Kranji. Swettenham records that when the Maharaja came to deliver his welcoming speech in Malay, he was without any prior notice summoned from a side room where he was breakfasting to translate. This, by his own account, he did satisfactorily. Within two years he was to exercise his ability as interpreter on a more momentous occasion.⁵⁸ The function ended on an unhappy note, with the release of a recently captured tiger into a fenced arena in the presence of a water buffalo. Swettenham recollected with revulsion that the buffalo gored and killed the tiger. The local newspaper however recorded that the tiger refused to fight, and was eventually strung up by its hind legs, to be gored by the buffalo. 'Censor,' doubtless reflecting the feelings of many present, justifiably wrote a stiff letter to the paper objecting to the cruelty and tastelessness of the fight.⁵⁹

In August 1872, Swettenham was sent to the Land Office in Singapore to learn the routines for a week or two before his first posting to Penang. He departed from Singapore on 7 September, once again on the *Pluto*, with Sir Harry and Lady Ord, for Malacca. There they left Mr Sidgreaves, the Chief Justice, and Hervey, to serve as police magistrate, while they sailed on to Penang.⁶⁰

NOTES

1. CO 273/8:ff. Sir Hercules Robinson's Report, 25 January 1864, para.49. See also C.3672 of 1866, Papers relating to Straits Transfer.
2. CO 273/28:80 ff. Ord to CO, 58 of 5 March 1869.
3. CO 273/28:169 Civil Service Commission to Cox at CO, 11 June 1869. Details of this correspondence and of Watts' and Swettenham's results are given in CO 273/43:177-96. 189 gives the results.
4. CO 273/43:188. Civil Service Commission to CO, 8 July 1870. CO 273/43:196. Civil Service Commission to CO, 18 July 1870.
5. CO 273/52:280 ff. For the *Pluto* see pl. 2.
6. *Footprints*, pp. 13-15.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Curiously they appear not to have touched port in Penang, the next logical staging post or if they did, Swettenham failed to mention the fact in *Footprints*.
9. CO 273/44:22 Ord to Kimberley 6, of 6 January 1871 reporting the arrival of *Pluto*.
10. *Footprints*, p. 16.
11. C.D. Cowan, 1961, *Nineteenth Century Malaya: The Origins of British Political Control*, C.N. Parkinson, 1960, *British Intervention in Malaya, 1866-*

- 1877, and Lennox A. Mills, 1942, *British Rule in Eastern Asia*, together with CO 273/11 onwards
12. C.M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements 1826-1867*, OUP Singapore, 1972.
 13. Tej Bunnag, *The Provincial Administration of Siam, 1892-1915*, 1977
 - Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thai-Malay Relations*, 1988, and D.G. Hall, *A History of South East Asia*, 2nd ed. 1964, pp. 741-2.
 14. CO 273/35:22-30 Memo by Jervois, 20 January 1869.
 15. For his anonymous recollections, see [W.H. Read], *Play and Politics, Recollections of Malaya by an old Resident*, London, 1901.
 16. Ord had been commissioned in the Royal Engineers in 1837, and served as a Brigade Major in the Crimean War. He had joined the Colonial Office in 1855, and had served in Dominica as Lieutenant-Governor, and Bermuda as Governor (1861-6.) He was subsequently to serve as Governor in South Australia, and give his name to the Ord River. *Who Was Who*, London.
 17. C.B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore, 1819-1867* p. 787. Singapore, 1902, repr. University of Malaya Press, 1965, and OUP, Singapore, 1984.
 18. CO 273/28:457 Ord to CO, 79 of 29 March 1869.
 19. *SDT*, 23 Febuary 1871.
 20. CO 273/18:25 ff. Ord to Secretary of State, 58 of 8 April 1868.
 21. CO 273/18:33 ff. Duke of Buckingham and Chandos to Ord, 4 June 1868.
 22. CO 273/25:388 Colonial Secretary, Singapore to the firm of Paterson Simons, 9 June 1868.
 23. J.M. Gullick, 1987, *Malay Society in the Late Nineteenth Century*, p. 6 for an account of Abu Bakar.
 24. For a detailed study of tin in Malaya at the time, see *The Malayan Tin Industry to 1914* by Wong Lin Ken, 1965.
 25. W. Blythe, *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya*, London, 1969, and M.L. Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, Singapore, 1941.
 26. CO 273/13:50-59 and CO 273/21:164-214 Ord to CO, 180 of 28 August 1868 give details of these riots.
 27. J.M. Gullick, 1953, 'Captain Speedy of Larut.' *JMBRAS* 26(3) and Wong Lin Ken, 1965, op. cit., for technical details.
 28. *Footprints*, p. 16.
 29. *Straits Calendar*, 1871. *Footprints*, p.16. E.J. Robertson, *Straits Memories*, 1910, p. 20.
 30. *Footprints*, p. 19.
 31. *Footprints*, p. 19, *STW*, 17 August 1872 and W. Makepeace, G.K. Brooke and R. St. J. Braddell, *One Hundred Years of Singapore, being Some Account of the Capital of the Straits Settlements... to 6 February 1919*, vol. 2, p.327.
 32. *SDT*, 23 Febuary and March 1871, *STW* 23 March 1872.
 33. *British Malaya*, p.108.
 34. Archibald Edward Harbord Anson had served in the Royal Artillery in 1844, the Royal Horse Artillery in 1848, and had been Inspector-General of Police in Mauritius from 1858-67. He then served as Lieutenant-Governor in Penang from 1867-82, standing in as Administrator of the Straits Settlements when Governors were on leave in 1871-1872, 1877 and 1879-80. *Who Was Who 1916-1928*, London.

Early Days and Apprenticeship

35. *About Others & Myself 1745 - 1920* by Sir A.E.H. Anson, 1920, p. 293.
36. *STW*, 31 August 1872.
37. *Penang Argus*, 12 September 1872.
38. *Footprints*, p. 16.
39. Chew Thesis, chap. 1 fn.
40. Swettenham quoted by Khoo in *Peninjau Sejarah* 1(1), 1966, p. 52.
41. CO 273/55:99-105 Kimberley to Anson, 128 of 23 June 1871.
42. CO 273/58:306 Ord to Kimberley, 105 of 27 July 1872. Watts however failed, and eventually resigned in 1875, after allegations of financial impropriety.
43. *Footprints*, pp. 19-22; *SDT*, 7, 24, 25 July 1871 and 5 February 1872. For further details of Chuah's career, associated with secret societies, see Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 175, 187 and 202.
44. Cowan, 1961, op. cit., pp. 166-7.
45. *Footprints*, pp. 19-20.
46. *SDT*, 24, 25 July 1871.
47. *Straits Observer*, 26 April 1875.
48. Tunku Kudin was also known as Tunku Dia Udin and Tunku Zia'u'd-din. For simplicity's sake he will be referred to as Tunku Kudin. For a detailed study of Tunku Kudin, see J.M. Gullick's four papers, *JMBRAS* 56 (2), 58 (2), 59 (2) and 60 (2) of 1983, 1985, 1986b and 1987 respectively.
49. *Footprints*, pp.19-21. For an account of Yap Ah Loy see Middlebrook, 'Yap Ah Loy' *JMBRAS* 24 (2).
50. *STW*, 20 October 1872.
51. Swettenham in *Malay Sketches*: 'Van Hagen and Cavaliero', pp. 103-11. In *Footprints*, p.21, Swettenham made an error in indicating that his visit occurred after the Van Hagen and Cavaliero incident.
52. *SDT*, 17, 31 January, 2, 5, and 15 February 1872 reported on the outcome of the case.
53. *SDT*, 23 January 1871.
54. Mr Whampoa's Chinese name was Hoo Ah Kay (1816 - 80).
55. *SDT*, 23 March, 22 April, 15 and 27 May 1871.
56. *STW*, 3 August 1872.
57. *STW*, 31 August 1872.
58. *Footprints*, p. 17.
59. *Footprints*, p.18 and *SDT*, 5 September 1872.
60. *Penang Argus*, 22 August 1872 and *STW*, 14 September 1872.

Penang and Policy Changes

Swettenham's appointment to be Acting Assistant Collector of Land Revenue at Penang and Province Wellesley was not announced officially till 18 October 1872, although he and the Ords had arrived on the island about one month earlier, and he had been sworn in as acting Clerk of the Council in Penang on 12 September. The press reported the announcement in the same edition as that which mentioned the fate of Van Hagen and Cavaliero.¹ A further duty was to handle the Lieutenant-Governor's 'Confidential and Native Correspondence,' acting as an interpreter when needed, on a salary of £400-7-0d.² The Acting Lieutenant-Governor initially was G.W.R. Campbell, seconded temporarily from Ceylon from March 1872 to May 1873 to act during Anson's absence on leave.

One of Campbell's early discoveries and the immediate reason for Swettenham's posting was a serious defalcation, estimated initially to amount to \$5,000 in the Land Office in Penang, which had continued undetected since 1870. The culprit was Mr E. Loureiro, Chief Clerk in that office, who was promptly arrested.³ An official inquiry was immediately set up, and established that the defalcation had involved the failure to transfer to the government account money collected for quit rent, search registration fees and timber registrations. The matter was one of some embarrassment not only for the Penang administration, but also for the Auditor-General, C.J. Irving, in Singapore, when it was revealed that the Lieutenant-Governor Anson in Penang had on three occasions in September 1871 asked for an official audit from Singapore in view of the serious quit rent arrears. These had gone unheeded by Irving. The result of the investigation was that Mr V. Cousins, a long-serving Chief Clerk in the Audit Office in Singapore, was posted to take Loureiro's position for a year to straighten out the office and hand over to one of the cadets, before going on to do the same in Malacca. Meantime the jury recommended Loureiro for clemency because the whole audit had been shown to be so imperfect.⁴

Further embarrassment was caused when J.W.W. Birch,⁵ the Colonial Secretary at that time went to Penang to discuss the

position with Campbell later in May. Birch reported that since in 1870 Cousins had in fact audited and passed Loureiro's defective accounts, he was not fit to take over the job. Birch concluded his report by recommending that a European be appointed: a course approved by Kimberley in mid-July.⁶ When the final report was presented later that year, it was established that from 1867 Loureiro had defaulted on \$13,785.55. Loureiro, despite the jury's plea for mercy, was sentenced in August to twenty-five months' imprisonment with hard labour. Irving was severely censured for his lack of attention to Penang affairs, despite his plea that the audit office was understaffed. \$7,000 of the defalcation was eventually recovered on the sale of Loureiro's effects.⁷

Skinner, one of the two earlier cadets, was at the time serving as magistrate in Province Wellesley, living at Butterworth in a house on the beach, and Swettenham joined him there initially. The arrangement proved satisfactory, for Swettenham's work took him, early each morning either in a steam launch across the Straits to Penang, or out into the furthest corners of Province Wellesley, returning in time for dinner, when the two exchanged notes. For a month in late 1872 Swettenham stayed as guest of Lady Ord in the Governor's bungalow on Penang Hill, while Ord was travelling. The Governor's house, *Bel Retiro*, consisted of two bungalows, joined by 168 feet of corridor, with fine views down to the coast. A semaphore signal station facilitated direct communications with Fort Cornwallis, on the coast. Life on the hill involved a four mile walk down the hill, and a pony ride back up in the evening, which was tiring. But it had its compensations, for it enabled Swettenham to make and cultivate useful contacts. Among them was Forbes Brown, with extensive sugar estates in Province Wellesley, a house with an eighty-foot drawing room at Glugor and, just below the Governor's residence on Penang Hill, a house called Strawberry, with breathtaking views over the Straits to Kedah Peak and the central range in the distance.⁸

Forbes Brown was one of the unofficial members of the Legislative Council, and that, together with his commercial interests, made him an important local figure.⁹ Apart from the business community in Georgetown, the leading local figures in the district were the proprietors of the substantial sugar estates in Province Wellesley, which at the time totalled almost 15,000 acres.¹⁰ The government offices in Georgetown were in a long, narrow single-storied building, surrounded by a verandah on the street side. Below, a steep step led into a dark, gloomy corridor with stone paving, which had once served as the East India Company store. The Governor and other officials had their offices on the first floor.

These also included the Land Office, with which Swettenham would have been familiar.¹¹

Of the government officials whom Swettenham saw, the most remarkable was Captain Tristram Speedy, who was appointed Assistant Commissioner of Police, Penang, in 1872.¹² Swettenham probably first met Speedy and his wife in Penang at the end of 1872: a bearded fair haired man, strikingly tall at six feet, five inches, with a fondness for dressing up, and a reputation as a considerable linguist. Speedy was one of those larger-than-life characters so frequently encountered in any frontier society. Unlike Swettenham, he was later unable to adapt to the restrictions of the more settled way of life which accompanied the establishment of law and order.

After Skinner was posted out of Province Wellesley in early 1873, Swettenham moved over to Penang, sharing a house with Captain W. Innes, R.E.¹³ They nicknamed their pretentious house, standing in its own derelict compound, 'The Baronial Hall,' on account of the imposing flight of steps up to the front door, and the marble paved hall, lit by long narrow windows glazed with small panes of glass. Innes planted the lawn with guinea grass, for the benefit of his horse, which the drunken Singhalese syce insisted required two stalls in the stables, one to stand in, the other to sleep in. Innes' horse, a bad-tempered creature, took its revenge on the syce one night, and apparently knocked him down, entailing a long stay in hospital, from which the syce emerged in due course, already drunk.¹⁴

Swettenham's life in Province Wellesley was full of unexpected incidents. His job involved presiding over two courts each week, ten miles apart, in the south of the Province. One day during the proceedings, he was told that two Malay constables had been attacked by a tiger along the road he was to traverse that evening to spend the night at the second courthouse. His work completed in the first, he borrowed a police rifle and set off in a half-garry, known as a shandry, on the road where the incident had taken place. Not long after the pony shied across the road, and stopped, having smelt the tiger. Swettenham spotted a curious circular mark on the road, apparently made by the feet of an animal careering round in a circle. Having followed the tiger's tracks unavailingly into the jungle on the side of the road, he resumed his journey, it being already after 6:00 p.m.

On arrival at his destination he enquired about the incident, and in due course heard the story by the two constables, who appeared as he was eating his dinner. They had been painting the courthouse where Swettenham had spent the afternoon, and, on completion of their work at about noon, started for home, the one carrying a long-handled whitewashing brush and the other an

umbrella. Where Swettenham's pony had shied, a tiger had sprung into the middle of the road in front of them, roaring at them and lashing its tail. With considerable presence of mind, and knowing flight would be disastrous, they fell to their knees, the whitewash brush facing and prodding at the tiger. The tiger tried to outflank them, but each time they swivelled round with the brush. Tiring of this strange opposition, the tiger turned round, and scratched furiously with its hind feet on the dirt road, throwing a shower of gravel and sand at the constables. They with even more presence of mind put up their umbrella to shelter from the hail of stones. The tiger continued his circling tactics for some minutes, alternating between the forward and the rear approach, appropriately matched by the constables, till, disgusted by the resistance, he leapt off into the bush. The constables retreated with equal speed and relief, until they met a group of eight or ten unarmed Chinese. These, although warned by the constables, but probably not understanding, proceeded to the same spot apparently oblivious of the danger, till the tiger again appeared and sprang into their midst. The noise and pandemonium they created was, however, sufficient to scare him away, and, much chastened, the parties proceeded on their ways without further interruption. Swettenham supposed that the tiger had made a kill in the bushes nearby, and merely resented the intrusion on his afternoon meal. Swettenham recorded further impressions of his time in Province Wellesley in his sketch 'A Nocturne.'¹⁵

Another less serious case of corruption occurred at the end of 1872, when Dodwell, the crippled postmaster of Penang, was found to have misappropriated \$129.52, as a result of a check authorised by Campbell and promptly carried out by Swettenham. Despite a letter by Dodwell admitting his guilt, the jury at the trial could not reach a decision, and were discharged. At a second trial, in February 1873, the jury acquitted Dodwell, out of public sympathy. The acquittal gave Ord cause for particular concern: Dodwell was suspended from duties and eventually dismissed by the Executive Council.¹⁶ At about this time, Campbell embarked on an acrimonious correspondence with Ord on whether he should be required to post security in respect of the officers serving under him, including Swettenham. The subject was perhaps not entirely surprising in view of recent corruption cases which had not been confined to Penang.¹⁷

This led to further deliberation between Penang and Singapore on the question of whether the post of Lieutenant-Governor in Penang should be downgraded to increase central control of the Settlements. It provoked, not surprisingly, a vigorous memorial of protest from the Penang public. This was addressed direct to Lord

Kimberley, the Colonial Secretary in London. It was surreptitiously abetted no doubt by Anson, who, having returned from leave in May 1873, alleged gross incompetence by Singapore in handling Penang matters, citing particularly delays in signing land titles and paying junior government officers. Moreover, Penangites protested that excessive controls from Singapore prevented the Lieutenant-Governor from acting with sufficient authority in quelling disturbances in Larut. They concluded that the Lieutenant-Governor in Penang should have more authority, not less. The Colonial Secretary in Singapore was obliged to write to Anson in Penang, requesting chapter and verse on the allegations. Anson passed the request on to Thomson, the Honorary Secretary of the Committee of Memorialists, who replied cheekily and no doubt to Anson's considerable satisfaction, if not encouragement, that, 'the Committee have no power to reply to the questions enumerated until such time as his Lordship (Kimberley) shall have taken action upon the document in question.' Further enquiries revealed that only one junior officer had on one occasion had his salary delayed, and Birch in Singapore eventually admitted that a failure there had resulted in the loss of certain Penang land titles. There the correspondence rested.¹⁸

One further international development requires notice: the decision of the Dutch to blockade Acheen (Acheh) in Sumatra in 1873. This resulted in an appeal from the Sultan of Acheen to the British for assistance. The appeal was turned down, and the Dutch urged the British to observe a trade embargo with Acheen. Thus, throughout 1873, the establishment of colonial spheres of influence was to the forefront in the Straits of Malacca. No doubt the background of Dutch attempts to secure control of Acheen throughout this period would have weighed in the deliberations in London to change British policy towards the Malay States. In contrast to his obsessive interest in Siam, Swettenham seems to have taken little interest in the British abrogation of interest in Sumatra. One explanation may have been that Sumatra was an area in which his rival W.E. Maxwell developed particular expertise.

Closer to home, the government was shocked by revelations of maltreatment of Indian labourers on the extensive sugar estates in Province Wellesley. Malakoff Estate was the worst, although Alma Estate was also mentioned. A report by a committee of three, headed by the Colonial Surgeon at Penang, J.J. Veitch, revealed widespread flogging, which in some cases had led to death, accompanied by totally inadequate food, sanitary and medical conditions. A second, and independent report was demanded. This came to the same conclusions.¹⁹ Court proceedings resulted, and J.C. Thomson of Malakoff Estate was sentenced to three months'

rigorous imprisonment, while his assistant, Durnford received four months' for similar charges. The whole episode led to a considerable outcry in the press. In December 1873 the planters held a protest meeting, claiming that the government had acted vindictively against them. However the effect in the long term was salutary, for it forced the government to introduce legislation providing safeguards for Indian immigrants, a first step towards the statutory health and sanitation provisions which, with Swettenham's assistance came into force later.

At the end of September 1873, Swettenham took three weeks' local leave. Part of this he spent on a very uncomfortable vessel pursuing pirates along the Perak coast, south of Penang. He described the events at gloomy length.²⁰ At some stage around this time, perhaps also during his three weeks' local leave, Swettenham must have spent a few days in Singapore, for he was involved in interpreting there for Syed Ahmad, who had just established himself as Dato Klana in what is now Negeri Sembilan.²¹

Meantime, Ord completed his term as governor in early November 1873, and departed amid effusive memorials from the local communities, but significantly none from the British. For all his unpopularity with the established business figures of Singapore, and the suspicion with which he was clearly regarded by the officials in the Colonial Office in London, Ord from his correspondence conveys the impression of a hard-working, and infinitely patient man. He was the first of several Governors of the Straits Settlements who must have recognized Swettenham's undoubted potential as a colonial official.²² Moreover Ord, like Swettenham, was not part of the London establishment, and the consciousness that they were both outsiders may have strengthened Ord's sympathy for his young protégé. Nevertheless, when Ord left the Straits, the Colonial Office commented that 'with a little discretion Sir H. Ord might have left Singapore a popular Governor.'²³ He was persistent, but it can be argued that his own lack of judgement lost him the the confidence of the Colonial Office, and the goodwill of the Singapore business community.

He left having hoped to take with him two gibbons, the gift of the Raja of Kedah. Unfortunately these had not arrived by the time of his departure, and Swettenham was asked to look after them before forwarding them to London. The smaller died within twenty-four hours of arrival at Swettenham's house in Penang from wounds inflicted by the larger. The latter having severely bitten Swettenham escaped into the coconut grove at the back of the Baronial Hall, and eventually attacked, doubtless on provocation, a passing schoolboy. It was killed in the process. A court case

ensued, and as a result, Swettenham had to pay \$22.95 in costs and damages.²⁴

Ord was replaced as Governor by Sir Andrew Clarke. While Ord had an Australian background and lacked close personal contacts with the officials in the Colonial Office, Clarke was definitely part of the London establishment.²⁵ Clarke's appointment coincided with, and to a large extent facilitated, a dramatic change of policy in British attitudes to the Malay Peninsula, because, unlike Ord, Clarke from the beginning had the trust of the Colonial Office officials who handled the London end of the correspondence.

The beginnings of a change in the policy can be seen in comments on a curious letter sent to Herbert of the Colonial Office by a Mr Seymour Clarke on the 10 July 1873. Seymour Clarke was a businessman, related to W.H. Read of Singapore, and was at that time heavily involved in promoting tin mines in Selangor. After referring to an earlier meeting with Herbert, Seymour Clarke stated that although Herbert at their meeting had reiterated the official policy of non-intervention in the Malay States, particularly Selangor, the British government 'took much interest in its welfare and would be glad to see its prosperity established.' He then reported that 'one of the old Residents in Singapore intimately acquainted with the native chieftains' believed that some of the Native States might 'put themselves under the protectorate of some European Power, and Germany was mentioned as most likely to be approached, failing England.' He quoted from a letter, allegedly received from Tunku Kudin by the promoters of the tin-mining company in Selangor, with which he was involved:

I would ask you to ascertain if the English or any other Government would interfere in any disturbance that might arise in the territory of Salangore so that merchants etc. desirous of opening up trade here may have a security for their Capital and Property invested, and so that there was some safety for life and property.

Seymour Clarke further enquired somewhat disingenuously whether Tunku Kudin should take this up 'thro' the Governor of the Straits Settlements, or direct to the Colonial Office, and with what probable result?'²⁶ There can be little doubt that the 'old Resident' referred to was Read, and the letter from Tunku Kudin, if ever it existed, was composed with Read's assistance.²⁷ After reiterating the official line on non-intervention, a note of hesitation creeps into the Colonial Office minute by Cox on the letter: 'I can't help thinking that with a judicious Gov. we might almost imperceptibly have a considerable moral influence over the various native chiefs — but I am aware how dangerous any interference might be.'²⁸ Herbert commented on the same day: 'But as Sir A. Clarke is believed to be

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able and cautious in administrative matters, it might be well to desire him confidentially to consider after his arrival whether it would be safe and advantageous to extend our influence to some parts of the Malay territories beyond our own settlements.'²⁹

Although Seymour Clarke received the standard government reply maintaining the policy of non-intervention, Sir Andrew Clarke, when he left UK for Singapore, carried with him instructions to investigate the possibilities of the opposite course: 'The anarchy which prevails and appears to be increasing in parts of the Peninsula, the consequent injury to trade and British trade generally render it necessary to consider seriously whether steps can be taken to improve this condition.' After drawing attention to Seymour Clarke's correspondence, copies enclosed, Lord Kimberley continued:

Her Majesty's Government have, it need hardly be said, no wish to interfere in the internal affairs of the Malay States. But looking to the long and intimate connection between them and the British Government, as shown in the treaties which have at various times been concluded with them, and to the well-being of the British Settlements themselves, Her Majesty's Government find it incumbent upon them to employ such influence as they possess with the Native States, to rescue, if possible, these fertile and productive countries from the ruin which must befall them if the present disorders continue unchecked.³⁰

NOTES

1. *SSGG*, 18 October 1872, *STW*, 26 October 1872 and CO 273/59:251 - 3 Ord to Kimberley, 141 of 19 September 1872
2. At the rate prevailing, Swettenham's salary amounted to \$1884 p.a.
3. CO 273/57:166 Ord to Cox, 4 May 1872, filed with Ord to Kimberley, 29 of 2 May 1872.
4. *Ibid*; CO 273/57:336-75 Ord to Kimberley, 39 of 10 May 1872.
5. Later to be murdered in Perak. See Chapters 6-10.
6. Note CO 273/57:464-80 Ord to CO, 60 of 31 May 1872, enclosing Birch's report of 28 May 1872.
7. CO 273/60:99-308 Ord to CO, 164 of 9 October 1872. CO 273/70:229-93 Ord to Kimberley, 318 of 5 October 1873.
8. Anson, *op. cit.*, p. 289.
9. *Footprints*, pp. 22-3.
10. J.C. Jackson, *Planters and Speculators*, 1968. CO 273/74:158-83. Campbell to Colonial Secretary, 28 June 1873 enclosing Penang Blue Book for 1872.
11. Anson, *op. cit.*, pp. 276-7.
12. Speedy had behind him a colourful career in India, New Zealand, Australia, and Abyssinia. *Footprints*, pp. 38-9, with a picture *opp.* p. 37. A full account

- of Speedy is given in Gullick, 1953, op. cit., The late Tan Sri Sheppard (pers. comm.) records a meeting with Swettenham in 1941, in which he said of Speedy, 'there was something wrong with that man.'
13. Innes, who was appointed Assistant Colonial Engineer in March 1873, was later killed in the military activities after Birch's murder. See Chapter 12 and CO 273/67:17 Governor to CO, 156 of 10 July 1873.
 14. *The Real Malay: 'A Genre Picture.'* pp. 86-88.
 15. *The Real Malay: 'Woodcuts.'* pp. 172-8, and 'A Nocturne,' pp. 120-1.
 16. *Also & Perhaps: 'Some Proverbs.'* pp. 54-6; CO 273/65:511-43 Governor to CO, 74 of 24 March 1873 and CO 273/68:1-118 Governor to CO, 204 of 12 July 1873.
 17. CO 273/65:184 ff. Governor to CO, 26 of 30 January 1873.
 18. CO 273/69:85-105 Governor to CO, 234 of 8 August 1873.
 19. CO 273/71:450-87 Governor to CO, 397 of 25 December 1873.
 20. *Footprints*, pp. 28-9, Parkinson, 1960, op. cit., p.103, *British Malaya*, p. 125. There is a discrepancy here between the three days noted by Parkinson, op. cit. and the three weeks recorded by Swettenham. It is possible that the balance of the three weeks' local leave were spent partly at least on a trip to Kedah.
 21. SS No.188, 10 July 1873, quoted in Parkinson, 1960, op. cit., p. 168.
 22. CO 273/83:204 Governor to CO, 100 of 6 March 1876 filed with Ord to CO, 25 April 1876.
 23. Quoted in M. Turnbull, 1972, op. cit., p. 387.
 24. *The Real Malay: 'A Genre Picture.'* pp. 93-104.
 25. His early career, which had involved political service in Australia and New Zealand had also brought him to the attention of Hugh Childers, a prominent supporter of Gladstone. Clarke, drawing on his engineering background, had advised Childers in 1870 on the desirability of widening and controlling the Suez Canal. He was a member of The Owls, a fashionable London dining club of the time. See Parkinson, 1960, op. cit., p. 207, quoting *The Life & Correspondence of the Rt. Hon. Hugh C.E. Childers, 1827-1896*, E.S. Childers, 2 vols., London 1901, pp. 145-6.
 26. CO 273/74:187-212 Seymour Clarke to Herbert, 18 July 1873.
 27. Gullick, 1986b, op. cit., for a full discussion of this incident.
 28. Ibid. Comment dated 21 July.
 29. CO 273/74:187 ff. Herbert's minute on Seymour Clarke's letter to him, 10 July 1873.
 30. HC 1111:39. Kimberley to Clarke, 20 September 1873. Parkinson, 1960, op. cit., p.111 however attributed the change of policy to a change of government in London, while others have stressed economic factors in Britain as well as Malaya. (Khoo Kay Kim, 1967, 'The Origin of British Administration in Malaya,' *JMBRAS* 39 (1): 91 and Turnbull, 1972, op. cit., p. 135) Swettenham himself in *British Malaya*, p. 174, acknowledged the benefit to British trade, but also put forward motives of humanity, 'the white man's burden,' as might be expected.

Perak and the Pangkor Engagement

Some indication has already been given of the general conditions in the Peninsula beyond the Straits Settlements in Chapter 2. Although the result in the two most disturbed states of Perak and Selangor was a similar degree of lawlessness, the detailed reasons were very different. In Perak the focus of trouble was the rich tin-mining areas of Larut in the north, between Penang and Pangkor, which were fought over by supporters of the two major Chinese secret societies: the Ghee Hin and the Hai San. The leaders of these societies, who lived both in Singapore and Penang, brought in large numbers of illiterate immigrants from South China to work the mines, and where necessary to fight over their control.

The position in Perak was especially complicated because of the political structure in the state. The Sultan in theory was expected to consult the Raja Muda, the heir apparent, and under him the four senior chiefs: the Bendahara, the Penghulu Bendahari, the Temenggong and the Orang Kaya Mantri. Below these four were further echelons of minor chiefs. The succession to the title of Sultan did not normally pass direct from father to son, but through different branches of the royal family, appointed in such a way as to ensure, in theory that the Sultan was a man of age and experience.¹ The reality however was far different in the 1870s. The Sultan and his various chiefs lived in comparative poverty, effectively dividing the state into spheres of influence in which each chief tried to exact the maximum tribute from Chinese miners operating in his area, or wishing to pass downriver with tin ore through his area. The chiefs allied themselves with whichever mining group was able to promise the maximum revenue.

North Perak at this time was very sparsely populated, and only by Malays. During the reign of Sultan Abdullah Muhammad (1841-50), a minor Malay chief named Long Ja'afar was given authority to administer the largely unoccupied area in the north, with authority to collect taxes. Long Ja'afar encouraged Chinese to come

to Larut (now Kamunting and Taiping) and to begin tin mining. He collected taxes from them and became rich. Long Ja'afar died in 1857. Meantime Sultan Ja'afar succeeded Sultan Abdullah Muhammad, his distant relation, in 1850 and ruled till 1865. Sultan Ja'afar confirmed in writing the authority to administer Larut, to make laws and to administer foreigners to Ngah Ibrahim, Long Ja'afar's second son, who, like his father, grew wealthy from income derived from the tin mines worked by the Chinese. In 1863, Ngah Ibrahim, no doubt in return for financial gifts, was given the very senior title of Orang Kaya Mantri, one of the four most senior chiefs, with full authority over the northern part of Perak. He was virtually the equivalent of a Viceroy. His rank and authority were recognized by the whole Malay population.

A further complication arose from the fact that the succession to the title of Sultan had been disputed since the death of Sultan Abullah Muhammed in 1850. Abdullah's son Yusof was passed over, because, like his father, he was on bad terms with the other chiefs and tyrannical in governing his district. Likewise, the man who would normally have been regarded as the second in line of succession, Raja Ismail, was also passed over, for he was not of the royal family. He was appointed Bendahara in 1851 when no members of the family were available as candidates. When Sultan Ja'afar died in 1865, the succession passed back to his cousin Ali, at that time the Raja Muda. At this stage the late Sultan Ja'afar's son, Abdullah, succeeded to the title of Raja Muda.

Fights between the Chinese secret societies in the 1860s for control of the area led to the defeat of the Ghee Hin. Their leaders in Penang appealed to the British authorities for assistance. As a result of British pressure the Sultan was obliged to extract compensation from Ngah Ibrahim, the Orang Kaya Mantri, henceforth referred to as the Mantri.²

When Sultan Ali died in 1871, several individuals contended for the throne. Abdullah, the late Sultan Ja'afar's son, was already Raja Muda, and in the normal course of events might have been expected to succeed. Yusuf, son of the late Sultan Abdullah Muhammad, had already been passed over twice. But Abdullah was on bad terms with the Mantri, who favoured Ismail, Bendahara since 1851 and by now an old man. Abdullah further weakened his case by refusing to attend Sultan Ali's funeral, possibly from fear of Yusuf, through whose country he had to pass. Abdullah's failure to attend the funeral was important in another respect: Perak tradition required that the Sultan's regalia should be passed in person by the assembled chiefs to the chosen successor, and Abdullah, by missing this opportunity, created substantial further difficulties for himself, as we shall see later. He also lost face by failing to take steps when

his wife absconded with Raja Daud of Selangor. This episode was attractively related by Swettenham, changing only the names, in his tale 'A Malay Romance.'³ The chiefs strongly urged by the Mantri, finally therefore installed Ismail. In this way the Mantri established, for a while, his position as kingmaker. Irving, the Auditor General, expressed the view of many informed Europeans at the time when he suggested that the Mantri's support for Ismail was a long-term bid for the Sultanate himself. Ismail had powerful backing from most of the chiefs, except Yusuf, who distanced himself from his colleagues' activities, and of course Abdullah.⁴

Abdullah was not prepared to accept the new position. He first pursued his campaign for recognition by appealing to the British authorities, writing to Ord in February 1872, claiming that Ismail had been incorrectly appointed. Ord's attempts at mediation failed, in the face of opposition from the Mantri. Abdullah then claimed the position of Sultan and appointed Yusuf as Raja Muda, negotiating through Tan Kim Ching and other wealthy Singapore Chinese. At the same time he promised the Ghee Hin favourable consideration in the Larut tin fields if they would support him. The Mantri supported the Hai San, resulting in serious fighting at Larut in 1872, in which many of the Ghee Hin were killed, and some 2,000 fled to Penang, greatly alarming the British authorities.⁵ The ubiquitous W.H. Read, the Singapore entrepreneur, was known often to be in business partnership with Tan, and Abdullah saw in this alliance a chance to influence the Colonial government in Singapore in his favour.

Ord remained deaf to these appeals and pressures in early 1873. In July 1873 Speedy suddenly resigned from the Penang Police, and to the consternation of the Government indicated that he was going to India at the behest of the Mantri, one of the warring parties in Perak, to raise sepoy for him to defend his control of the tin mines in the area. A flurry of telegrams between London, India and Singapore resulted in the sepoy being detained for a time in Calcutta, until Ord indicated that he had no objection to their being allowed to leave. The Colonial Office wrote cautiously on 29 October 1873, trusting, 'that the Colonial Government has been careful not to commit H.M.'s government in any way to the support of Captain Speedy in the present undertaking.'⁶

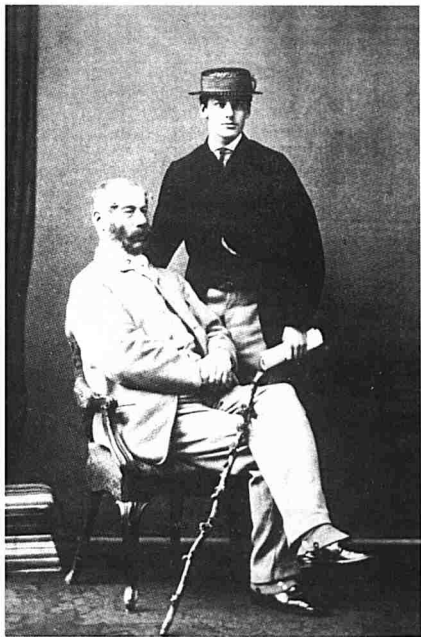
Thus Clarke, arriving armed with instructions to investigate the possibility of limited intervention, inherited a Colonial administration which looked favourably on the Mantri, by now allied to the Hai San, but under indirect pressure from Abdullah through his alliance with powerful Singapore commercial interests represented by Tan Kim Ching and W.H. Read. Abdullah had visited Singapore in September 1873, where he had been entertained

by Tan and had met Read. Read advised him to wait till Clarke arrived, before pressing his case further. Meanwhile Tan induced him to sign a bond making over to Tan the Larut tin concessions if Tan was able to secure British support for Abdullah's cause.⁷

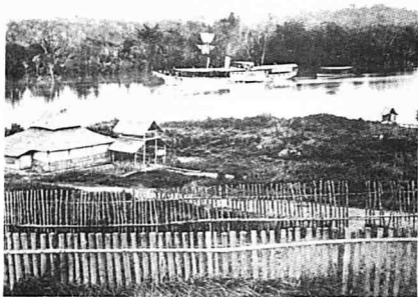
Clarke's early days in Singapore were spent assessing the position, chiefly in Perak, where, as will by now be evident, a total breakdown of law and order was imminent, and threatening to spill over into Penang. On 13 December 1873, Clarke held a dinner party at Government House, at the end of which he asked Read, one of the guests, to stay behind to discuss Perak affairs. This offered just the chance that Read and Abdullah were waiting for. Read later recounted: 'I asked him whether he intended moving quickly in the matter. He said, "I am ready at a moment's notice, if I can get the key to the door". I said, "Give me a fortnight and I will get it for you."' ⁸ Read thereupon drafted a letter, translated it into Malay, sent it to Abdullah for signature, and handed it back to Clarke, in somewhat more than a fortnight on 9 January 1874.⁹ This may be regarded as a simplified account, written by an old man many years later. The discussions were undoubtedly more complex, but in essence the point is proved: Clarke had decided to take action.

Meantime, Clarke had not been idle. In early January 1874, W.A. Pickering, formerly of the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs, and, from 1872 Chinese Interpreter in the Straits Settlements, had been sent to Penang. Pickering was the only man in the Colonial government at the time who understood Chinese, and commanded the full respect of that community. His brief from Clarke was to obtain the agreement of the heads of the warring Chinese factions in Larut. By 4 January he had achieved this. The factions were to submit their disputes to Clarke for arbitration, and meantime were to hand over their boats as surety. This effectively cut off their means of escape from Larut, and ensured that if the agreement was broken, Speedy with his sepoy's would 'do his worst.'¹⁰

With the Chinese position temporarily under control, Clarke turned his attention to the Malays, sending Major McNair, the Colonial Engineer, and Captain Samuel Dunlop, Inspector-General of Police, to summon the Perak chiefs to Pangkor on 14 January, at the same time as he was to take over the boats and arms from the Chinese. Interestingly, their brief at this stage was to enquire whether Abdullah would concede his rights to the Sultanate to Ismail in exchange for a pension. This document is important, for it shows that Clarke already had in his mind the main terms of the Pangkor Engagement, with the one important exception: Abdullah was eventually confirmed as Sultan, not Ismail.¹¹



1. James Oldham Swettenham, Frank Swettenham's father, with an unidentified youth, possibly one of Frank Swettenham's elder brothers. Compare with the same photograph, *Footprints*, pl. 1, where the figure of the youth has been inexpertly touched out.



2. The Colonial steamer *Pluto*.



3. Swettenham in about 1875.



4. Swettenham and J.W.W. Birch.



5. J.W.W. Birch.



6. H.M.S. *Avon* at Klang.



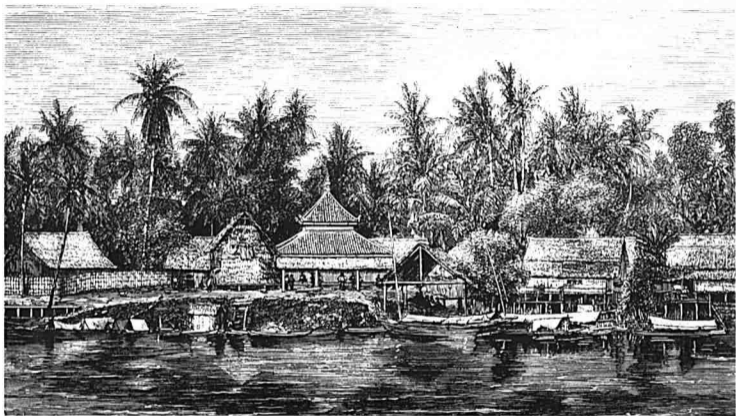
7. Che Mida.



8. Che Mida, her husband, Nakhoda Trong, and attendants.



9. Che Mida's residence at Kuala Kangsar, with British party, including Swettenham and Speedy.



10. General view of a Malay Village on the Perak River.

On 9 January, the long-awaited letter, drafted by Read and signed by Abdullah, had arrived in Singapore, requesting, in the official English translation of the Malay version, 'a man to show us a good system of government.' It should be noted that by this stage Clarke had already decided to hold his meeting at Pangkor. The letter may have helped him change his mind from support of Ismail to Abdullah, and provided a convenient pretext, but beyond that the letter itself had little importance.¹²

Clarke left Singapore on 11 January for Pangkor on the *Pluto*, accompanied by various government officials, the chief of whom was Thomas Braddell, the Attorney-General, a man in whom Clarke was to put great trust. Those who had been closely associated with Ord's policy of support for the Mantri, chiefly Birch and Irving in Singapore, and Anson in Penang, were left behind. Meantime Dunlop, McNair and Pickering had been arranging supplies of rice in Penang for the Larut miners. Here they enlisted the assistance of Swettenham, chiefly to act as interpreter at the forthcoming meeting. He was sent on 13 January to accompany the Chinese headmen from Penang to Pangkor on the *Avon*.¹³ This was the first major job in Swettenham's professional career. It illustrated, as did much of his subsequent career, an almost uncanny ability to pick out important issues, develop a monopoly of expertise on the subject, in this case through his knowledge of Malay, and thus make himself indispensable. Nor, as we shall see, was he a man to hide his talents.

By 15 January an agreement had been concluded between the headmen of the Chinese Ghee Hin and Hai San. This provided that both sides should disarm and destroy their stockades, that a commission of British officials and two Chinese headmen, representing the two factions, should settle all claims to the mines, and future arrangements in Larut should be controlled by a British Resident. Finally the headmen agreed to a bond of \$50,000 to guarantee they would keep the peace and abide by the provisions of the agreement. This agreement could not finally be signed till 20 January, since the Sultan's signature was also required, and for the moment it was not known who the Sultan would be.¹⁴

Meantime Clarke was attempting to summon the leading Perak chiefs to Pangkor. Swettenham had gone up the Perak River to Larut in the *Fair Malacca* with Patterson, a man whom he loathed profoundly. He commented in his diary: 'I have heard from the natives here, principally from the Penghulu, enough about my villainous friend (?) Commander Patterson of *HMS Avon* to have tried him by Court Martial ten times and hanged him ten times if once was not enough.'¹⁵ Their tasks were to inform the Chinese there of the agreement reached in Penang, and to summon the

Mantri. This involved a walk of four miles to where the Chinese factions faced each other behind stockades, with a further stockade eight miles away manned by Speedy and his Indians guarding access to the Mantri's house. Swettenham on this occasion failed in his immediate mission, although the Mantri did eventually attend at Pangkor. Swettenham and Patterson were returning and had reached the mouth of the Perak River when they met McNair and Dunlop on board the *Johore*, with further letters to Abdullah and the Laksamana, one of his chiefs. They were successful in persuading Abdullah to return with them. However the boat ran aground on the return trip, so that Abdullah, the Laksamana and the Shahbandar (another of the chiefs) arrived on the 15 January.¹⁶

Of Abdullah at least we have Swettenham's own, unattractive pen-portrait:

He was short and spare for a Malay, and his distinguishing features were a large ugly mouth with a downward turn at the corners and an almost perpetual expression of extreme discontent. His vanity was inordinate, his extravagance continually led him into difficulty, and he smoked opium to excess and to the neglect of all his duties and his interests; moreover he lacked courage and sought counsel from men of no standing, whose only thought was their own profit.¹⁷

As a result of these delays, the business of the meeting was only able to begin on 16 January. By this time Sir Andrew and Lady Clarke and their attendants had arrived at Pangkor on the *Pluto*. The meeting started with ceremonial visits by the chiefs to the Governor on board the ship. Of the four major contenders for the position of Sultan, the Mantri and Abdullah alone were present. Ismail subsequently claimed to have received his invitation too late to attend, while Yusuf was not even invited, even though he had written in February 1869 to Singapore stating his claim to the throne. Of the minor chiefs in attendance, the majority represented or supported power-holders in Lower Perak. Representatives from Upper Perak were noticeably absent, and all had personal reasons for not mentioning Raja Yusof's claim.¹⁸

The proceedings proper started at 3:30 p.m. with an interview between Clarke and the Mantri, alone. The Mantri was accompanied to Pangkor by his Penang-based lawyer, R.C.Woods, but the latter was not allowed to attend the actual proceedings. The Mantri agreed, after some hesitation, to have a British officer in Larut to assist and advise him, but claimed that he now held Larut independently of the Sultan. A further puzzle over the Pangkor proceedings is Clarke's apparent lack of knowledge about Ord's recognition of the Mantri as an independent ruler earlier in 1873.¹⁹

Clarke also saw Abdullah, and was pleasantly surprised to discover that Abdullah was not the debauchee he had been led to expect from previous reports by Straits Government officials. But these were no more than impressions. Expert advice was needed, and later on the afternoon of Friday 16 January, Haji Mohamed Said was asked to produce a memorandum and genealogical tree of the Perak royal family. Haji Mahomed Said had of course been Swettenham's Malay teacher in Singapore. This was translated by Swettenham, who confirmed the accuracy of his own translation. It was then countersigned by McNair as to its truthfulness.²⁰ With its assistance, Clarke was able to decide that Abdullah had a far better claim than Ismail, since Yusuf's case was ignored. There can be little doubt that Clarke by now knew of the Mantri's claim and chose to disregard it, thus directly reversing his predecessor's policy.

A plenary session of the chiefs was held on the afternoon of Saturday 17 January. The Mantri, no doubt conscious that his position had been greatly weakened by Clarke's reversal of Ord's policy of recognition, was only with difficulty persuaded to attend. Swettenham and Pickering had failed in their attempts to get him to come. Pickering was sent a second time with twenty soldiers, and this secured the Mantri's prompt attendance, together with Speedy and two other lesser chiefs. The Mantri, on asking for a chair, was refused one. Clarke was angry at the request, and McNair took him by the waist and forced him to sit on the deck, with all the other Malay participants. This was a clear indication, if such were needed, of Clarke's refusal to recognize his important position among the Perak chiefs.²¹

Given that all those present were on board a British boat, surrounded by British soldiers, it is hardly surprising that there were no dissentients to Clarke's proposal that Abdullah be crowned Sultan. Indeed, the Bendahara was frightened out of his wits when he was on the boat at Pangkor.²²

The 18 January being a Sunday, the terms of the Pangkor Engagement were only drawn up on Monday 19 January, discussed that afternoon, and signed on Tuesday the 20th in the afternoon. No authorized Malay version of the text remains, and there can be little doubt that originally the Engagement was drafted in English, and translated into Malay for the benefit of the chiefs. There is some controversy over the Malay text.²³ However a copy of a Malay text, apparently in the hand of Raja (later Sultan) Idris, who did attend, has been found.²⁴ Raja Idris, also known as Raja Dris in his youth, subsequently became Sultan of Perak, 1887-1916. Born on 19 June 1849, he was less than a year older than Swettenham. The two men were to be closely associated, not always amicably, up to Swettenham's retirement in 1904. Raja Idris was not a signatory to

the Pangkor Engagement as he did not at that time hold high office in the State.²⁵ The Malay text was evidently prepared by Swettenham and Haji Mohamed Said. But the Malay language is by its nature in some contexts not very precise, and arguments attempting to blame Swettenham or Mohamed Said for inaccurate translation have proved inconclusive. The Chinese headmen had signed their agreement in the morning. Abdullah's appointment as Sultan was marked by an eleven-gun salute, and arrangements were made for the installation to be held a month later at Bandar. A letter was also addressed to the absent Ismail, informing him of his deposition, and requesting him to hand over the regalia of office: under the circumstances a startlingly high-handed piece of colonial tactlessness.²⁶

Finally, Dunlop, Swettenham and Pickering were appointed Commissioners to settle compensation questions, and arbitrate on all disputes. As far as British interests were concerned, all power was effectively vested in the Resident, under Article 6, which read as follows: 'That the Sultan receive and provide a suitable residence for a British Officer to be called Resident, who shall be accredited to his Court, and whose advice must be asked and acted upon on all questions other than those touching Malay Religion and Custom.' However no executive power was given to the Resident; this was to be a source of much trouble later.²⁷

It will be apparent from the foregoing account that there could be no question of any of the parties involved in Perak actually welcoming the establishment of a British presence. It is true however that by disagreeing among themselves on the question of succession to the Perak Sultanate, they had seriously weakened their position, and this factor was used to great advantage, both by the Chinese factions feuding over the lucrative tin mines, and the British, once the change of policy was accepted in London.

Under the circumstances it is perhaps not surprising that the British account, which was assiduously fostered over the years by Swettenham himself, should have attempted to portray Clarke's intervention as the result of a genuine request from Abdullah. But as we have seen, this argument does not stand up to closer scrutiny. Abdullah was at least prompted, if not directed, to write the letter by W.H. Read, representing Singapore business interests, and even before the letter was received, Clarke had already decided to hold a meeting of the Perak chiefs, and impose his own terms. The crudeness of Clarke's behaviour was compounded by his decision, for no apparent reason, to reverse his predecessor Ord's support of the Mantri, and his public humiliation of the Mantri in the course of the Pangkor deliberations. Moreover, the high-handed tactlessness

of Clarke and his colleagues' treatment of the deposed Ismail seemed designed to guarantee Ismail's hostility.

In a letter to his patron, Childers, Clarke admitted he had hustled the Malay chiefs into an agreement, and justified this on the grounds, that had he not done so, nothing would have been achieved. He defended his support of Abdullah on the grounds that it was necessary to secure first the allegiance of the chiefs on the lower reaches of the Perak River, before becoming involved with those further upstream.²⁸ Colonel Anson, left behind in dudgeon in Penang, was under no illusions: 'There can be little doubt that these chiefs did not fully realize what they were asked to agree to; or if they did, had no intention of acting up to it.'²⁹ Ord expressed similar opinions some two years later.³⁰ As might have been expected, news of the Pangkor Engagement was received with very considerable satisfaction in Singapore and Penang.³¹

Swettenham, who was closely involved in all these proceedings, must have been fully aware of the true nature of the Pangkor Engagement. His successive treatments of this episode in his writings and the myths he thus established are considered elsewhere.³² While it is not entirely surprising that Swettenham should have been at pains to sustain the myth of a voluntary request by Abdullah for British involvement in the Peninsula, it constitutes the first of several instances where we may note Swettenham's role as his own and the British establishment's best publicist on matters Malay. In following subsequent events, it must be remembered, whatever Swettenham himself and later colonial writers may have said, that Abdullah's invitation to the British to intervene was extracted under questionable circumstances, and in the eyes of most Perak Malays at the time, British intervention was little more than naked aggression.

NOTES

1. For a detailed account of these intricacies, see *The Journals of J.W.W. Birch*, P.L. Burns (ed.), OUP, Kuala Lumpur, 1976, referred to hereafter as *Birch Journals*.

2. The complicated relationships, distinguishing the family of Long Ja'afar from that of Sultan Ja'afar are set out in Khoo Kay Kim, 1972, *The Western Malay States*, pp. 67-9, 125, and R.J. Wilkinson, (ed.) *Papers on Malay Subjects*, p. 89.

3. *Malay Sketches*, pp. 179-91.

4. *A Short History of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei* by C. Mary Turnbull and *Birch Journals*, p. 12 fn. 5. See also Irving, 30 April 1872, SSR/G7 and R.O. Winstedt, and R.J. Wilkinson, 'A History of Perak,' *JMBRAS* 12(1), 1934.

5. Abdullah to Governor, 21 February 1872, and Memoranda by C.J. Irving, 5 June 1872 and 8 August 1872, SSR/G7.
6. CO 273/72:424. India Office to CO, 14 October 1873, filed with Kimberley to Clarke, 229 of 29 October 1873.
7. L. Comber, 1959, *Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya*, Chapters. 11-13.
8. Read, 1901, op. cit., dedicated to Sir Andrew Clarke: pp. 25-6.
9. HC 1111:85 Abdullah to Gov. Straits, 30 December 1873.
10. Ibid:74 Pickering to Gov. Straits, Telegram 4 January 1874.
11. Ibid:75-7 Colonial Sec. Singapore to McNair and Dunlop, 7 January 1874.
12. Ibid:85 Abdullah to Gov. Straits, 30 December 1873. The Malay version no longer exists, if indeed it ever did so.
13. *Footprints*, p. 32 and HC 1111:77-8. Report of Proceedings of Major McNair and Captain Dunlop, 14 January 1874.
14. HC 1111:83-4. Engagement entered into by the Headmen of the Chinese, dated January 20, 1874.
15. Sir Frank Swettenham's Malayan Journals, 1874-1876, P.L. Burns and C.D. Cowan, (eds.) 1975, hereafter referred to as *Sw.J.* Also published by C.D. Cowan in JMBRAS 24(4), 1951. Swettenham goes on to allege two acts of gross cowardice without giving a context. Parkinson, 1960, op. cit., p.118 refers to an unsuccessful encounter in November 1873 between a warship, then under the command of Patterson, and pirates in the Dindings channel. Burns in *Sw.J.*, p. 58 quotes Anson's account of Patterson's curious conduct in November 1873 near Pangkor. These two incidents appear to be those referred to by Swettenham. Swettenham (*Sw.J.*, p.38) 'heard from the natives here' (Pangkor) the stories of Patterson's cowardice. One curious discrepancy is that Parkinson appears to say that Patterson was in command of the *Thalia*. HC 1111:77-80 Proceedings of Major McNair and Captain Dunlop, January 14 1874 make it clear that Patterson was commanding the *Fair Malacca*, while Swettenham himself, (*Sw.J.*, 9 April 1874) records Patterson as commanding the *Avon*.
16. *Footprints*, p. 33, suggests inaccurately but does not state that the Mantri came back with Swettenham. In fact he arrived later.
17. *Malay Sketches*: 'A Malay Romance', pp. 179-191. This unflattering portrait is borne out by the photograph in Winstedt and Wilkinson's *A History of Perak*, MBRAS Reprint No. 3, facing p. 99. Winstedt, 1969, in *Start from Alif*, p. 71 also notes his 'prognathous jaw and boxer's nose.'
18. R.H. Vetch, *Life of Lieut.-General the Hon Sir Andrew Clarke*, p. 150. Cowan, 1961, op. cit., believes, p.185 fn.29 that Yusof's letter was not known of by the other Singapore officials, as Ord always kept such correspondence to himself. See also Winstedt and Wilkinson, op. cit., *A History of Perak*. McNair and Dunlop had drawn attention to Yusof's claim to the throne (referring to him as 'Raja Oosoo') in their report of 14 January, HC 1111:77-80.
19. 'Enquiry into the complicity of the Perak Chiefs in the outrages of the last year.' CO 273/86:124.
20. *Footprints*, p. 33.
21. PEP III Haji Mohamed Said's statement, 16 December 1876.
22. CO 273/87:392 Haji Yahya's detailed evidence.

23. J.M. Gullick, 1992a, *Rulers and Residents*, Supplementary Note B on the Malay Text of the Pangkor Engagement. The official English text is in HC 1111:81-2 and in J. de V. Allen, A.J. Stockwell and L.R. Wright (eds.) *A Collection of Treaties and Other Documents Affecting the States of Malaysia 1761-1963*, 2 vols., New York, Oceana Publications, 1981, Vol. 1, pp. 384-92.
24. M.A. Mallal, 'J.W.W. Birch: Causes of His Assassination', MA Thesis, University of Malaya, 1952. The Malay version was in the handwriting of Sultan Idris. It is to be found in *Peninjau Sejarah*, 1(1):51-60. For the young Raja Idris' attendance at Pangkor, see *British Malaya*, p. 176.
25. Noor Azman bin Shamsuddin, 'Sultan Idris Mershidu-Al-Adzam Shah, Sultan Perak Darul Ridzuan, 1887-1916' Thesis, 1975-1976, University of Malaya.
26. On the accuracy of the translation, see Parkinson, 1960, op. cit., p. 137, and Allen, Stockwell and Wright, 1981, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 388-389.
27. The major controversy over the accuracy of the translation centres on this clause, in particular, the phrase, 'must be asked and acted upon'. Mallal's version used the word *mahu* in translation of the word 'must'. This in Malay expresses 'a wish, will or intention' (according to R.J. Wilkinson, *A Malay-English Dictionary*, 2 parts, Singapore, Kelly & Walsh, 1902.) Significantly the more exact translation of 'must' by *mesti* was not used. It has been suggested that the use of the word *mahu*, carrying a lesser degree of obligation than *mesti* was an attempt by the translators, perhaps with Mohamed Said leading, and the point not noticed by Swettenham, to avoid using an explicit word which might affront royal dignity. Details from Gullick, 1992a, op. cit. p. 31. See note 23 above. On Swettenham's subsequent difference of views with the Muslim authority in Perak, see 'Malay Superstitions' in *Malay Sketches*, pp. 208-9.
28. Vetch, 1905, op. cit. p. 154.
29. Anson, 1920, op. cit. p. 322.
30. CO 273/89:554 ff. Ord to Secretary of State, 3 January 1876.
31. *Penang Gazette*, 29 January 1874; HC 1111:108. Resolution of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce, 18 February 1874.
32. Chapter 48 below.

The Commissioners

The thirteenth article of the Pangkor Engagement provided for British officers to restore order to the mining areas. Pickering, Dunlop and Swettenham were, as we have seen, appointed to this Commission by Clarke before he left Pangkor for Singapore. They were joined by one Hai San, Chung Keng Kwee, and one Ghee Hin representative, Chin Ah Yam. Marcus Chong Boon Swee, a Hakka Chinese from Malacca, and police interpreter, was also attached to the party. Captain T.C.S. Speedy was officially appointed Assistant Resident to the Mantri, supported by his corps of Indian mercenaries, who were discharged and immediately re-enlisted in government service. A further duty laid on the Commissioners, and one dear to the hearts of Victorian moralists, was the rescue of a number of Chinese women who had been taken against their will, generally from Penang. They were kept at the mining kongsis, either as prostitutes or mistresses, and traded between the richer Chinese there. This particular duty arose from the separate agreement which Clarke had negotiated, with Pickering's help, with the Chinese factions at Pangkor. Attempts to implement these terms in the context of traditional Perak Malay society were later to be the source of much trouble.

Swettenham kept a journal of his activities for the month from 23 January to 21 February 1874. This was adopted as the Commission's official report, and eventually published.¹ The extent to which the journals were subsequently rewritten is a matter of some debate. In their final form they contain comments which could scarcely have been transmitted officially to the Colonial Secretary in Singapore. The practice with official diaries at the time was that while they were required to be kept as reference, officials were free to quote only parts of their diaries if they so wished. Not until 1876, after the date of these journals, were district officers required to keep a full journal, to be deposited in the writer's office for consultation by his successors and the Governor if necessary. Swettenham's later complaints about keeping a journal were silenced by the Governor's expressions of interest.²

However in Swettenham's case, beyond the question of what he wrote, and what he transmitted officially to his superiors, there is the further question. Did he misrepresent as the original text of his journals passages rewritten later to suit his own ends? Evidence for this is no more than hearsay or even folklore among elderly expatriates who in some but not all cases had never known Swettenham. Yet the fact that such a tradition exists should be noted, even though to the present-day researcher there are no glaring conflicts of evidence or inconsistencies: perhaps simply a tribute to the skill with which Swettenham reworked or suppressed evidence, when he was the only witness whose evidence was trusted, as was often the case during his time in Perak before Birch's murder. The 'original' diaries themselves show every sign of being fair copies from earlier drafts. In particular the bindings do not suggest books which were used on a day-to-day basis. The tone of much of the journal for this period was very personal. Swettenham explained this at some length in his concluding remarks: '... nearly the whole of this book has been written sitting on the ground, or on the bottom of a boat, with no table but my own knees, besides which I am afraid that in writing this journal I have often forgotten that it is an official account of our proceedings more than "a story of our lives from day to day."' ³

The month was eventful. The tone was defined some years later by Swettenham himself: 'For the most part the means employed were the only ones available — tact and firmness, with an accent on the latter.' Speed was of the essence, if the whole situation was not to degenerate into a bloodbath, and the Commission lost no time in setting about its work.⁴ There was also light relief. In his diary he omitted to mention that Pickering, to the great envy of Speedy, took bagpipes with him everywhere, entertaining both his fellow Commissioners and the incredulous Chinese with his Highland skirls.⁵

The *Johore* left Pangkor for Penang with the Commissioners and the Chinese representatives on board. This was presumably to lay in further provisions, for they reached the mouth of the Larut River, where they joined the *Luzon* at midnight on 23 January. The first stage of the operations involved the clearing of the stockades on the Larut River, and the rescue of such women as were in the vicinity. This lasted until 31 January. On the morning of 24 January they met up with the Mantri, and a Mr G.P. Tolsen, a Penang resident looking for mining and sugar land. They travelled by boat up to the first stockade, which they demolished at 2:00 p.m., reaching the second stockade by 4:00 p.m., with the *Fair Malacca* and the *Johore*.⁶

The following morning, 25 January, they proceeded on foot some one and a half miles to Ujong Timbok, surrounded on two sides by the Larut River, and also known as Permatang or Laroot, where, with some difficulty, they persuaded the Chinese who had arrived from Penang the night before to destroy their stockades. This was completed by 1:30 p.m. when they left to walk further inland, and providentially spotted three elephants loading rice. With Speedy's assistance, two of these were pressed into service, to transport them to the Mantri's house inside his fort. This was in the hands of Abdullah's supporters and the Ghee Hin. All the weapons here and from Ujong Timbok were sent back to the *Johore*, while Swettenham and his party proceeded to Simpang, destroying, with the assistance of the elephants, the fourth stockade en route. At Simpang there was a strong stockade, but with few weapons, the majority of which they believed had been hidden in the jungle. Four hundred yards away was Speedy's advanced stockade, straddling the road to Bukit Gantang. From here, acquiring a bullock cart and bullocks, they went on to Bukit Gantang, some eleven miles from Ujong Timbok. At Bukit Gantang they met Mrs Speedy and Tolsen who had travelled overland on elephants from the Trong River, with the Mantri, Speedy's brother, who was serving in the Penang Police and Mr Betts, Speedy's inspector of mines.

After dinner they had a stormy argument, chiefly over Perak and British intervention. Captain Speedy, despite his appointment as Assistant Resident, still resented British government interference in Perak. He of course would have been in favour of the government allowing him to continue Ord's policy of permitting the Mantri, with his assistance, to consolidate control over Larut.

The following day the work of stockade destruction continued apace, with the help of the elephants. Those at Changkat-Jering, Speedy's camp, Simpang and Ah Oon were demolished before they reached Kota at 1:30 p.m. Here the Chinese provided a very unpleasant meal, and then objected to being pushed around, told to demolish the stockades, and give up their arms. But after some persuasion they agreed to do the demolition work themselves. After an uncomfortable night outside Taiping on planks laid on mud, the Commission moved on the next morning some three miles to Galien Pow (now Taiping), the site of several mines in the 1840s, and Galien Baru (Kamunting) nearby, some two and a half miles further on. Reading between the lines, it seems clear that at this stage the Commissioners did not feel equal to a confrontation at Kota. Investigations at Galien Pow and Galien Baru indicated that the Mantri had been totally unsystematic, not to mention rapacious, in his granting of mining leases, so it was scarcely surprising that disputes between the various Chinese mining groups had arisen.⁷

The Commissioners' demands that the women in Kota be handed over had in the meantime caused uproar there, and on their return the next day, Speedy had one miscreant, who had lied about the arms, publicly flogged. The effect was salutary, and they left later that day with twenty nine women, some on elephants and some in carts. By 8:00 p.m. they reached the *Johore*.

Most of the next day was spent interrogating the women, who, when spoken to privately, admitted that they wanted to return to Penang. They also indicated that a further four women remained at Kota. Dunlop and Swettenham, having ascertained their names and circumstances, set off in the evening to return to Kota and collect them. They took with them one of the Chinese headmen, previously taken from Kota as hostage. He was told he would get fifty lashes if he did not produce these remaining women. The threat proved effective, the women were produced, and all were back on the *Johore* by 1:00 p.m. on 30 January. With the women on board, they departed for Penang at once, and anchored off Pulau Jerejak for the night.

By 6:30 a.m. on 31 January they were in Penang. Here the women were put ashore in the police compound, while the Commissioners reported on events to Lieutenant-Governor Anson, who had up till then been kept very much in the dark about what was happening. Swettenham also saw Vice-Admiral Shadwell, and dined that evening on the *Thalia*.

The second stage of the operation commenced the following day, with an expedition to the Kurau River. The Chinese at Kurau had not been involved in the disturbances, so the Commissioners pressed on up the river into more predominantly Malay areas, retrieving women and children. Swettenham records the purchase of a woman by a Malay from a Chinese for \$65. As they continued upstream the following day, the river became very much narrower. The launch was left behind, and they took to one of the smaller boats which they had been towing. Swettenham stood and directed, while Speedy and Pickering steered with paddles. Occasionally they had to get out and heave the boat over sunken logs, their faces being continuously caught by the spiny tips of rattans hanging out into the river. They finished their liquor that evening, and spent a miserable, mosquito-ridden night at Bukit Berapit.

The next day they pressed on in pursuit of further captive women, held this time in the village of one of the headmen, Pandak Corik. On arrival there, shortly after midday, they did indeed find five women from Penang who were delighted to see them. Unfortunately however the elephants which they had arranged with the Mantri to meet them there, for the return trip to Larut, had not arrived. So on 4 February they started off on foot some twenty five

miles through the jungle, with the five women from Penang, one old, one very fat and a child of thirteen. On the way they saw tracks of tiger and rhinoceros, and were startled by large flocks of up to fifty hornbills. Eventually, and in some disarray, they reached Kota at 6:15 p.m. to find that the Mantri, who had been instructed to supply elephants, had left that morning for a place two days' journey into the jungle. He left a message that he would call for them when he had the leisure. Swettenham was furious. Moreover nothing had been done to destroy the fort at Kota. They therefore addressed a stiff letter to Speedy complaining of the Mantri's lackadaisical behaviour, and the negligence of the Chinese at Kota, urging upon Speedy prompt and strong action to demolish the fort.⁸

Having taken the women back to the *Johore* waiting off the Larut River, further progress was stalled, since Speedy, to whom responsibility for the destruction of the Kota stockade had been entrusted, had not proceeded there as Mrs Speedy was ill. Swettenham and Dunlop therefore spent 6 February investigating the claims of the rival Chinese groups to the mines. There was, as might be expected, chaos: no surveys, nothing in writing, and two claimants to almost every mine. They suggested therefore to their fellow commissioners, the Chinese Ah Quee and Ah Yam, that in the absence of any possibility of a peaceful solution, they would recommend all Chinese miners in Larut be deported, and new men brought in on clearly defined terms, with proper written grants. Thus were plans laid for a broad-brush solution to the problems of the squabbling miners.

Back in Kota that evening, they found Speedy had by now arrived. The Chinese still prevaricated about the destruction of the stockades, as they awaited the arrival of the Mantri. At mid-morning on the 7th Swettenham went snipe shooting, bagging five brace, of which only two could be retrieved. He then went on his own by elephant to the fort at Galian Baru, and, instructing the mahout, arranged to have the fort pulled down almost single handed. Further forts were pulled down later in the day. Ah Quee, their fellow commissioner, was arraigned for attempting to correspond with the Mantri behind the backs of the other commissioners.

The following day their patience snapped, and the Commissioners took back from Speedy responsibility for the destruction of the remaining stockade at Kota. Thus at last the stockades were burnt and destroyed. The Chinese offered no resistance, but blamed their headmen for the delay, while the headmen said if they had known how determined the Commissioners were, they would have destroyed the forts themselves.

Having by now learnt that the Mantri had at last appeared in his launch at the mouth of the Larut River, they set off to meet him, further infuriated by Speedy's revelation that despite the terms of Article 10 of the Pangkor Engagement, this gentleman had been collecting taxes on the tin when he should have been supplying elephants. Speedy went to see him first, and remonstrate, but returned saying that he found him 'sulky', and refusing to speak. The rest of the party forthwith descended on him at 10:00 a.m. and in the course of a two hour session, 'told him a good many things, and I don't think he will easily forget us.' Swettenham did the talking: the Mantri's only excuse for collecting taxes was that he had not understood the terms of the Pangkor Engagement. Swettenham's lecture, couched in the strongest possible terms, also touched on the chaos surrounding the mining titles, and the suggestion that a line should be drawn down the middle of the area, one side to go to the Hai San, the other to the Ghee Hin. The Mantri was advised to take himself to Penang to have the agreement explained, and this he eventually did.

The Commissioners made good time, for leaving the Mantri at Kota at 2:30 p.m. on 9 February, they reached Penang just before midnight that evening. The following day they cabled a summary of their achievements to Singapore and briefed a somewhat lukewarm Anson on the position. It was clear that Anson was less than happy at not having been consulted over Clarke's change of policy at Pangkor, and was inclined to support the Mantri, who by this time had also arrived in Penang and was arguing his case.

On the evening of 11 February, Dunlop and Swettenham again set out for Larut on the *Johore*. This ran aground during the night just off Pulau Jerejak. The behaviour of the Captain in getting her refloated was so dilatory that the Commissioners themselves climbed overboard to pull on the anchor which had been thrown out ahead. With some trouble they got underway and reached Larut by 5:00 a.m. on 12 February. After a further grounding attributable to the Captain's incompetence, which again involved climbing out and pulling the boat free, they reached the Mantri's stockade by 11:00 a.m. Here Speedy was given written notice that he was to gather within five or six days sufficient forces at the mines to guarantee that there would be no opposition to the solution which the Commissioners planned. They themselves decided to get to Bukit Gantang by going up the Sungei Limo. But the river was low, and the day well advanced, so with one elephant they spent a miserable afternoon and evening wading through the river, and eventually through swamp forest in pitch dark and pouring rain. They reached Bukit Gantang at 11:00 p.m., drenched. Speedy, although unhappy at the letter sent to him earlier from Swettenham, gave them

a warm welcome. They were the first Europeans to have travelled in this part of Perak.⁹

The following day after searching for enslaved Chinese women they turned south, passing between Bukit Berapit on the west and Gunong Pondok (Gunong Geriyang) on the east. Rain fell in the afternoon, so the party camped in a Malay hut at the foot of Gunong Pondok, some miles north of Kuala Kangsar. On the 14th they reached the river at Kuala Kangsar at midday, and swam across, to the amusement of the villagers on both sides.

From Swettenham's diary at the time, it is clear that the atmosphere he encountered in this part of Perak was one more of curiosity than hostility to the European intruders, although he remarked that since leaving Bukit Gantang, all the men and boys he had seen were armed to the teeth. The headman of Kuala Kangsar claimed not to have heard of the Pangkor Engagement, and this was therefore explained. The nominal headman was one Kulup Mahomed, or Che Kulup, a son of Che Mida. They spent the night in the only Chinese house in Kuala Kangsar, and were subjected to a stream of complaints from the owner about how badly he was treated by the Malays. Che Kulup employed fifty to seventy Chinese at his mines, gave them no wages for eight months and beat them if they refused to work.

Che Kulup had been told to produce four women who were known to be held captive there, and the Commissioners spent most of 15 February, a Sunday, waiting for them. Despite remonstrations with a recalcitrant Che Kulup, it was not till 4:30 p.m. that the women appeared, accompanied by Kulup's mother, Che Mida. She was a formidable lady, and subsequently came to be known as the Ranée of Kuala Kangsar by the British, to whom she was invariably helpful. She asked to talk to the Commissioners, and made a very favourable impression: 'She struck us as having more sense than most of the Malay men we have met.' She owned tin mines in her own right at Salak, further up the river, and explained in mitigation of the complaints against Che Kulup that it was the custom only to pay the miners when the tin proceeds were received from Penang. At the Commissioners' request she supplied a boat to take them downriver. Subsequently British officials were often to stay at her house, which was eventually purchased and used as a residence by Sir Hugh Low.¹⁰

They set off from Kuala Kangsar at 5:30 p.m., and tied up on the riverbank for the night. During the evening they were visited by one Usman, a clerk of the Mantri, who explained that taxes were being levied indiscriminately by all the chiefs. He added, according to Swettenham, that the people could not bear this much longer. Swettenham commented that unless a British Resident was

appointed, with a force of fifty men behind him, it would be impossible to impose any form of law and order. This passage in the diary is also of interest, in that it contains the first reference to the unpopular Raja Yusuf, who had been ignored when invitations were sent to the chiefs to attend the Pangkor meeting. They proceeded downstream the next day, heading for Ismail's residences, the first at Blanja and the second, east of the river at Pengkalan Pegu, where another three women were alleged to be held. En route they passed Senggang, Raja Yusof's residence. Business with Ismail was of particular delicacy, since of course he had been deposed under the Pangkor Engagement in favour of Abdullah: Clarke had written to him on 20 January requesting that he should surrender the Perak regalia. Ismail was to become Sultan Muda, and be given a pension and a district. The indignity of this fate was compounded by the title of Sultan Muda, a title introduced by the British, and having no validity amongst the traditional Malays. The regalia, without which no Perak sultan could be installed, should be handed over, Clarke had suggested, a week later on 27 January. Ismail had made no attempt to do so.¹¹

As they approached Blanja they were told variously that Ismail had gone to look for turtle eggs, and that he was away for fifteen days. He was clearly adopting evasive tactics. Moreover they could not obtain elephants to go up to Pengkalan Pegu, the site of his second establishment. They therefore gave up hope of meeting him on this occasion and went on downstream, reaching the *Johore* late on the evening of the 17th.

The proposal that Sultan Ismail should become Sultan Muda was a major error. Ismail did not take kindly to this since as a pious Muslim he was insulted at the suggestion that, in the context of Perak *adat*, he should assume 'the position of a liaison officer with the Powers of Darkness.'¹² One wonders whether Swettenham, if he did not share responsibility for advising Clarke, at least realized that the recovery of the regalia was not the only 'rather delicate matter.' At all events this unnecessary affront goes to explain why Ismail avoided meeting Clarke's envoy.

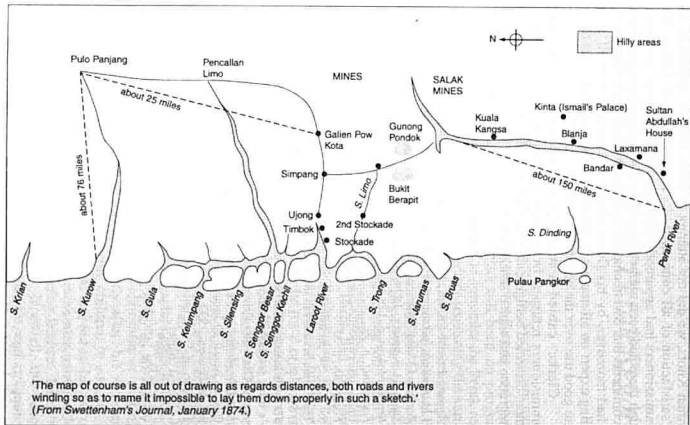
On the morning of 18 February they went onshore for an interview with Sultan Abdullah, who impressed them favourably, and confirmed their belief that Ismail had been deliberately hiding from them at Blanja. Abdullah's policy at this stage, supported by the Commissioners, was not to take steps to attempt to control Ismail or any other of the chiefs. However he confirmed that he had forwarded to Ismail Clarke's letter of 20 January about the regalia. Having dispatched a stiff letter to Ismail, complaining that they had been wilfully misinformed of his whereabouts, the Commissioners obtained a pilot from Abdullah, went downriver to the mouth, and

returned north, anchoring at the mouth of the Larut River at 1:00 a.m. on the 19th. Yet again the Captain and the pilot ran them aground in the mouth of the Larut, so they took to a smaller boat, and rowed ten miles to the first stockade. Pressing on to Ujong Timbok they found Speedy's representative handling the customs satisfactorily, and conditions much improved since their last visit. At 2:00 p.m. they left on foot for Kota, where they found both Speedy and the Mantri.

The 20 February was to prove the culmination of the activities of the Commissioners. Early in the morning they saw the Mantri, whom they found living in a hovel outside the town. He was invited to join them, together with the Chinese leaders, at the mines at noon, and they explained to him how they proposed to settle the issue. After a late breakfast they set out on foot for the mines, accompanied by the Mantri, Speedy and his brother, Betts, an entourage of elephants, and Speedy's police in the rear with carts carrying stakes to mark the boundary.

The final marking of the boundary was apparently quite arbitrary, in view of the total lack of written titles, and took the form of a post and rail fence from a living tree on one side of the valley to a dead tree on the other. The staking of the boundary was accompanied by a speech made by Swettenham in Malay to the assembled crowd, pointing out that if there were any objections, the Commissioners would advise the Governor that neither party would be allowed to return to the area, and all their investments would be lost. The Ghee Hin were to mine on the Kamunting side, the Hai San on the Kota side. Thus, the Commissioners pointed out, each side had adequate land to ensure that they would make a profit.

All miners would henceforth be issued with written documents of title from Speedy, the Assistant Resident in Larut, giving full details of the extent of the concession, for which an annual rent would be charged, depending on the acreage. Marcus Chong, the interpreter translated this into Chinese. The Mantri was asked publicly to agree to the terms, which he did, and Speedy then addressed the Chinese, promising mining leases for twenty years. In the afternoon they returned to Kota by elephant, Speedy and Swettenham later than the rest of the party, as they stopped on the way to try and shoot snipe from the elephant. On the following morning, 21 February, they embarked for the *Johore*, reaching her at 9:30 a.m. to find that the tide was falling and she was yet again aground. They got her afloat again by 1:30 p.m., and reached Penang at 10:30 p.m.¹³



Map 3. Sungai Krian to Sungai Perak, redrawn from Swettenham's sketch map, 1874.

'The Gordian Knot, the settlement of the Mines, like other Gordian Knots, we did not attempt to untie, but cut, apparently to the satisfaction of all concerned...' The atmosphere among the Commissioners had apparently been cordial throughout, and even though there had been moments of acute discomfort, it is clear from his comments that Swettenham at least had hugely enjoyed himself. He had moreover, by his fluent Malay, established himself as a leading expert on all matters in the State. This expertise was to be put to good use over the next two turbulent years.¹⁴

Clarke cabled exultantly to the Colonial Office: 'Commissioners returned from Perak, having rescued fifty-three women, disarmed belligerents, razed all stokades and settled mines. Immigration and capital settling in.'¹⁵

NOTES

1. Appendix to the PSSLC, 1874. See also *Sw.J.*
2. J.M. Gullick, pers. comm. and SSF 1308/83 quoted by E. Sadka, 1968, *The Protected Malay States*, p.142.
3. *Sw.J.*, 21 February, 1874, p. 49.
4. *British Malaya*, p. 179.
5. *Footprints*, p. 39.
6. Unless otherwise indicated, all details in this chapter come from *Sw.J.*
7. *Footprints*, p. 35.
8. *Sw.J.*, p. 51, enclosure B.
9. The Commissioners to the Assistant Resident, Captain Speedy, 10 February 1873, *Sw.J.*, p.52.
10. *SDT*, 16 March 1876. *Sw.J.* p.36 fn. 1. For a description of her house in Low's time, see Isabella Bird, 1883, *The Golden Chersonese*. There is a line drawing of Che Mida ('Hamidah') as the frontispiece to J.F.A. McNair, 1878, *Perak and the Malays*, and a drawing of her house at p. 169.
11. Gov. to Ismail 20 January 1874, cited in *Sw.J.*, p. 37 fn. 3.
12. R.J. Wilkinson, 1932. 'Some Malay Studies,' *JMBRAS* 10(1), p. 97.
13. This part of *Sw.J.* finishes on 21 February 1874. It resumes on 4 April 1874; see next chapter.
14. *Sw.J.*, pp. 48-9.
15. Vetch, 1905, op. cit., p.154.

The Pursuit of the Perak Regalia

After the turbulent events of February 1874, Swettenham returned to his post of Collector of Land Revenue in Penang and Province Wellesley for March. But there had still been no progress in Clarke's attempts to persuade Ismail to surrender the Perak regalia. Indeed the Governor's letter of 20 January requesting the surrender had not even been acknowledged. At the end of March therefore he sent J.W.W. Birch on a semi-official visit to Selangor and Perak. Birch was very anxious to obtain the job of Resident as and when an appointment was made, even though as Colonial Secretary he might perhaps have been considered too senior for the job. That Clarke felt some hesitation about sending him is suggested by his later comment that the tour was one which Birch had 'obtained my permission to make.' He was to be accompanied in Perak by Swettenham, who was to act as his interpreter, in his attempt to recover from the deposed Sultan Ismail the royal regalia. Without these, Abdullah's assumption of the Sultanate would never be regarded legitimate in the eyes of his Malay subjects.¹

Before taking the story further, it will be well to consider briefly Birch's background and history, for he was, until his murder later, to play a key role in the saga of misunderstanding and disaster which followed. He was born in 1826, the son of a clergyman, and after a brief spell in the Royal Navy, had joined the Roads Department in Ceylon in 1846. His successful career in the Ceylon administration, where his 'zeal, activity and ability' (particularly as a linguist) were recognized, led to his appointment as Colonial Secretary in Singapore in 1870. Shortly after, his wife died in England, leaving him with four young children to educate. This imposed a considerable financial strain, and led to his becoming indebted to certain of the Singapore Chinese merchants, including one who held the Singapore opium farming license. Birch's case became linked with one involving T. Braddell, the Attorney-General. Questions were asked in Parliament, and an inquiry was instituted. Although Birch was eventually cleared, but in one instance stated to have committed 'an act of indiscretion,' the report

on the inquiry was not made public till December 1874. This meant that he could not until that date be appointed Resident of Perak, even had official sanction for such a course been readily forthcoming from London.²

It was agreed that Swettenham would meet Birch, travelling north from Singapore on the *Pluto*, at Pangkor. Swettenham's departure from Penang was delayed on the evening of 4 April, and he only reached Pangkor on the 5th, travelling on board a steam launch belonging to a Chinese ship-chandler in Penang, Foo Tye Sin, J.P. The vessel was probably the *Fair Malacca*.³

There followed four days of frustration while Swettenham waited for Birch to appear. Pulau Pangkor was not an agreeable place to pass the time: there were about 200 inhabitants, mostly fishermen, and a Swedish policeman who spoke inadequate English. Swettenham found the delay particularly aggravating, as it had caused him to miss invitations to Government House in Penang, which involved four dinner parties and two dances.

At last Birch appeared on 9 April having pursued a leisurely course up the coast from Singapore over the previous ten days. He had with him Tunku Kudin and Davidson, whom he had collected in Selangor. Swettenham records his delight at meeting up with these two, with whom he had travelled in Selangor two years earlier. Birch also brought with him an official photographer: he was himself a talented amateur photographer who had exhibited some of his work in Ceylon. The unique photographs taken during his 1874 trip to Selangor and Perak, and also those taken during Jervois' visit in September 1875, are probably attributable to this hobby, though Birch did not always actually operate the camera.⁴ Furthermore, Commander Patterson, detested by Swettenham, had been replaced as captain of the *Avon*, by Captain Powlett. Since his journal was not written to form part of a public record, Swettenham could afford to be rather more frank in his comments on individuals, as in the case of Patterson. Birch for his part noted that Swettenham was bored with his stay at Pangkor, but also mentioned at the outset of the exercise what a good companion he was. Swettenham rapidly told him what he had heard from the Malays at Pangkor, in particular that Ismail was bringing tin downriver for sale in Penang. He therefore advised Birch that it would be best to go up the Perak River to see Abdullah, and then up the Larut River, overland to Kuala Kangsar, and rejoin the Perak River with a view to heading towards the Patani boundary.

The following morning was spent chiefly on photography, and in the afternoon they made an exploratory sortie up the Dindings River. The next day they headed for the Perak River, reaching Sultan Abdullah's palace at Batak Rabbit at 4:30 p.m. The setting

The Pursuit of the Perak Regalia

was unattractive: Swettenham described the flat desolate tidal marsh and nipa palm, oppressively hot by day, and infested with mosquitoes and sandflies at night. Even Abdullah's house was no more than a modest dwelling on stilts, with walls of mat, and roof of nipa thatch.⁵ Birch sent Swettenham ashore to advise that they had presents from the Governor for Abdullah, and to announce their arrival. Swettenham invited the Sultan and some forty followers back for dinner on board that evening, at which future plans were discussed. It was agreed that a letter would be sent the next day to Ismail, asking him to be ready to hand over the regalia at Blanja, while Birch and Swettenham would go to Larut, visit Speedy and the mines, then go across to Kuala Kangsar and up the Perak River towards Patani.

At the same time Birch requested that the Laksamana, a senior Perak chief, and politically the most important in Lower Perak, be asked to accompany them on their tour. This was done as the Laksamana was regarded as a considerable conspirator, and Birch wished to keep him under observation. His presence, it was considered, would also have an encouraging effect on Ismail, when he was required to hand over the regalia.

The next morning was again devoted to photography and formal leave-taking of Abdullah. When eventually everyone embarked, Davidson and Tunku Kudin left by the *Pluto* for Selangor and Singapore, while Birch, Swettenham and the Laksamana went north on the *Avon*, accompanied by the *Mata Mata*, heading for Larut. Birch's visit to Larut and Kota, accompanied by Swettenham, proved satisfactory, and Swettenham noted with approval the very considerable amount of new building which had taken place in the past month as a result of the more peaceful conditions imposed by the Commissioners.

At Kota, Swettenham recorded that they dealt with signs of disaffection amongst the Chinese by threatening anyone who caused a disturbance with immediate deportation back to China, together with a letter to the Governor of the relevant Chinese province. This rapidly resolved any further problems. From Kota they went on, accompanied by Speedy to Kuala Kangsar. There were seventeen elephants in the party, five or six being too small to carry anything. As on Swettenham's previous visit, they spent the night at Gunong Pondok, where they found 'two disreputable individuals' levying oppressive taxes on tin, and arbitrary extortions of \$1 per head on each Chinese passing through. Their weapons having been removed, the two were told to remove themselves. That night after dinner there once again ensued an argument between Speedy, on behalf of the Mantri, and the others. It was clear that Speedy still

did not fully accept his new position employed by the British administration, rather than the Mantri.

Swettenham was delighted that both Birch and Speedy were as charmed by Kuala Kangsar as he himself had been the month before. Che Mida welcomed Swettenham back with open arms and at her suggestion, they took up residence in the house of her son, Che Kulup, in his absence. That evening they had long discussions with her. The main focus of her complaint was the activities of Raja Allang and Raja Loh, distantly related to her by marriage, who were terrorizing the countryside with their extortions. They also based themselves at Kota Lama, a village a mile or two upstream from Kuala Kangsar on the Perak River. They were aided and abetted in this by their stepfather, Panglima Prang Semaun, an important supporter of Ismail, about whom Swettenham subsequently wrote.⁶

They went to bed late, but were woken at midnight by Che Mida, with a report that Panglima Prang Semaun had landed with some men nearby and was expected to attack. Although Birch and his colleagues had prepared themselves for the attack, this did not materialize, partly perhaps because of news of the preparations, partly because of heavy rain. In the light of this disturbance, they decided the next day to visit Kota Lama, the headquarters of the dissidents. After some trouble assembling the elephants, they set off, but on arrival were met with evasions by all the villagers, who pretended not to know the whereabouts or the houses of the ringleaders. On the way back, Swettenham and Birch made a detour to Kampong Korinchi, a village opposite Kuala Kangsar on the river, populated by Sumatrans who excelled in making knives and spears, some of which were purchased by Swettenham.

Several days were spent at Kuala Kangsar, waiting for boats and making enquiries into the state of border relations with Patani, to the north, and attempting to ascertain which of the Perak chiefs supported which factions in the State. Swettenham himself had a detailed discussion with the Laksamana on how best to extract the regalia from Ismail. The Mantri was to go to Ismail, with the suggestion that the regalia be given up either then and there, or later to Abdullah. In either case Ismail would be given status and a suitable title. If however he refused, he could expect force to be used by the British: an exaggeration on the part of Swettenham and Birch, which would have caused considerable anguish had it been known in the Colonial Office, as can be seen by comparison with Clarke's instructions the previous autumn. These proposals were approved by both the Mantri and the Laksamana. The latter was increasingly well regarded by the British party, and had remained a good friend of Che Mida, despite his brief marriage to her. Swettenham amused him by relating to him one of Hans Andersen's

fairly tales.⁷ Swettenham was somewhat imprecise in his diary about this period. He had obviously established favourable relations with Che Mida, and it seems possible that during this period or on other occasions when visiting Kuala Kangsar he had a brief affair, if not with Che Mida herself, then with a young lady of her acquaintance.

By 21 April, with still no sign of the boats, they bought a bamboo raft for \$4, and floated off downstream, a party of nineteen in all. Just before reaching Senggang, the site of Raja Yusuf's house, they met the boat of the Laksamana, the crew of which gave them the news that Raja Yusuf had been levying three *gantang* of rice on those wishing to pass the house. Swettenham noted with irritation in his diary that the Laksamana had paid as demanded, revealing thereby how incompletely even he at that stage understood the political realities and conditions then obtaining in the area. This was the first time that Swettenham had met Yusuf. He thought well of this large, strong, good-looking middle-aged man, the most aristocratic among those whom he had met in Perak.

Yusuf rapidly impressed both Swettenham and Birch with a feeling that he had the best claim by birth to the Sultanate, and that he would probably make the best Sultan. He even offered to go down to Singapore with them to see the Governor. Indeed his approach was so forthright that Swettenham recorded him as saying: 'But I think that by far the best way would be for the English Govt. to take over the whole of Perak for their own, and give the chiefs a certain amount per mensem each.'

Swettenham clearly wanted Yusuf to go to Singapore with Birch. '... I said everything I could think of to try and induce him to come with us.' Birch himself must have been severely tempted. Here after all was the man who by rights, and, apparently ability, should have had the job. But to have supported his cause in Singapore would have been to undermine Clarke, the Governor, who had taken on his own responsibility the resolution of the Perak problem so soon after he had arrived. The Laksamana, who was as hostile as the other Perak chiefs, refused to come up from the boat to see him, and in subsequent discussions with Swettenham confirmed that it was Yusuf's severity and determination which had made him unpopular when he acted as adviser in the days when his father Abdullah was Sultan. Birch did however report these discussions to Clarke, who subsequently commented to Anson in Penang: 'Birch describes (him) as the best Malay he has met, but he is a man of arbitrary and violent temper.'⁸

The following day, 22 April, they continued downstream reaching Ismail's establishment at Blanja at 5:30 p.m. Here they waited for two days: Raja Yusuf joined them on the 24th. At last, on the 25th, they managed to see the elusive Ismail. He confirmed

that he was prepared to give up the regalia, but only personally to Abdullah, as instructed by the Governor. There was no way he could hand it over to Birch, and in any case he did not have it with him, and only proposed to send for it on Abdullah's arrival. The atmosphere was one of prevarication and dissatisfaction. The Mantri, who was also present, alleged, as was indeed the case, that he had been browbeaten into approving the appointment of Abdullah as Sultan at Pangkor. This was embarrassing, for in view of Yusuf's revelations, both Birch and Swettenham were at pains to stress that at Pangkor the Governor had merely endorsed the unanimous wishes of the chiefs to choose Abdullah. In defence, Birch and Swettenham enquired whether Yusuf's name had been mentioned in the Pangkor deliberations. The Mantri was obliged to admit that no such mention had been made. Finally, Ismail, through the Mantri, said that he would on the following morning give his ultimate decision as to who should receive the regalia. The next day the Mantri and Ismail stood fast on their refusal to surrender the regalia to anyone but Abdullah. Moreover they issued instructions that no food was to be sold to Birch's party, and no assistance whatsoever was to be given them.

In an atmosphere of increasing exasperation, Birch drafted a letter for Ismail to address to him, confirming his willingness to give up the regalia. He and Swettenham then had a frosty interview with him. Birch announced that he was not prepared to put up with such treatment any longer, and would go to Kinta to collect the regalia from Ismail as soon as he should appear there. This was decidedly not acceptable to the Mantri and Ismail. Ismail, far from signing, replied with a letter addressed direct to the Governor, explaining that he could not give up the regalia to anyone other than Abdullah. The terms in which it was couched gave offence to Birch, who announced that he would depart for Singapore. Swettenham was left to do the final rounds between Yusuf, Ismail and the Mantri, all of whom exasperated him by their uncooperative behaviour. Indeed Ismail and Yusuf refused to see him. Eventually he and Birch left for Bota. Swettenham recorded in his diary that the only way to deal with the problem was by force.

On their way down the Perak River they met Abdullah with fifty boats and five hundred men. He endorsed their view that Ismail had no intention of handing over the regalia. After stopping a night with the Laksamana at Durian Sebatang and a night at Pangkor for firewood, they reached Penang on 4 May.

Swettenham concluded this part of his diary with the observation that the Laksamana had proved a far better person than he had hoped, and that, according to Speedy, the Perak Malays had taken heart from the British presence and were now flooding into

Larut. The attempt to mask a failure was sustained by both Birch and Clarke; Birch because he desperately wanted the post of Resident, which would not be available unless the country could be said to be at peace, and Clarke because it was important for him to justify his action at Pangkor.

For five weeks Swettenham reverted to his regular job in Penang, in the course of which he was nominated Justice of the Peace, Magistrate and Commissioner of the Court of Requests in Penang. However he had little time to settle into this job, for in June he was sent by Clarke back to Perak to bring Ismail and Yusuf to meet him in Penang. Clarke evidently had not by any means dismissed from his mind Birch's account of the April episode, and his memory of it was jogged by a letter from Ismail early that month, commenting on Birch and Swettenham's April visit.

Swettenham's June trip via Larut, staying with Speedy, to Kuala Kangsar and Blanja, was almost as frustrating as the previous one. Speedy appeared to be getting on well at Larut, and had moved house up the hill. He had staying with him Walter Knaggs of Alma Estate in Province Wellesley, and another European. The usual acrimonious argument broke out with Speedy over British policy towards the Mantri.⁹

On arrival at Kuala Kangsar on 13 June, Che Mida informed Swettenham that she had been told both he and Birch had committed suicide at sea out of frustration from their previous abortive visit to Blanja. Indeed, she was about to make a feast in honour of Swettenham's departed spirit. She fixed him up with a house overnight, which he was obliged to share with Knaggs and a motley collection of local friends and relations of Che Mida, most of whom spent the night smoking opium.

After a further day of frustration, failing to obtain a boat promised by Che Mida, during which Knaggs returned to Larut, Swettenham set off at 7:00 a.m. on 15 June downstream to Senggang with a boat, three men but no paddles. They collected two paddles en route and reached Senggang at noon. Raja Yusuf gave them a warm reception, and Ismail was there. Prospects were looking up, but the resolution was not to be simple. Yusuf was ready to go, but not downriver past Abdullah's house; Ismail was prepared to go, but not for a fortnight, and only if he could go via Larut. Prevarications continued accompanied by a scarcely veiled threat on Yusuf's part to invoke assistance from Siam or a European power if the Governor was not prepared to support his case for becoming Sultan. Swettenham with considerable presence of mind referred him to Low's treaty with Perak of 1826, which forbade Perak to have diplomatic connections with Siam. It became evident over the next four days that Ismail would not come, but Yusuf

would, particularly if he was able to bring with him tin, which, because of Swettenham's presence could be taken downstream through Abdullah's country without any taxes. By the morning of 23 June, the whole party had reached Blanja. A final impassioned appeal by Swettenham to persuade Ismail to come was unsuccessful. Swettenham was of the opinion, perhaps correctly, that Ismail was afraid of trouble with Abdullah downstream. Meantime Yusuf had left overland to meet Swettenham's party at Sungei Dinding, for the same reason that he did not want to risk passing Abdullah's establishment. However he sent his tin ore down the river in the boat with Swettenham.

Swettenham reached Abdullah's palace at Batak Rabbit at 2:00 p.m. on 25 June, and at once went to see the Sultan, who, not unnaturally, was concerned to discover that Yusuf was on his way to see the Governor. Swettenham reassured him, and recorded no reply in his diary to Abdullah's enquiry as to who was to be the first Resident. Swettenham and his party were just preparing to leave when the *Pluto* suddenly appeared, followed by the *Hart*. On board the *Pluto* were Braddell and Dunlop, who had been sent to look for Swettenham on a rumour in Province Wellesley that he had been murdered. The convoy departed as planned, the *Pluto* and the *Hart* back to Penang, leaving Swettenham to spend the night off Pangkor.

The next day he explored up the Dindings River, following both tributaries where the river divides at Kota Siam. The area, he noted, was rich in gutta-percha, and there was much good padi and sugar country, uncultivated for lack of peaceable conditions. Yusuf meanwhile was making a leisurely trip overland to the Bruas River, a few miles further north. It was not till the early hours of 28 June that he and his party reached Swettenham's vessel, where Swettenham was by then ill with a touch of fever. They eventually reached Penang that afternoon.

Unfortunately no detailed records survive of Clarke's discussions, assisted by Swettenham, with Yusuf and his colleagues at Penang. It is not unreasonable to suppose that they were discouraged from seeking outside aid, and asked to support Abdullah, who, however much Swettenham may have argued to the contrary in the previous two months, was Clarke's personal choice, and, as it transpired, a disastrous one. Swettenham merely commented: 'No good resulted from this visit to Penang.' They were accompanied by Toh Nara, one of Yusuf's supporters. Much of the time was spent by Yusuf intriguing with a Province Wellesley Malay who led Yusuf to believe he could get support from Siam for his bid to be recognized as Sultan.¹⁰

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all details in this chapter come from *Sw.J.*
2. Khoo, 1965-1966. 'J.W.W. Birch: a Victorian Moralizer in Perak's Augean Stable.' *JHSUM* 4.
3. *Sw.J.*, p. 53, fn.2.
4. Some of Birch's photographs are reproduced in the *Birch Journals*. He was probably also responsible for the Bandar Bahru photographs. See p. 12
5. *Malay Sketches*: 'A Malay Romance,' pp. 179-91.
6. *Ibid*: 'The Passing of Panglima Prang Semaun,' pp. 112-46.
7. *Birch Journals*, pp.75-6, *Sw.J.*, p.70. Swettenham does not indicate which story he told. However, if there was any truth in the story, which Swettenham recounted later in his life, that he had been saved at the time of Birch's murder by the good offices of a former Malay girl-friend, this could well have been the occasion when they first met.
8. *Sw.J.*, p.72 and Clarke to Anson, 14 May 1874, Clarke Correspondence.
9. Knaggs was at this period in search of investment opportunities in Perak. He turned up to meet Jervois at Taiping on 3 September 1875: *Birch Journals*, p. 319.
10. EPO, CO 273/86:172 and detailed evidence by Swettenham, CO 273/87:129.

Bandar Temasha

We touched briefly in Chapter 2 on affairs in Selangor, including Swettenham's first visit there with Davidson. It is now necessary to consider conditions in that state in greater detail, since Swettenham's first major posting was to be there, and Selangor together with the adjacent states to the south were to be an important focus of Sir Andrew Clarke's activities in the months immediately after the Pangkor Engagement.

Selangor was ruled by a family of Bugis descent, a seafaring group with a strong tradition of piracy. The Sultan of Selangor was Abdul Samad, a shrewd and cynical old man in his sixties, who, earlier in his life had made a formidable reputation for himself as a warrior, and claimed to have killed 99 men with his own kris.¹ But the Sultan assured W.W. Skeat, when District Officer, Kuala Langat in 1895, that this 'was not the case.' He merely had a state keris of execution which 'since it was first used' had killed 99 men.² It is a minor point but it shows that some entries in Swettenham's Journal are unreliable local gossip accepted by Swettenham without proper enquiry. It has a bearing on Swettenham's 'discovery' of the truth about the Kuala Langat piracy.³

Sultan Abdul Samad was to live to the ripe age of 94, and now, early in his old age had acquired a reputation of caring little for the affairs of state, being content with his opium (*'opium cum dignitate'* in Swettenham's words) and his gardening.⁴ But this image, described by Braddell as that of 'a careless heathen philosopher' concealed one of the most astute of the Peninsula's sultans. Over the years up to 1853, the Selangor Sultans had not found tin in the Klang River valley. When Raja Sulaiman, the heir to Sultan Mohamed died in 1852 having failed to find any tin, in spite of a substantial loan from Malacca Chinese, the Sultan appointed Raja Abdullah, the son of the Ruler of Lukut, with mining experience, to hold the post of Chief of Klang in 1853, and he rapidly opened up tin mines and became wealthy. Sultan Mohamed himself died in 1858, and was succeeded by Abdul Samad. Raja Mahdi, the son of the late Raja Sulaiman, eyed Raja Abdullah's

success with bitter jealousy and in 1866 began to attack Raja Abdullah, and then to take part in the opposition to Tunku Kudin, the Sultan's son-in-law and Viceroy. Abdullah operated from a *gedong* (godown), now known as Gedong Raja Abdullah, on the bank of the river at Klang, while Raja Mahdi built a large earth fort on high ground overlooking Raja Abdullah's *gedong* and used the fort as his headquarters for a number of years.⁵

Thus by the mid-1860s, Sultan Abdul Samad's position was greatly complicated by the warlike activities of his princely relations, notably Raja Mahmood and Raja Mahdi, each of whom felt they were entitled to some share from the proceeds of the tin ore mined in Selangor by the Chinese. By 1867 a civil war had broken out. It gave rise to one of Abdul Samad's famous comments about the participants: 'They are both young men. Let them fight it out.' The war was to last till 1873, when the British began to get involved. When the participants appealed to Abdul Samad for support, generally in the form of gunpowder, he always signified his approval, and gave out gifts with strict impartiality. This enabled all concerned to claim that they were acting with the Sultan's sanction. Swettenham one day asked him why he behaved thus: 'His Highness explained with a smile, that when people came and bothered him with long statements, to save discussion and get rid of them quickly he said "Benar, benar," which means "Right, right," but he added, "I mean right from their point of view, not mine."' 'The voice was less one of irresponsibility than impotence. Abdul Samad could not afford to favour one side at the expense of the other, for fear he be deposed by a victorious side which he had not supported. He was to follow this policy with considerable success with Swettenham, and other representatives of the British government.'⁶

By the end of 1874, Swettenham had summed him up accurately in a letter to Clarke in which he said that the Sultan 'rather encouraged the somewhat prevalent idea that he was slightly imbecile and quite incapacitated for ruling, for by this means he saved himself all the trouble of keeping order in a most troublesome and unruly people and the consequence was that every man took the law into his own hands and meted out such justice as seemed to him fit and was in his power to enforce.'⁷

Tin in Selangor had originally been mined at Lukut, on the river of that name in the south of the state in the first half of the nineteenth century. Subsequently production had increased under Yap Ah Loy on the site of what is now Kuala Lumpur. To the south of Selangor, there was also tin in Sungei Ujong, an equally troubled state. Sultan Abdul Samad had some years earlier moved to Langat from Klang, the traditional seat of power, to avoid being embroiled

in royal squabbles. From the British point of view Langat, with the Sultan in residence, was an important and strategic point from which to cover the flank of Sungei Ujong, as well as to exert pressure directly on Selangor. By appointing his son-in-law, Tunku Kudin, as his Viceroy, Abdul Samad succeeded in uniting the remaining warring factions in the state against this upstart foreigner, and gave additional impetus to the war which had started in 1867.

Details of the squabbles and intrigues up to 1874 need not concern us, except perhaps to note that Tunku Kudin, by blockading the Klang River, had forced Raja Mahdi to retreat to Kuala Selangor. However as soon as Clarke returned from Pangkor, he was informed that in addition to reports of piracy along the Selangor coast at the mouth of the Jugra River which he had received in November 1873, there had been an attack by pirates on the Cape Rachado lighthouse, just south of Selangor. This attack had been repulsed by the lighthouse keeper. The prime suspects were Raja Mahmood of Langat, Raja Bot of Lukut and Tunku Allang. Raja Mahmood was the son of Tunku Panglima Raja, a close supporter of the Sultan. He had supported Raja Mahdi, a distant cousin of Sultan Abdul Samad during the civil war in Selangor, and gained an awesome reputation throughout the Peninsula as a fighting man. His character fascinated Swettenham, with whom he later became firm friends. Raja Bot was a nephew of the Sultan, and Tunku Allang, also known as Tunku or Raja Yaacob, was the Sultan's youngest and favourite son. They were the same people as had been suspected of instigating the piracy in November 1873.⁸

The moment coincided with a strong naval presence in the area in the form of Vice-Admiral Shadwell and five vessels of the China fleet. Clarke therefore wrote to Shadwell officially on 1 February 1874 requesting his assistance to resolve the Selangor piracy problem. Suspects were later arrested in Malacca in respect of the November incident, and it was proposed to try them there.⁹

Clarke however modified this plan, which, in its revised form, was to deal with the Sultan direct, under the protection of the China fleet. The aim was to support Tunku Kudin in his position against the other rivals for power. This was a popular move in Singapore, for those British merchants who were engaged in trade with Selangor were almost invariably involved with Tunku Kudin. Both Davidson and Read were heavily involved in this way. The Sultan was suitably overawed by a visit from Clarke, amply supported by the navy on 9 February. Once it had been established publicly that Tunku Kudin was the Viceroy, but with no claim on eventual succession to the Sultanate, it remained only to show as publicly as possible that he had the full support of both the Sultan and the Governor. The trial of the pirates provided an excellent opportunity

to demonstrate this. The Sultan was encouraged to appoint Tunku Kudin and three others to head the trial, which, despite his reluctance, was to be in his name, while two officials from Clarke's entourage at Singapore, Braddell and McNair, were appointed as observers only, with strict instructions to 'avoid taking an active part in the trial itself'. Clarke then rubbed salt in the wound by writing to Abdul Samad that he had just heard allegations that the Sultan's son, Raja Yaacob, was also involved, and requested the Sultan to put him on trial. Davidson undertook the examination of the witnesses. On the basis of the evidence of one survivor of the piratical attack, a youth who had dived overboard and hung onto the anchor-chains, all the accused were found guilty: as events turned out, a grave miscarriage of justice. Seven were sentenced to death, and the eighth reprieved on account of his youth. The executions took place on 16 February at the mouth of the Jugra River, by the Malay method which involved the use of a kris. In a macabre twist, the Sultan, who clearly knew what had happened, presented the kris to Clarke. The Sultans' relations, who were alleged to have been the instigators, were let off with a severe reprimand by the British Commissioners, Braddell and McNair.

Towards the end of his stay in Langat, Swettenham's contacts in the community were such that he was able to conclude that all those thus executed were innocent. He quoted the names of seven who were actually guilty, four of them still living in Langat. It was evident that the conviction was obtained on the perjured evidence of the sole survivor. More surprising was the fact, that even though they were unfamiliar with British law, it apparently occurred to none of the suspects to establish an alibi. Swettenham himself was clearly uneasy about the episode, for he appears not to have made public his knowledge of such a gross miscarriage of justice until 1900, when his short story, 'A Silver Point' was published. In hiding his discovery from his superior, it is arguable that Swettenham was failing in his duty. Davidson was still Resident at Klang by the time Swettenham discovered the truth. Surely Swettenham owed it to Davidson to give him the opportunity of questioning Swettenham's informants? They were perhaps unwilling to submit to cross-questioning by an experienced lawyer. Moreover Swettenham probably did not wish to risk humiliation to himself if Davidson's cross-examination demolished a story which Swettenham had accepted. Swettenham no doubt concluded that it was too embarrassing for all parties to reopen the issue, at least till well after Davidson's death in 1891. By then of course the incident was so remote that it made a good story.¹⁰

Events in Selangor were closely interlinked with unrest in the immediate south, in what is now Negri Sembilan. The state of most

interest to the British, because of its substantial tin production, was Sungei Ujong, claimed by both the Dato Klana, supported by the British, and the octogenarian Dato Bandar, a man of considerable local importance. The grant by the Dato Klana of a mining concession to a Dutch-Eurasian from Malacca provoked considerable interest in the mines, to which many Chinese flocked from the disturbed areas near Klang. But among the many people who claimed a share in the proceeds from the mines was Tunku Kudin of Selangor, on the grounds that the Selangor-Sungei Ujong boundary had never been clearly defined. In neighbouring Rembau, the succession was disputed between two individuals supported respectively by Tunku Kudin and the Dato Klana. There was a lull in activities on Clarke's arrival, and it was only after his gunboat diplomacy in Selangor that he could turn his attention further south. Similar tactics were used, involving the destruction of the Dato Bandar's stockades by Clarke on the *Pluto*, accompanied by the Dato Klana. This show of force did not prevent a further case of piracy at Kuala Labu, twenty five miles up the Langat River in July. This was alleged to have been instigated by Raja Mahmood in collaboration with the Dato Bandar's son.

At the end of July, and in early August therefore Clarke visited Klang and Langat, where he conferred with the Sultan and Tunku Kudin. At the same time it transpired that Raja Mahdi was also preparing to attack Klang and Kuala Selangor, and had three boats waiting for his use at Langat. One was handed over to Tunku Kudin on this occasion: the other two were to provide a minor source of aggravation and worry for several months. As a result of this, on 2 August the Sultan approved a joint operation against Raja Mahmood and his allies, to be led by Tunku Kudin and the Dato Klana.

By now it must have been evident to Clarke that supervision of Sultan Abdul Samad was a prerequisite if any form of control was to be established in Selangor or the small fractious states to the south. For this purpose therefore Swettenham was directed to take up residence in Langat, and by his presence prevent Raja Mahdi and Raja Mahmood from obtaining any support from that quarter. Swettenham's role was to counteract the influence of the 'circle of turbulent chiefs' surrounding the Sultan.¹¹ The job clearly suited Swettenham: an energetic and enquiring young man, with a liking for the Malays. Nor were there any onerous administrative duties: he was required simply to be there, to listen, to advise, find out what he could about the country, and report back.

Swettenham arrived in Malacca from Singapore on 14 August 1874, meeting there the Lieutenant-Governor, Captain Shaw, who had that morning returned from the Linggi River on the *Pluto*,

bringing with him the Dato Klana and Tunku Kudin. The plan was for these two to make a combined attack on Raja Mahmood and Raja Mahdi the following Friday, with one man-of-war guarding the Sepang River, while another was to take Captain Shaw, Captain Smith and Swettenham to Langat to deliberate with the Sultan and at the same time prevent anyone escaping from Langat. They wished also to encourage the Sultan to detain Raja Mahdi's boats at Langat and encourage Raja Mahdi to go to Singapore. After various delays and changes of plan they reached the Klang Straits on the morning of the 17th. Tunku Kudin was there, with Davidson, acting on this occasion as Kudin's adviser. Further discussions of plans took place on the 18th, and after a wet night they reached Kuala Langat the next morning, a fleet of three vessels: the *Pluto*, the *Mata Mata* and the *Hart*. It was then established that in addition to Sultan Abdul Samad, Raja Mahdi and Raja Yaacob were also in the Jugra area.

At noon Swettenham and J.J. Peachey, Chief Clerk in the Treasury Office, Malacca, left in the *Mata Mata* for Bukit Jugra, to attempt to find the Sultan, hand him the Governor's letter, and talk to him about the possibility of Swettenham living there. On arrival at Bukit Jugra, Swettenham was met by Raja Kahar, another son of the Sultan, who supplied him with a guide to take him to the palace. On arrival, they waited till the Sultan awoke, and then had a satisfactory interview with him, although he proved somewhat evasive over the question of Raja Mahdi's boats. He did however say he had encouraged Raja Mahdi to go to Singapore. On the more delicate question of having Swettenham himself in permanent residence at Langat, both the Sultan and Raja Yaacob expressed themselves delighted by the idea. Swettenham in his diary laid heavy stress on this point, claiming he repeatedly asked the Sultan whether he was agreeable to such an arrangement.¹²

At the same time it was made quite clear that Swettenham's main job would be to prevent any further cases of piracy on the coast. This message was conveyed in an implicit threat issued by Swettenham in the course of his interviews with the Sultan on 19 August. The matter was laughed off:

If any piracy were committed by men coming from Langat, whether his people or not, he would be held responsible, indeed as long as he gave countenance and harbour to pirates there might be a suspicion of himself being implicated. At this Tunku Jacob said, 'Quite true, Quite true, why they even wanted to make me out a pirate,' and he and his men laughed heartily at the very idea of their Rajah being suspected of such an infamous crime! I am inclined to think that the Jugra trial and execution have had a very salutary

effect on this gentleman and that he has determined to turn over a new leaf.

Swettenham's final sentence probably assessed the position correctly.¹³

Given the Sultan's earlier lackadaisical and relaxed approach to such problems, the alacrity with which he accepted Swettenham's proposals is remarkable. We have independent corroboration from the Sultan himself that he was pleased with Swettenham's tact and ability. It can only be assumed that the Sultan, who had doubtless kept a sharp eye on events in Perak and Sungei Ujong, had come to the conclusion that he had more than met his match with the British gunboats. His acceptance of Swettenham as the emissary of Clarke can therefore be seen as an astute and timely recognition that the swashbuckling days of piracy up and down the Selangor coast were numbered: if his own position was not to be threatened, he had best move with the times and accept the inevitable.¹⁴

For the moment Swettenham slept on board the *Pluto* each night, despite the mosquitoes, while a stockade by the river was being prepared for him. The site was not propitious, consisting 'merely of a thick log wall with embrasures for guns and a roof, one end being entirely open.' It was surrounded by a ditch full of water, the roof was of palm leaves, and leaked, while the floor was of earth, which was all but covered with water every time the tide came in. The only place where one could sleep was on the top of the log-walls, and that presupposed no rain at night. Needless to say, the mosquitoes were appalling.¹⁵ It seems likely that the house was the same as that which Emily Innes occupied from 1876 until she moved to Jugra. She described it as 'an ordinary Malay wigwam,' and gave a picture of it on the frontispiece of her book.¹⁶

Swettenham vividly described Bandar Temasha, or City of Festivals, as it was euphemistically called, as follows:

Outside, the prospect was singularly unlovely; a few score of blighted coco-nut palms, with broken and drooping fronds, like the plumes of a hearse returning from a disorderly wake; some particularly disreputable and tumble-down huts; the dark-brown waters of two deep and eddying streams; and all the rest mud and rank brush-wood. When the tide went down, and the sun drew a pestilential vapour from the drying ooze, horrible, loathsome crocodiles crawled up the slimy banks to bask in the noisome heat. And every day great pieces of these banks, undermined by the violent onslaughts of the tide, fell helplessly into the stream, dragging in their fall some over-tired palm, some misshapen jungle tree, to lie with its head in the swirling water, its roots, torn from the ground,

standing ragged and unnatural against a background of grey sky.¹⁷

The first few days were spent settling in to this insalubrious spot, together with the twenty Malay policemen accompanying Swettenham from Malacca. However there was a major alarm on 21 August, when it was rumoured that Raja Mahdi and Raja Mahmood were still in the area, and waiting to attack, being looked after, some two or three miles away by Sultan Abdul Samad's former chief fighting man, Tunku Panglima Raja, Raja Mahmood's father. This contradicted assurances which Swettenham had been given only two or three days earlier that Raja Mahdi at least was on his way overland to Singapore. Swettenham immediately sought an audience with the Sultan, who tried to reassure him that the two brigands were not in the area. Indeed it turned out in the end that they were not. Swettenham however was not entirely convinced, as his diary entries show. Nor were his police detachment, who had been sent at minimal notice from Malacca without adequate food or supplies. On the evening of 21 August the police begged to be allowed to come on board the *Hart* for safety. Swettenham himself had to interrupt his dinner on the *Hart* to go with Lieutenant Forbes and talk to them. He returned believing that one of the problems was the sergeant-in-charge, who, if not at that moment drunk, certainly had been earlier in the evening. The police agreed to stay, albeit reluctantly.¹⁸

At 1:00 a.m. on the following morning there was an alarm from the police, who claimed that unknown armed parties had passed the door of the stockade and taunted the police, before proceeding by boat upriver into the night. When the morning came they paid for their cowardly behaviour of the night before with a tongue lashing from Swettenham. The rest of the day was spent mounting a search party, with the Sultan's assistance, for Raja Mahmood. This involved going up the Jelutong River, a subsidiary of the Jugra. Although they eventually found a palatial Malay house, which was believed to belong to Mahmood's father, Tengku Panglima Raja, the only inhabitant that could be found was 'one wretched looking Malay' who tried to maintain that the house was his.¹⁹ Meantime it had been agreed that Raja Mahdi's second boat should be removed and after some difficulty in launching the vessel, she was made fast to the *Hart*, which departed on 23 August for Klang.

At this stage Swettenham was left on his own, in very unfamiliar territory. His own accounts of this period suggest that the captains of the various pirate ships of the area were aware that he had earlier in the year made a name for himself in Perak as a young man with considerable powers of persuasion and, when he chose to

exercise it, charm. Swettenham spent his time improving the conditions in and around the stockade, and making the acquaintance of the senior Malays at Langat. Several of these he wrote about in his collections of short stories.²⁰

The Sultan remained solicitous for his young Resident's well-being, sending supplies, and, on the first occasion \$100. Although Swettenham accepted the supplies, he returned the \$100, explaining that under his government service agreement he was unable to accept this. The Sultan then indicated that he would be happy to pay all the expenses of Swettenham and his police contingent, and it was agreed that this offer would be referred to the Governor.

There remained however considerable uncertainty as to the whereabouts of Raja Mahdi and Raja Mahmood. On the evening of 28 August Davidson reappeared by boat from Sepang, hoping to meet Raja Mahmood the next day. The meeting did not materialize, but a contingent from Malacca, including the Lieutenant-Governor, Shaw and Pickering, did appear to deal with the Malacca police whose cowardice had so exasperated Swettenham a few days earlier. It was agreed to have them replaced with Singapore police. Meantime the *Hart* had returned from Klang with Captain Royse, ready if necessary to start a search for the trouble-makers up the Jugra River. The Sultan admitted to Swettenham that back in 1867, he had given written permission to Raja Mahdi to govern Klang. This of course had long been forgotten by all but the Sultan and Mahdi, and the British officials, most of whom had subsequently sided with Tunku Kudin. The Sultan also repeatedly denied allegations that he had been in touch with the dissidents.

By the end of August, and despite the vain attempts to track down Mahdi and Mahmood, Swettenham decided that the time had come to go to Singapore, and report on the position to the Governor. He departed on the *Mata Mata* taking for the Governor, from the Sultan, a letter and pair of elephant tusks. He personally promised the Sultan to purchase for him in Singapore various items not available in the City of Festivals.

The full text of the Sultan's letter to Clarke does not survive, but it seems almost certain that this was the letter of which the following much-quoted excerpt was part:

We are very much obliged to our Friend [Clarke] for the officer whom our Friend has chosen. He is very clever; he is also very clever in the customs of Malay government, and he is very clever in gaining the hearts of Rajahs and sons of Rajahs with soft words, delicate and sweet, so that all men rejoice in him as in the perfume of an opened flower.²¹

Even making allowance for the flowery language which in the Malay context of the time would have been considered suitable for such a

letter, this was indeed high praise from a 'careless heathen philosopher.'

Swettenham arrived in Singapore on or around 3 September, and left on 11th by the *Abyssinia* with a clutch of government officials, including Cousins, who had failed to discover the Penang defalcation, Irving, the Assistant Colonial Secretary and W.E. Maxwell, son of the peppery Sir Peter Benson Maxwell, former Chief Justice. This is the first recorded occasion when Swettenham and Maxwell met, though they must previously have seen something of each other in Singapore. A bitter rivalry was to develop between them in the future. Swettenham on this occasion clearly laid plans for a longish stay, and brought with him a certain amount of furniture, part of which was mislaid in Malacca.²²

At 2:00 a.m. in pouring rain they managed to spot Bukit Jugra in a flash of lightning, and the small lighter which the *Abyssinia* was towing was cast off with Swettenham and the police on board. In the excitement he forgot to reclaim \$499 cash from the steward, to whom it had been entrusted for safekeeping. Although they had a compass in the boat there was no light, so they spent an unpleasant five hours before daylight uncertain which way they were going. Eventually they reached the stockade at 8:00 a.m., and found all was well.

The next fortnight was taken up with settling in at Langat, and a visit of almost a week to Klang, in the company of Maxwell, partly to retrieve the lost \$499. In the event they found Tunku Kudin there, together with his assistant, Syed Zin. This gave Swettenham a welcome chance of spending the best part of day with him, discussing Selangor affairs, and a further day fishing with him in the Klang Straits. By 20 September Swettenham was on sufficiently familiar terms with Tunku Kudin that he drafted a letter for eventual signature by the Sultan, and discussed it with Kudin. Swettenham in his diary does not make clear the contents, but evidently it was the one eventually signed by the Sultan on 2 October undertaking to pay \$1,000 per month for Swettenham's upkeep, and giving Swettenham authority to collect taxes in the State. The Sultan went on to state that at the end of the fasting month he proposed to travel round the state with Swettenham to review the conditions in the various districts. It seems likely that at the same time Swettenham discussed with Tunku Kudin the text of a proclamation by the Sultan declaring his wish to open the State of Selangor for trade, and affirming his willingness to make land grants to encourage this. The Sultan also informed the Governor in the same letter: 'As regards my friend's officer, Mr Swettenham, I have already informed my friend, I am now making a house for him in order that he may live with me in comfort.' The Colonial Office

regarded this with considerable satisfaction. Cox minuted that this was 'the first intimation of the Sultan's wish for a British Resident, tho' we have been looking upon it as a matter of course.'²³

Swettenham was rapidly getting the measure of Selangor affairs. At the same time he reviewed the financial position of Klang, finding that debts totalling \$300,000 were owed, over \$100,000 to two Chinese businessmen in Malacca, and a further \$78,400 to J.G. Davidson. He assessed the administrative costs at \$3,000 per month, with a revenue of \$10,000 per month, which he felt could be trebled with five years of peace and prosperity.²⁴

He returned to Langat on 23 September and had a long interview with the Sultan on the 24th, in the course of which the Sultan approved the various drafts shown previously to Tunku Kudin in Klang. Swettenham was sensitive and discreet in his treatment of the old man, for he brought with him a further letter from the Governor. The Sultan was reluctant to open it at once, and Swettenham, realizing this was because the Sultan could not read, tactfully made no attempt to urge him to open it and cause embarrassment amongst the large group assembled.

A further fortnight in Langat produced tentative and indirect contacts with Tunku Panglima Raja. Although nothing materialized from these contacts, they focused Swettenham's attention on this chief, who had previously been Sultan Abdul Samad's right-hand warrior. He claimed to have killed some forty men, while his son Raja Mahmood claimed to have killed twenty. At the same time it became apparent that the Datuk Dagang, the senior foreign trader in Langat, was attempting through his clerk to undermine Swettenham's authority with the Sultan.²⁵ This induced Swettenham to bring some pressure on the Sultan to sign the proclamations which he had discussed with Tunku Kudin in Klang the previous week. However the Datuk Dagang's influence was seen when the Sultan hesitated before signing a proclamation which apparently restricted the Dato Dagang's rights to collect customs duties. But the other proclamations, which, according to Swettenham, were signed more or less willingly, once the Sultan's advisers had left, were forwarded by Tunku Kudin's boat to Singapore via Malacca.²⁶

Since nothing had yet materialized from indirect attempts to persuade Tunku Panglima Raja to negotiate, Swettenham left on 6 October by boat to go up to Labu and Sungei Ujong. This exercise was aimed to liaise with other British personnel, for though Swettenham's presence in Langat seemed to have quietened down affairs in that area, the removal of Raja Mahmood and Raja Mahdi across the Selangor border into Sungei Ujong had led to renewed dissension, with the aged Dato Bandar renouncing in effect with the support of the two refugee warriors, his earlier decision to accept the

control of the Dato Klana. The Dato Klana therefore appealed to Clarke in Singapore. Swettenham's instructions came in an undated letter from Birch, the Colonial Secretary in Singapore.²⁷

As a result of this, Clarke in early October sent to Sungei Ujong Pickering with the Acting Superintendent of Police at Malacca, one Mr Hayward, and a group of Malay police, to support the position of the Dato Klana against the Dato Bandar. When Pickering reported back to Singapore, Clarke appeared to be nervous about the possibility of provoking a further row over yet another royal ruler's claim to the throne. Swettenham, on the job at Langat and with the Sultan's ear, was the obvious man to assist. The journey was tedious up the Labu River, overhung with rattans, and with trunks fallen across the narrow stream. It took them two days to reach Labu, twenty-four miles from the coast. They were unable to buy any provisions there, which increased the hardship.

They were however joined by Sheikh Mohamed Ali, described by Swettenham as an 'ancient warrior,' a son-in-law of the Dato Bandar of Sungei Ujong, and a supporter of Tunku Kudin. As a result of news from him that a detachment of Europeans was at Ampangan, Swettenham decided to set off with Tunku Sulong and the Dato Bandar of Langat heading first for Kapayang, the residence of the Dato Bandar of Sungei Ujong. After a rough journey, they arrived to find the Dato Bandar had left for Seremban, and food was only with difficulty obtained before they pressed on to Ampangan.²⁸

En route they met the Dato Bandar of Sungei Ujong, being carried in a chair because of his age, surrounded by armed followers. He was in an excited state, and asked Swettenham what he thought he was doing in the area, and by what right the Dato Klana was talking of hoisting the British flag in Sungei Ujong without the Dato Bandar's consent. 'What,' said the old chief, 'Another European, you travel about my country as if it were your own.' The Dato Bandar was most incensed that the Dato Klana was acting without consulting him, and urgently requested Swettenham to visit him on his way back from Ampangan the next day. To this Swettenham agreed.²⁹ Swettenham's party reached Ampangan, some twenty-two miles from Labu at 8:00 p.m. exhausted, but relieved to find that Pickering's party was there. They talked till 2:00 a.m., Swettenham telling Pickering full details of his meeting with the Dato Bandar.³⁰

On the 11 October, Swettenham witnessed the raising of the British flag by the Dato Klana, and then walked on to Rasa to see the Dato Bandar of Langat and the Dato Dagang of Sungei Ujong. He returned exhausted to Ampangan at 5:30 p.m. to find an irate Dato Bandar of Sungei Ujong, and spent the night, the first of Puasa, in Sheikh Mohamed Ali's house. This involved a substantial

meal at 2:00 a.m. the next morning, as Muslims are prohibited during Puasa from eating in daylight hours.

The Dato Bandar eventually agreed to see Swettenham, alone, a little after 9:00 a.m., for an interview which lasted two hours. He complained at length about the Dato Klana's behaviour in never consulting him, and about Pickering's lack of Malay, which had impeded their conversation together four days earlier. However to Swettenham's approval, he did agree to give the necessary letter to the Governor in Singapore, which explained the joint responsibilities of the two territorial chiefs for the government of Sungei Ujong.³¹ With some difficulty Swettenham and his party got away at 11:00 a.m. "The last thing he [the Datuk Bandar] said was, "Does the Sultan of Selangor like you?" I said, "Oh yes, he is very fond of me" and he said "so am I." It was a harrowing walk to Labu through the jungle, with the fat, old Datuk Bandar of Langat waddling in an hour later.³²

The rest of the return journey was uneventful, and the party reached the Langat stockade just after 11:00 a.m. on 14 October. Over the next few days Swettenham recovered from the forced marches and lack of food to which he was subjected in Sungei Ujong. Sheikh Mohamed Ali, with whom he had stayed at Rasa passed through, reporting that all was quiet in Sungei Ujong, and Swettenham promised to send silk cloth to his wife for her hospitality. The calm was short-lived, for on 22 October news arrived from Rasa that the Dato Klana had rifled the Dato Bandar's house. The Dato Bandar had complained to Pickering, dispatched through him a letter of complaint to the Governor, and appointed Sheikh Mohamed Ali to settle the matter.

The wet weather and discomfort at Langat continued: the tide came within inches of the floor of the stockade, crabs ran everywhere and the roof was full of snakes. Towards the end of October Swettenham sent his cook to Penang to collect his things, and the prospect of looking after himself was not attractive: 'I don't find it very pleasant living in this free and easy way with my Sergt. and the Engineer of the launch, as they talk to each other as though I were at the other end of the world (I say this advisedly for I think it must be one end) and their conversations are neither elevating, entertaining nor instructive, and usually seasoned with the cup which does inebriate.'³³

At the end of October Swettenham made a further brief visit to Klang by a broken-down launch. The trip took almost twelve hours. On arrival Swettenham spent most of his time with Tunku Kudin, discussing the affairs of Sungei Ujong and Langat, an abortive shooting expedition, and further consideration of Klang finances and land tenure. All land was given out on 99-year leases.

There was additional trouble over the disposal of gutta-percha, to Guthrie & Co. in Singapore at a fixed rate. They owed their monopoly to Davidson's interest in the company. This represented Tunku Kudin and Yap Ah Loy's reward to Davidson for his financial support for them in earlier years and well illustrates the confusion of public and private interests which were so notable a feature of life at that time.³⁴ 2 November saw the issue of a proclamation above Braddell's signature as Acting Colonial Secretary officially confirming Queen Victoria's approval of the Pangkor Engagement.³⁵

Swettenham returned to Langat on 6 November, and on the 8th eventually met Tunku Panglima Raja. The Tunku impressed Swettenham as the most handsome man he had seen in the district: an opinion to be modified a month later in favour of Raja Mahmood, his son.³⁶ The Tunku expressed himself anxious to make peace. 'It is,' he said, 'useless now to attempt to make further disturbances, you being here and the Sultan forbidding and discountenancing it.' Swettenham heartily agreed and urged him to bring his people, including Raja Mahmood to Langat as soon as possible.³⁷

Discussions with the Sultan on Sungei Ujong affairs indicated that the old man not surprisingly preferred the Dato Bandar to the Dato Klana. Swettenham clearly lost no time in urging an element of planning in Langat, with good effect, for the Sultan was on several occasions personally observed holding a piece of string to ensure that new houses were built in reasonable alignment with the road. 'This has put the population into a great state of mind as the oldest man amongst them never heard of such things being done in Langat.'³⁸

Just before Hari Raya, the end of the fasting month and Muslim New Year, Swettenham's cook returned with his possessions from Penang, but unfortunately his house was still not ready, and his effects got wet from the leaks in the roof. New Year was celebrated at the height of the wet season, and provided an opportunity for Tunku Panglima Raja to pay another visit on Swettenham, asking for the chance to be allowed to live in quiet retirement somewhere. Swettenham promised to assist, and urged that he should bring all his family as well. They found common ground in their love of hunting, and the older man made Swettenham's mouth water with accounts of big game in the interior of the Peninsula. Swettenham could scarcely have known that at this time Raja Mahmood and the Dato Bandar of Sungei Ujong were busy fighting Dunlop there.

A day or two later Swettenham was asked to go to Klang again to help Tunku Kudin with various administrative problems.

The old sultan readily agreed to this, giving him every encouragement to put the administration of Klang on a sound footing. Arriving at Klang at 1:00 a.m. on 20 November, it transpired that the problems were the incompetence of a European bookkeeper, appointed by Davidson, and disaffection by various of the Selangor chiefs towards Tunku Kudin. Kudin was anxious to identify with his British protectors, and requested that the British flag might be allowed to fly alongside his. At the same time they met and discussed Klang's financial problems with Lim Tek Hee, to whom the Klang administration owed \$200,000, making him its largest single creditor. Both Kudin and Swettenham wished to bring him into the administration, shrewdly realizing that it was in Lim's own best interests to see that the government worked efficiently. Accounts were drawn up for the previous seven months, the net revenues fluctuating from \$1,633 to \$7,416, and rules were drafted covering the import and export of goods from Klang. Swettenham was establishing, almost single-handed with Kudin the elements of a government system of bookkeeping. This was combined with the astute appointment of two local chiefs to be magistrates, authorized to try, jointly or severally all cases except murder and robbery with violence.

Although we have little in the way of independent confirmation of this work, Swettenham apparently acted with considerable drive, energy and tact in his dealings with the rudimentary Klang bureaucracy. Here he gave early promise of that expertise in financial administration which was to play such an important part in his later career, both as colonial servant, and on rubber company boards.³⁹

Meantime news of fighting between the Dato Klana, supported by Dunlop and Pickering, and the Dato Bandar, supported by Raja Mahmood had reached Klang. Swettenham was anxious to return to Langat. There were further problems arising from a disagreement between Tunku Kudin, and his sponsor Davidson. Swettenham mentioned no details, but wrote of 'a serious misunderstanding' between them. It may well have had to do with Kudin's inability to pay interest on monies loaned by Davidson. It must have been public knowledge, and must have cast doubts in Clarke's mind as to Davidson's suitability as Resident in Klang. Tunku Kudin returned with Swettenham, to collect his wife, Raja Arfah, Sultan Abdul Samad's daughter from Langat. This was only the second visit that Tunku Kudin had paid to his father-in-law for some years, for his marriage to Raja Arfah was not a happy one. Moreover his position as an outsider from Kedah, albeit appointed by the Sultan as Viceroy, put him in an embarrassing position with the Sultan's blood relations at Langat. He had returned at the time of Clarke's

visit in February 1874, but on disembarking to go to the istana, he took a loaded revolver with him as a precaution.⁴⁰ That he was able to return on this occasion says much for Swettenham's diplomacy. Swettenham lost no time in pointing this achievement out to his superiors in Singapore.⁴¹

Arriving at Langat on 26 November, Swettenham found waiting for him a letter appealing for assistance from Pickering, who, at the time it was written, was besieged in the Dato Klana's house by Raja Mahmood, the Dato Bandar and his men. The Dato Klana's men had fled, leaving Pickering, the Dato Klana, Pickering's police posse and some Arabs to face the opposition. Tunku Kudin was at once sent back to Klang to recruit some Chinese to go overland to assist, while Swettenham hastened on to Langat for an audience with the Sultan. He had just got the Sultan's approval to assist the Dato Klana when two of the Governor's aides appeared to say that the Governor was waiting beyond the stockade in the *Mata Mata*, expecting to see the Sultan. Clarke, in a letter to his wife indicated that the object of the trip was not only to visit the Sultan, but to 'see if Swettenham was safe.'⁴²

The Governor's interview with the Sultan proved satisfactory, and the Sultan took to heart Clarke's warning to him not to shelter any dissidents who might flee over the border from Sungei Ujong. The gist of Clarke's discussion was conveyed to two of the Sultan's sons, and Tunku Panglima Raja, who was also present. The latter was told that if Raja Mahmood could be persuaded to give himself up, he would not suffer any harm. The mechanics of the surrender of Raja Mahmood were left to Swettenham, who issued a letter in English, to be carried by a plainclothes constable accompanying the messengers, requesting free conduct. The Governor departed that evening.

Two days later, on 29 November, Sheikh Mohamed Ali appeared, carrying a piece of blank paper bearing on it only the Dato Bandar's stamp. It signified that the bearer was free to make whatever arrangements he saw fit, in the Dato Bandar's name. Sheikh Mohamed Ali begged to be allowed to see the Governor. By dint of rowing the best part of thirty-six hours, he, Swettenham and their parties eventually reached Lukut, finding the Governor on board the *Charybdis* out at sea. Swettenham explained the position to a startled Clarke, learning that he had just missed the Dato Bandar's eldest son, Che Karri, who was also seeking peace.

Sheikh Mohamed Ali was allowed to sign in his father-in-law's name terms which Captain Dunlop, by then in charge of the British forces in Sungei Ujong, had been authorized to agree to, if he saw fit. The terms were stiff. The Dato Bandar and his supporters were to surrender unconditionally, accept the Dato Klana

as sole ruler of Sungei Ujong and reimburse the British government for all expenses in connection with the recent troubles. In exchange the Dato Bandar was to receive little more than the Governor's favourable consideration to his claims and grievances, and to his request to be given an honourable position in Sungei Ujong.

The next day Swettenham set off at 4:00 a.m. for Ampangan, initially by boat up the Lukut River and then on foot. Around 1:00 p.m., when they were within five miles of Ampangan they met a police posse with news that the Dato Bandar and Raja Mahmood had fled, leaving Kapayang, which had been burnt by the troops and looted by Chinese miners, cut off from their supplies. On the return trip Swettenham recorded a hand to hand struggle with a python in a stream. Swettenham was alone with his orderly, and it took 'nearly an hour's struggle' to secure the snake. The orderly was of little help, but the boatmen, presumably alarmed by the noise came back to assist.⁴³

On reaching the *Charybdis* late that night, Swettenham heard the full story of events: Dunlop had given Che Karri twenty-four hours to produce his father, the Dato Bandar, under threat of destroying Kapayang. Although Che Karri reported that his father had fled, Dunlop still desisted from attacking, and this pause in operations had provided an ideal opportunity for the Chinese to loot the village, removing amongst other things, 400 *bahra* of tin, worth \$28,000.

Returning to Langat on 3 December, Swettenham met the constable who had been sent to collect Mahmood. From the constable's story it was clear that the Dato Bandar and Mahmood were on the verge of surrendering. Finally the two of them, accompanied by Raja Mahmood's father, Tunku Panglima Raja, and a large company of local notables appeared just after 5:00 p.m. on 5 December. Swettenham in his diary remarks that the Dato Bandar looked ill and broken, both by his effective defeat, and the un wonted walk through the forest to Langat. His brief description of Raja Mahmood is worth quoting in full, if only to compare it with later versions of the same event: 'R. Mahmood is a small, well-built man with anything but a prepossessing face, and his manner is that of a man who has been accustomed to consult only his own wishes.' Later he was to give a very much more romantic description:

I have good reason to remember Raja Mahmood as he walked into my dilapidated stockade at the head of a dozen men who, like their master, feared God, but had no sort of fear of man. I suppose he was under thirty years of age, of average height for a Malay, very well built, and extraordinarily alive. He had a fine open face, looked you straight and fearlessly in the

eyes, and you realized that he always spoke the truth, because the consequences of [not] doing so were beneath consideration. He was very smartly dressed, with silk trousers and a silk sarong, fighting-jacket, a kerchief deftly and becomingly tied on his head, and in his belt the famous kris Kapak China — the Chinese hatchet. His jacket attracted my attention most, for I had never seen one like it before, and, for that matter, have not seen another since. It had short sleeves to the elbow, fitted rather tightly to the body, and was made of a thick silk in narrow stripes of white and red, while over it in every direction were printed, in heavy black, texts from the Koran in the picturesque Arabic characters. I thought at the time how remarkably well this weird and fantastic jacket suited the man, his bearing and his reputation. It was only a visit of ceremony, but Raja Mahmood's strong personality, his straightforward manner, and his fearless courage attracted me immensely. We made fast friends, and though I took him to Singapore, and he accepted the Governor's order not to leave that place for twelve months, I also took him back to the Malay States, and in all the years which followed he never failed me, or any one else who understood him. Only he was not an everyday man: he was a type of the best quality of old Malaya, with all the Malay prejudices and hatred of innovation. One had to realize all this, to remember it, and to consider his view of life if you wished to see the best of him and earn his regard.⁴⁴

It is not difficult to account for this discrepancy. When Swettenham wrote up his diary of 5 December 1874 he was meeting for the first time a man who was reputed to be one of the major trouble-makers, and had indeed given Swettenham himself no little trouble: 'the most thorough-going scoundrel in the Malay Peninsula,' according to Clarke.⁴⁵ The later account derives from 1906, when in the glow of retirement Swettenham recollected how, at the time of Birch's murder, he owed his life to this colourful pirate. At the same time it provides striking proof of Swettenham's readiness to embellish an account.

Although the Dato Bandar may have been defeated, he was not broken. He was staying with the Dato Dagang of Langat, an able but unpopular individual. The position was to say the least delicate, for Swettenham was under instructions to try and persuade both Raja Mahmood and the Dato Bandar to go down to Singapore, where their personal safety was guaranteed, provided they did not leave the island. This they were not unnaturally reluctant to do, and it required judicious threats on Swettenham's part to have them banned from Selangor for life to get their eventual agreement. It

must have been evident at that stage that Swettenham's threats might not necessarily be enforceable.⁴⁶

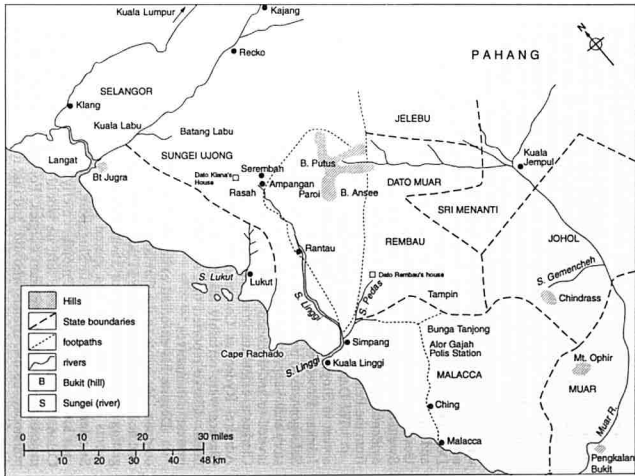
At any rate the Dato Bandar felt that Swettenham's attitude should not be taken at face value. Two go-betweens were used, in the form of the Dato Dagang of Langat, and the aged Sheikh Mohamed Ali. Sheikh Mohamed Ali warned Swettenham of exactly what was afoot. The proposal was that Swettenham should go downriver, alone in a boat to meet the Dato Dagang and the Dato Bandar. Swettenham agreed, subject to the provision that he should be allowed to take Sheikh Mohamed Ali. This precaution was to ensure that Swettenham had a witness whom he felt he could trust.

At 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon Swettenham with Sheikh Mohamed Ali and a crew of boatmen reached the rendezvous as arranged, to find, in another boat, the Dato Dagang, the Dato Bandar, and the Dato Dagang's acolyte, a Haji from Malacca, 'a tall thin old man with a stereotyped smile, the language of what is known as a "sea lawyer" and an evident desire to be out of the way when there was likely to be trouble.'⁴⁷

After the formalities, and a long introductory speech, the Dato Dagang, speaking on behalf of the silent Dato Bandar explained that the Dato Bandar wished to pay Swettenham \$1,000 in recognition of services to date, with a further \$19,000 if, after his visit to Singapore, the Dato Bandar was allowed to resume residence in Selangor. Simultaneously a sack containing \$1,000 was deposited into Swettenham's boat.⁴⁸

Swettenham in addressing the Dato Bandar, obtained his confirmation that all the Dato Dagang had said was correct, and that the sack did contain \$1,000. In what was obviously a carefully prepared speech, he then exonerated the Dato Bandar for this attempt at bribery, for the Dato Bandar clearly did not know the ways of Europeans. At the same time he roundly castigated the Dato Dagang and the Malacca Haji. Finally, having instructed his boatmen to throw the sack back into the Dato Dagang's boat, Swettenham promised to do what he could to help the Dato Bandar if he came to Singapore, and without a word of farewell to the other two ruffians, ordered his boat back to Langat.

Sheikh Mohamed Ali and the boatmen were highly amused at this incident, which caused the boatmen to make record time back to Langat. It was of course an appalling loss of face to the Dato Dagang and the Dato Bandar. However it did not prevent a further approach that evening from the incorrigible Dato Dagang. He appeared at Swettenham's house, and admitted that he was stupid to have expected Swettenham to accept the gift in the presence of so many witnesses. The same sack of money was now waiting in the



Map 4. Selangor and Sungai Ujong, redrawn from a nineteenth century map

hands of his servant at the foot of the steps if Swettenham should choose to accept.

Swettenham, manfully repressing an urge to throw the Dato Dagang bodily off the verandah, was nevertheless extremely angry, and told the Dato Dagang never to darken the door of his house again. The Dato Dagang fled, followed by his servant with the bag of money. His first port of call was Sheikh Mohamed Ali, to whom he offered the money. Sheikh Mohamed Ali immediately consulted Swettenham, who indicated he had no objection to this proposed course. It would after all enable the Sheikh to recover from his father-in-law some of the money lost through the latter's rebellion.

Despite the embarrassment which this episode must have caused, both the Dato Bandar and Raja Mahmood agreed to accompany Swettenham to Singapore, leaving the next day, 16 December, reaching Singapore on 18 December. The Dato Bandar and Mahmood were obliged to sign grovelling apologies to the Governor for their misbehaviour, and were securely lodged with Swettenham's former teacher, Haji Mohamed Said. It was further evidence of his key role as a mediator between dissident Malays from the Peninsula, and the Straits government.⁴⁹

The Dato Bandar and Raja Mahmood were sentenced to spend a year in Singapore, while Raja Mahdi was induced to remain in Johore. However his potential for continuing to cause trouble in Selangor was to be a source of concern the following year. Yet this story ends happily, for scarcely six weeks later the three rebels were invited to and attended a ball at Government House given by the Clarkes to celebrate, ironically, the arrival of Shadwell's successor, Admiral Ryder, as Commander of the China Squadron. The Clarkes were certainly magnanimous, and, one imagines, good hosts. Clarke reported that the rebels 'were an object of much interest in themselves.'⁵⁰

Despite his enforced exile, the Dato Bandar was not to be outdone. He wrote to the Colonial Secretary in Singapore stating that he had lent Swettenham \$1,000, and requested his assistance in getting it repaid. Luckily for Swettenham he had reported the true events in his diary, so was spared any problems. Later, when Swettenham was stationed in Singapore, the Dato Bandar would visit him in his office each month, chiefly to complain about the Colonial Treasurer. As he left, he would help himself, without invitation to two of Swettenham's cigars. For though he himself did not smoke, he had friends who did: and that to him was the same thing.⁵¹

NOTES

1. Swettenham, *British Malaya*, p. 128 repeated the story derived from *Sw.J.*, p. 145.
2. W.W. Skeat, 1900, *Malay Magic*, p. 40.
3. p. 75 below.
4. Although Swettenham did facetiously use *opium cum dignitate*, 'opium with dignity' in his fiction in *Malay Sketches*, p. 104, he was careful to use the correct Latin *otium cum dignitate*, 'leisure with dignity', from Cicero, *De Senectute* in an official context, AR Sel. 1888.
5. It is now the site of the Klang Town Council Offices.
6. *British Malaya*, p. 130, and J.M. Gullick, 1953, 'A Careless Heathen Philosopher?' *JMBRAS* 26 (1):86-103.
7. SSF KL 61/1882 Swettenham to Clarke, 8 December [1874].
8. For Swettenham on Raja Mahmood, see *The Real Malay: 'A Silver Point'*, pp. 63-85 and *British Malaya*, pp. 191-2.
9. HC 1111:187 Encl. 3 in No.53. Report by T. Braddell, 18 February 1874.
10. For general background, see Cowan, 1961 and Parkinson, 1960, op. cit. For presentation of the kris to Clarke, see Vetch, 1905, op. cit., p. 61. Perjured evidence: *Sw.J.*, p. 290, 28 August 1875 and 'A Silver Point' in *The Real Malay*. See also Gullick, 1986b, esp. pp. 30 and 48, fn. 147-8. Gullick offers the following hypothesis:

Swettenham was not in Selangor at the time (November 1873) of the piracy nor of the trial (February 1874) and he had no part in the investigation which followed the arrest of the accused in Malacca. He had been away from Kuala Langat for long periods during the year (August 1874-August 1875) between his first arrival and the entry in the journal recording his recent ('lately') discovery of what he thought was the truth. His absences had been due to travel in Selangor and the calls of duty outside the State. He can hardly have known 'the locals' well.

On his return after another long absence (*Sw.J.*, p. 270, headnote) some unnamed Malay informant told him the alleged facts. The misinformation (if it was such) could well have come from some adherent of Raja Mahdi or other opponent of the detested Kudin, motivated by a wish to make mischief for the latter (as president of the trial court) with his British friends and patrons. Swettenham, in this section of his journal, records dealings with (among others) Raja Yaacob, Datuk Dagang and Raja Bot, all of whom for various reasons were bitter enemies of Kudin.

It is also clear that Swettenham relied on his follower, the Sumatran adventurer Tunku Sulong, 'exceptionally clever and enlightened for a Malay,' on account of his 'personal acquaintance with all the Malay Rajas of note.' (*Sw.J.* p. 97). Yet the Malacca police regarded Sulong as a rogue (*ibid*) and no doubt he had had a brush with them. Sulong would therefore have had old scores to pay off with the Malacca police. As they had arrested the men subsequently tried and convicted of the piracy a suggestion that they had got the wrong men would serve his purpose.

Most of this is guesswork, unsupported by any evidence. It is possible that some Malay cabal concocted the story (recorded at *Sw.J.*, p. 290), and got the confident and gullible young Swettenham interested in it: 'You ask Tunku Sulong to find out about it if you want to know what really happened.' It is quite in character with the different episode recounted in 'A Silver Point.'

Swettenham may well have sincerely believed that he had discovered the truth and it may be so but he does not name his informant, and the revenge motive for the alleged perjury could just as well fit his own informants. Swettenham was also cautious. He knew that information of this sort was at best likely to be 'some truth with many lies' (*Sw.J.*, p.185) and so he kept it to himself rather than expose his informants to immediate questioning by Davidson, who was only a few miles away at Klang. (*Sw.J.*, p.278).

11. HC 1320: 7 Gov. Str. to Sec. State, 29 December 1874.
12. *Sw.J.*, pp.108-9.
13. *Ibid.*
14. For the Sultan's acceptance of Swettenham, see p. 107.
15. *Sw.J.*, p. 109 and *Footprints*, p. 41.
16. Emily Innes, 1885, *The Chersonese with the Gilding Off*, frontispiece and p. 15.
17. *Footprints*, p. 42. Emily Innes, *op. cit.*, vol. 1 p. 17 confirms this picture of Bandar Langat as a pestilential swamp.
18. Swettenham's 'Some Account of the Independent Native States,' *JSBRAS* 4:187-8, 1880 and *Sw.J.*, pp. 110-1
19. *Sw.J.*, p. 115.
20. *Malay Sketches* and *The Real Malay*.
21. R.J.Winstedt, 1934, *A History of Selangor* and CO 273/76:300 Governor to CO, 319 of 7 November 1874.
22. *Sw.J.*, p. 25.
23. *Sw.J.*, Appendix C, pp. 340-2 and HC 1320:73. It is not clear whether the discrepancy between the \$100 offered by the Sultan, and the \$1,000 per month now suggested as a contribution to Swettenham's expenses was specifically brought to the Sultan's attention.
24. *Sw.J.*, p.127 and fn. 3.
25. *Sw.J.*, p.131. Datuk Dagang Abu Said (Sadka, 1968, *op. cit.*, p. 14) later intrigued against Douglas who vented his wrath on him in the Sultan's presence (the Datuk 'looked as pale as a Malay can look') and insisted that the Sultan should dismiss him from public office, though the Sultan retained him on his own payroll at \$30 per month as overseer of works to the Sultan: Douglas diary 28 August and 13 October 1876.
26. *Sw.J.*, p. 131 and fn.
27. HC 1320:39.
28. Sheikh Mohamed Ali was described in *The Real Malay*, pp. 72-3.
29. The Dato Klana's remarks are found in Vetch, 1905, *op. cit.*, p. 167 and *Pickering Journal*, UM Microfilm 594.
30. *Pickering Journal*, UM Microfilm 594.
31. *Sw.J.*, p. 136 and fn.
32. *Sw.J.*, p. 137.
33. *Sw.J.*, p. 141.

34. *Sw.J.*, p. 144.
35. *Footprints*, pp. 45-6 for full text. Swettenham in both *Footprints* and *British Malaya* states inaccurately that the list of Residents was also gazetted at the same time. He lists his own appointment as Assistant Resident. In fact the first list of such appointments was not announced till 14 December. See next chapter.
36. Innes, 1885, op. cit., p. 100 also found the Tunku Panglima Raja 'a very fine-looking fellow' and described his appearance in detail.
37. *Sw.J.*, p. 146.
38. *Sw.J.*, p. 147.
39. *Sw.J.*, pp. 152-4.
40. Vetch, 1905, op. cit., p. 60.
41. *Sw.J.*, p. 157 and Swettenham's Report to Braddell, 18 December 1874, discussed in next chapter.
42. *Sw.J.*, p. 159, and Vetch, 1905, op. cit., p. 169, quoting Clarke's letter.
43. *Sw.J.*, p. 162, inaccurately described it as a boa constrictor, a South American species.
44. The first description comes from *Sw.J.*, p. 167, the second from *British Malaya*, p. 191. Clifford also (Preface to the 1927 edition of *In Court and Kampong*, p. 16) gives a sympathetic portrait of Raja Mahmood, who acted as commander of his bodyguard and as adviser, during the first months of Clifford's time at Pekan.
45. Vetch, 1905, op. cit., p. 167.
46. *The Real Malay: 'A Silver Point,'* pp. 63-85.
47. *Ibid*, p. 72.
48. Swettenham's diary account brings the figure up to \$10,000 only, while 'A Silver Point' mentions \$20,000.
49. For text of letters, see *Sw.J.*, pp. 178-9.
50. HC 1320:61 Clarke to Carnarvon, 9 February 1875, *Straits Observer*, 11 February 1875.
51. *The Real Malay: 'A Silver Point,'* p. 85.

The Appointment of Residents

I do not pretend that we went into the Malay States as philanthropists, I think it was the imperial instinct which took us there ... But the States are not British territory, and what we have done is for the benefit of the people.' Some twenty-three years after the first appointment of British Residents, Swettenham commented shrewdly on the system.¹ In the course of the next few chapters we shall be examining the accuracy of his assertions and the motives and achievements of the residential system in some detail. The year 1874 had been an eventful one for Swettenham, and indeed on the west coast of the Peninsula generally, Perak, Selangor and Sungei Ujong had witnessed the flexing of British muscles. In each state Swettenham had played a not inconsiderable role.

As we have seen, Clarke arrived at the end of 1873 with instructions to advise on the possibility of taking action within the Malay States, both to restore peace and pre-empt the involvement of other European powers. He had definitely exceeded his instructions at Pangkor and its aftermath. This action had coincided with the fall of Gladstone's government on 24 January 1874. The election in February returned Disraeli as Prime Minister of a Conservative government, with a strong imperialist policy. However Disraeli was exhausted, and preoccupied for much of the next few months with home issues. The Earl of Carnarvon replaced the Earl of Kimberley as Secretary of State at the Colonial Office, while the two senior administrators were Sir Robert Herbert as Permanent Under-Secretary, and Sir Robert Meade, as his assistant. Both these men were relatively new to their posts. Both were Liberals, working in a Conservative government, and Herbert, having been in 1855 Private Secretary to Gladstone remained a close personal friend. Under these circumstances, Carnarvon was left with considerable initiative to run the affairs of the Straits Settlements with Herbert and Meade as his most senior advisers.²

Clarke's initial dispatches on Pangkor were drafted after his return to Singapore on 23 January 1874, and unofficial private letters approving these were received during the summer. Yet it was

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not until 4 September that Carnarvon eventually wrote officially confirming Speedy's appointment as Assistant Resident in Perak, and authorizing the Governor to appoint Residents in Perak and Selangor. Noting that he had not so far received from Clarke any specific recommendations, Carnarvon continued: 'It is of great importance and even essential to the success of the policy to which you have devoted much time and attention that these very responsible posts should be filled by officers of the highest ability, and on whose conduct, in their varied and more than usually difficult positions, complete reliance may be placed.'³ The press, both in Singapore and Penang wholeheartedly supported Clarke's moves, as, to a large extent did the press in Britain:

The arrangement contents everybody, and is in itself excellent, but it virtually obliges us to maintain the Roman peace on a bit of Malaya 300 miles long and very valuable for its mines and soil. As however Sir A. Clarke has succeeded, and as this is just the bit we wanted, let us hope he will get a solemn warning and a GCB.⁴

Since the politics of both residential appointments are germane to our story, they must now be considered in more detail. In the case of Perak, Birch had already appealed to the Governor to be allowed to take up the post in February 1874 and had also applied direct to Cox at the Colonial Office for the same job. Birch, a senior man for such a job, aged forty-eight, was however single, his wife having died a year or two earlier. This made him a more suitable candidate, for Perak was not in those days a suitable place for British wives. After his death, it was alleged that he was unable to speak Malay, a severe disadvantage for someone aspiring to the post of Resident. However while not so fluent to dispense with an interpreter, he was by no means incompetent in the language.⁵

However Birch was also faced with a further disability at the time, for in July 1874 Lord Stanley of Alderley had raised in the House of Lords questions about the administration of the Straits Settlements, mentioning the administration of the opium and spirit farms. As a result a Singapore lawyer, J.S. Atchison, a friend of Davidson, wrote to the editor of *The Times* alleging among other things that Birch was improperly indebted to the opium and spirits farmers to the tune of \$5,000 - \$6,000, and was indebted to another contractor for \$4,500. He also enclosed copies of his correspondence with Birch seeking repayment of money owed to one of his Chinese clients, threatening court proceedings if this was not paid. Although the letter was addressed to *The Times*, Atchison sent it to Lord Stanley, who passed it on to Lord Carnarvon.

Reluctantly and with embarrassment, the Colonial Office encouraged Clarke to set up an inquiry, which, predictably cleared

Birch of all but 'an act of indiscretion on his part.' Although the final clearance from Lord Carnarvon did not come till December 1874, Clarke realized before then that the verdict of the inquiry, while embarrassing, would not be disastrous. Birch was therefore appointed provisionally as Resident on 4 October 1874.⁶

Clarke's eventual justification for his appointment of Birch sounds a defensive note:

To the Sultan of Perak I have nominated as Resident Mr J.W. Birch, the Colonial Secretary. I have not done this until after long and anxious consideration, nor until Mr Birch had, by the success which has attended one or more missions with which he has lately been entrusted, given evidence of his ability, and still more of his tact and judgement in dealing with natives.⁷

The position in Selangor was far less clear-cut. By the end of the year, Swettenham had made his mark with Sultan Abdul Samad at Langat; yet for the moment the official administrative centre of the state was at Klang, by now under the control of Tunku Kudin. Kudin as we have seen had close business connections with the Singapore lawyer, J.G. Davidson who had himself been present at the ill-fated trial of the alleged pirates at Jugra in February 1873. So he must have been fully familiar with the political situation in the state. Indeed it has been suggested that the appointment of Davidson to witness the trial may have been part of an attempt by Clarke to put him in the running for the position of Resident, Selangor. By the end of the year Clarke must have been troubled at the prospect of appointing Davidson, while the results of the enquiry into Birch's financial irregularities were still in the headlines. Moreover the Colonial Office were also very hesitant. Nevertheless Davidson took the necessary steps to transfer his financial interests to a commercial house in Singapore.⁸

However on 11 December 1874 the British in the Straits Settlements must have been startled by the announcement in the press, amongst the names of Residents and their assistants, of 'F.A. Swettenham, Resident of Salangore.' That a junior officer of four years' experience should be posted to nearly the same level of responsibility as Birch, twice his age, was intolerable. The furore was such that when the Government Gazette was issued dated 12 December, but in fact several days later, Braddell as Acting Colonial Secretary amended the appointment to Assistant Resident at Langat.⁹ The press was scathing in its comments: the *Straits Observer* commented sarcastically, 'Mr F.A. Swettenham is a cadet, and his great experience it is to be hoped will prove to be sufficient for the post he has been appointed to.'¹⁰ The *Singapore Daily Times* followed this up with an editorial on all the appointments. On

Swettenham's, even after it had been amended to that of Assistant Resident, it wrote:

What then are we to think of the appointment of Mr F.A. Swettenham to be Assistant Resident, and virtually Resident, to the State of Salangore? We disclaim any wish to detract from the character or ability of Mr Swettenham, but here we have a cadet of four years' experience as a subordinate clerk in the Settlements, raised at a bound and apparently considered fit to fill a post of equal — if not more importance to that to which an official ranking next to the Governor in the Executive, and of nearly 30 years' experience in the service, has been promoted. This lucky "Dowb", moreover, is sent to the most turbulent state in the Peninsula, which was until recently a nest of Pirates, whose chiefs are notorious for their lawlessness, and whose sovereign with his sons has been more than suspected of secretly fomenting all the anarchy and piracy which at last, but tardily, necessitated the interference for very shame's sake of British men-of-war. The appointment may be good, but there is an incongruity, and, *prima facie* a disregard of ordinary prudence about it, considering the great influence for good or evil the first holder of the appointment will exercise, which does not create much confidence, and does justify much misgiving. There is only one conclusion the public can come to on the matter, — either Mr Birch is thrown away on Perak, or an Official of greater weight of character and of infinitely more experience should have been selected to be "the guide philosopher and friend" of the wily tin-loving Sultan of Salangore, with his gentle sons and lamb-like chiefs.¹¹

Thus Davidson was appointed Resident in Selangor, with 'Mr F.A. Swettenham of the Straits Civil Service to be Her Majesty's Assistant Resident with the Sultan of Selangore, with a salary of £750 a year.'¹²

Later, after the immediate furore had died down, the *Straits Observer* published Swettenham's report, dated 18 December 1874, on his first few months at Langat. The tone of this brief report was jaunty, cheerful, and slightly smug. But the fact that Swettenham was regarded as being altogether too full of himself was recorded in a subsequent issue of the same paper:

We would guard the public against putting any great amount of confidence in the report we published last week by the Government Agent at Langat. Yet it is hardly necessary to do so; the egotism of Mr Swettenham is so apparent, that it will place any sensible person on his guard against implicitly believing either his facts or his theories. Mr Swettenham

seems to have but appeared upon the scene, and discord vanished. He showed his face and all was peace. No apparition of an irate beadle disturbed from his forty winks repose by the noise of a workhouse play-yard ever had such an effect as that of the amiable countenance of the four-year Colonial Cadet upon the dispute between the Sultan of Selangor and his naughty son-in-law Tunku Oodin [Kudin]. Governor Ord may have stormed, Lieutenant-Governor Anson have "my friended" them, and Governor Clarke may have wheedled, it was reserved for Mr Swettenham to gain the victory that was refused to the courage, the courtly epistles, and the lollipops of the others. Read the report and (if you believe it) you will not be long in deciding who had the most right to use the *veni, vidi, vici* style of address, JULIUS CAESAR or FRANK SWETTENHAM.¹³

It is not easy, at this distance, to understand how such a ferocious attack on a junior government servant could have been justified. The impression is left that Swettenham must in some way have sailed very close to the wind to provoke such hostility. Probably a strong element of jealousy was also involved. Yet Swettenham made no reference to the episode in his later writings, and we are left only with Clarke's subsequent justifications for the change of course. That he should have hesitated about appointing Davidson, a man with financial interests known to be extensive in Selangor was understandable. On the other hand, Davidson's utmost integrity provided a convenient justification for the hasty appointment:

Under ordinary circumstances the latter fact [i.e. Davidson's business interests] would indeed have made me hesitate in suggesting Mr Davidson for the office of Resident, but the confidence which he possesses amongst the entire European community of these Settlements, as well as amongst the Chiefs and people of this Malay State, combined with qualities of training which specially fit him for the labours he has undertaken, has influenced me to consider these qualifications as neutralizing the objections which doubtless would otherwise exist.¹⁴

As to why it was now necessary to have a Resident in Klang, rather than Langat, Clarke on the same date advised as follows:

I have been rather in the hope that the presence at Langat with the Sultan of Salangore of Mr Swettenham, of this Civil Service, would have been sufficient to render unnecessary for the present the appointment of a Resident to that Chief. But although I have every reason to be satisfied with that gentleman in the results that have followed from the influence

which he has exercised over His Highness, and to which is mainly attributable the tranquility and good order now existing in that part of the State, there has not been either in the District of Salangore proper or in Klang that restoration of confidence which I had anticipated.

These districts are still left abandoned by their former cultivators, nor have the miners returned to them in any numbers, whilst capital to assist in opening new mines in this well-known rich mineral Country is withheld; and all in consequence I have thoroughly satisfied myself of its affairs not being subject to the control of a British Officer resident with the Sultan's Viceroy Tunku Dia Udin [Kudin].¹⁵

It has been suggested that this reflects a realization by Clarke that in his efforts to date in Selangor, insufficient attention had been paid to economic goals.¹⁶ This may well be so, but in the same dispatch Clarke speaks of Swettenham as follows:

I should desire to retain Mr Swettenham still with the Sultan of Salangore, over whom he has acquired great influence, and has exercised it with great care and caution, showing on more than one delicate and difficult occasion, consummate judgement and ability. Mr Swettenham is in fact a young officer of very high promise, uniting with considerable mental attainments great zeal and energy.¹⁷

Swettenham had already given evidence of his financial acumen in Klang. Clarke's end-of-year dispatch is therefore consistent with the possibility that very considerable pressure was brought to bear to persuade Clarke to alter his advice. That the issue had reached the attention of the Colonial Office in London may be deduced from Cox's minute on Clarke's dispatch, referring to Swettenham: 'Sir A. Clarke speaks very highly of him and I have no doubt that he is a clever young man — perhaps too young, and he certainly did very well when employed in some of the native expeditions. I do not see why he should not have been selected in preference to Mr Davidson.'¹⁸

Meantime news had been received of Clarke's promotion to a position on the Council of India, and Carnarvon expressed his misgivings to Clarke's successor, Sir William Jervois.¹⁹ Clarke concluded 1874 by writing to Carnarvon that he believed there would be no further need for force in the states where Residents had been appointed. However 1875 was to prove him sadly wrong.²⁰

NOTES

1. *Daily News* interview, reprinted in *MM*, 8 December 1897.
2. Herbert succeeded Sir Frederick Rogers in 1871, while Meade had previously acted as Private Secretary to Granville, Secretary of State at the Foreign Office. When Granville left the Colonial Office in 1870, Meade remained as an Assistant Under-Secretary.
3. HC 1111:241 Carnarvon to Clarke, 4 September 1874. Also *Birch Journals* p. 6, fn. 5.
4. *SDT*, 23 April 1874, quoting *The Spectator* in London, on Perak.
5. For Birch's appeal to Governor, see Vetch, 1905, op. cit., p. 174, and CO 273/75: 104 ff. Cox's minute, 7 April 1874 on Gov. to Sec. State, 43 of 24 February 1874. On Birch's linguistic ability, see CO 273/76:569 ff. Minute by Cox on 2 February 1875 on Clarke to Carnarvon, Confidential of 30 December 1874. 'There can be no doubt of his [Birch's] ability and that his knowledge of Malay language and some experience in dealing with these Native Chiefs is in his favour.'
6. *Birch Journals*, p. 22, fn. 3. Also CO 273/76:450-85 Gov. to Sec. State, 337 of 16 December 1874.
7. CO273/76:587 ff. Clarke to Carnarvon, Confidential of 30 December 1874.
8. Cowan, 1961, op. cit., pp. 71 and 207, fn. 3. The 'commercial house in Singapore' to which Davidson transferred his financial interests in Selangor was Guthrie & Co. (S. Cunyngham-Brown, 1971, *The Traders*, p. 155.) There is no reason to doubt the bona fides of the divesting but James Guthrie Davidson was a nephew of James Guthrie. Davidson continued to deal, on behalf of the State government, with Guthrie & Co. (and left some conundrums for Douglas to sort out in that respect.) Davidson was an honest man, and a pillar of the Presbyterian Church in Singapore, but he did not really make the required total break in his Singapore connections with Selangor. Hence his move to Perak in 1876, to succeed Birch, was probably a relief to the official mind in Singapore though the Perak appointment did not last.
9. *SDT*, 11 December 1874 and SSGG 50 of 12 December 1874.
10. *Straits Observer*, 14 December 1874.
11. *SDT*, 19 December 1874.
12. CO 273/76:569 ff. Gov. to Carnarvon, Confidential, of 30 December 1874.
13. HC 1111:269-71 Report of the Assistant Resident with the Sultan of Selangore of 18 December 1874, from Swettenham to T. Braddell, Secretary for Native States. Encl. in Gov. Straits to Sec. State, 23 March 1875. Quoted as Appendix D in Chew Thesis, and published in *Straits Observer*, 23 March 1875. The editorial quoted appeared on 29 March 1875 in the *Straits Observer*.
14. CO 273/76:569 ff. Gov. to Carnarvon, Confidential of 30 December 1874.
15. *Ibid.*
16. See Chew's thesis, pp. 76 ff.
17. *Ibid.*
18. CO 273/76:572 Comments by Cox of CO on Clarke to CO, 357 of 30 December 1874.
19. CO 273/76:581 Carnarvon to Jervois, 8 April 1875.
20. CO 273/76:569 ff. Clarke to Carnarvon, Confidential of 30 December 1874.

Selangor and the East Coast, 1875

The year 1875 began with Residents and their assistants in place in Perak and Selangor. Commander Murray was appointed to Sungei Ujong in April 1875. Although the Pangkor Engagement provisions were not specifically extended to the other states, on the British side it was tacitly acknowledged that the relevant clause would be applicable. This clause read as follows: 'That the Sultan receive and provide a suitable residence for a British Officer, to be called Resident, who shall be accredited to his Court, and whose advice must be asked and acted upon on all questions other than those touching Malay Religion and Custom.'

After a New Year's leave which extended to 15 January, and included a stormy interview with Raja Mahdi in Johore, Swettenham set off for Langat. He had scarcely arrived, after stopping at Malacca and Kelang en route, when he was ordered to proceed to Perak to assist Birch.¹ Much of the year was spent in Perak, to which we will revert later. Suffice to say at this stage, that his presence being no longer required there by 7 February, he returned over ten days partly overland down the Bernam and Slim Rivers.²

He started from Bandar Bahru on the afternoon of 7 February heading for Durian Sebatang on the Perak River with Tunku Sulong. He was advised to go up the Sungkai River, a southern tributary of the Perak River, and this he did, starting with his party to pole up the river on the early morning of 9 February. They reached Sungkai at 5:30 p.m. that day to find three or four houses. The next day they reached the beginning of the Slim road, and the end of the navigable part of the river. The Toh Dagang, the headman, had never before seen a white man, and felt obliged to sit up all night, playing cards and watching Swettenham sleep.

On the 11th they set out on foot over the Sungkai River, reaching Trolak by a fair path. The village consisted 'of two wretched houses in the heart of the jungle.' From Trolak to Slim, a

journey of four and a half hours, the path was good, but hilly. Four miles from Slim a stop by the hot springs provided welcome rest.

Slim, which Swettenham said 'might almost be a village in Switzerland,' was attractive. There he sought out the headman, one Datoh Sampuh, who lived a few miles up the Slim River. Although the Datoh was out, there were some *orang asli* (aborigines) at the house, and Swettenham provided a vivid description of a young girl:

There is a young lady standing within two yards of me, whose arms are covered with numberless brass rings. She has about a dozen strings of coloured beads — to which are hung more brass rings, — round her neck, and these beads are fastened behind with a buckle of shells and boar's teeth: through her nose she has a long porcupine's quill, and her face is painted in stripes of black and red, beginning at her forehead and ending like a pitchfork on her mouth and chin. She is a belle, no doubt, and amongst the "orang Sakei," I dare say irresistible.³

Swettenham also talked with Raja Asal, a refugee from the Selangor troubles, concerning the boundaries of Perak, Pahang and Selangor, and observed that Batu Gaja was visible from Slim, an estimated six hours' walk away. Also present in the area were about six Chinese, working for tin, for the area was believed to be very rich in it. Unfortunately however no food was available. Since he had injured his foot, and could not bear to put a shoe on, Swettenham was obliged to travel by boat from here. To get a boat it was necessary to send for one from downriver. This allowed Swettenham half a day to interview the local chiefs, and explain the taxes. A dug-out arrived at 2:00 p.m. on the 13th, and they set off, a party of five, with the boat close to the waterline.

A full day's travel brought them through uninhabited country to Kuala Slim, at the junction with the Bernam River. They travelled on for two days, scarcely seeing anyone, in part through marshland, where there was no shortage of crocodiles. Eventually on 17 February they reached Raja Itam's place, some 5 miles from Slim.

In discussions with Raja Itam, another refugee from the Selangor disturbances, Swettenham pointed out that Raja Itam was entitled only to the Perak side of the Bernam River, not the Selangor side. Raja Itam told them they were lucky to have survived the crocodiles in so small a boat. The final twenty five miles from Raja Itam's place to the mouth of the river were uneventful, as was the coastal journey to Langat, which he reached late on 18 February.⁴ Here Swettenham found several letters. Davidson was now operating from Klang under specific instructions from Braddell.⁵

These instructions, which had probably been discussed between the three men in Singapore over the New Year, stressed the

need to encourage fugitives to return to the state. It also asked for a report on the revenue system to be adopted, and emphasized the need for a road between Klang and the tin mines, to be financed from tax on land concessions to bona fide cultivators. Moreover Tunku Kudin's debts, a subject with which Davidson was particularly familiar, were to be ascertained, and a sinking fund established to enable them to be redeemed. A diary and full accounts were to be kept, and submitted to Singapore. The instructions concluded with the advice that Swettenham had been 'instructed to correspond direct with this office for the present, sending copies of his letters to you for your information.' Despite the furore of December 1874, Swettenham was still very largely independent.

Swettenham's relations with Davidson, his superior, were without doubt good. Davidson had after all provided Swettenham with his first exposure to Selangor life. It seems possible that when he had been thwarted of the title of Resident, he had pressed for, and been mollified by the assurance that he would retain the substantial degree of independence afforded by this ruling.

The first days of Swettenham's return were taken up with visitors and complaints. Many concerned the Dato Bandar of Sungei Ujong, who, from exile in Singapore had been spreading malicious rumours about the Sultan, and how badly Swettenham himself had treated the Dato Bandar in Singapore. The Sultan, annoyed that the Colonial Secretary, and not the Governor, had written to him for details in connection with the Dato Bandar, refused to reply until he saw Swettenham.

Langat continued to thrive on rumours of an imminent attack from Raja Mahdi and his supporters, but news had reached the Sultan of a meeting which Swettenham had had with Raja Mahdi in Johore, in the first fortnight of January. Swettenham's threats were said so to have frightened the two men that they had given up plans to return. On 23 February, Skinner, from Muar and Sungei Ujong arrived in Langat, subsequently reporting on Swettenham, 'He has only one room and does not seem very comfortable.' He also brought news of Clarke's elevation to the Indian Council, saddening both Swettenham, and the Sultan. The latter reacted to the news by suggesting that he would follow Clarke to India. When Swettenham gently explained to him that there were already many rajas in India, and no spare place could be found for him, the Sultan suggested that since the Malay Peninsula and India were in the same continent, Clarke should retain his position as Governor at the same time as taking up his new job. Swettenham himself wrote from Langat personally to Clarke, 'I think few people will be more sorry to lose Your Excellency than I, probably because few have received so

much kindness as I have. None can favour your policy more than I do, and I feel sure it will succeed.'⁶

Swettenham's time at Langat was, according to his diaries, taken up with the hearing of endless petitions and complaints, generally involving theft. The Datuk Dagang continued in his unsuccessful attempts to stir trouble between him and the Sultan. However Swettenham managed to see the Sultan every week or so, thus retaining, and indeed consolidating the old man's confidence.

The major domestic problem of the moment was an attempt to rescue from the clutches of Kudin the launch *Sri Malacca*, belonging to Tan Chin Hoon, a Malacca businessman. The vessel had been seized in 1872 together with a cargo of \$7,000 of tin when it was attempting to break a blockade which Kudin had imposed on Langat. A petition for assistance to the Colonial Legislative Council in 1873 had failed. In December 1874 Tan Chin Hoon addressed a petition to the Governor. This was referred to Swettenham, who consulted both the Sultan and Kudin. Swettenham's verdict was that Tan Chin Hoon's claim to have been invited to Langat by the Sultan was untrue, as was the allegation that the cargo of tin belonged to the Sultan. It had been stolen from Klang by Raja Mahdi. The Sultan had merely allowed the vessel to visit Langat with supplies.⁷

The episode provided Swettenham with a pretext for a visit to Klang on 7 March, to see both Kudin and Davidson, with whom he stayed. Later he visited Syed Zin in Klang, to discuss land matters, and recorded that day in his diary: 'I advised the town lots, now paying quit rent of \$2.25 per annum, to be commuted for \$30 a lot, as I believe that will be cheerfully paid, and the lots outside the town for which now not \$10 could be got, to be given on \$1 per lot quit rent. In a year or two they can be advantageously commuted.' This may be seen as further evidence of a tacit understanding between the Governor, Davidson and Swettenham that the younger officer would continue to have a major say in what happened at Klang despite his nominal downgrading to Assistant Resident at the end of 1874.⁸

On discovering in the course of this visit that Davidson proposed to travel inland, Swettenham persuaded him to defer his plans so that Swettenham might travel up to Kuala Lumpur from Langat, rendezvous with him there, and the two continue to Kanching and Ulu Selangor, returning to the coast via the Selangor River. That a junior man of Swettenham's standing could approach a senior colleague in this way reinforces the impression that the two were on the best of terms.⁹ Communications between Klang and Langat continued erratic. The return trip at night on the *Lapwing* saw Swettenham taking to a sampan off Jugra at 1:15 a.m. After several groundings on mud-banks and false starts to find the correct channel, it was not until 5:15 a.m. that he reached the stockade.¹⁰

Interviews, and the resolution of sundry thefts and minor misdemeanours prevented his departure for the rendezvous with Davidson for four days. The old Sultan remarked as he took leave, 'Don't delay. If you are not here, I feel uneasy.' (*Jangan lengah, kalau tuan tada disini, hati ta'sedap.*)¹¹

The two weeks from 17 March to 1 April were occupied with another arduous tour. This took Swettenham upriver from Langat through country with which he was familiar from his October visit. to Kuala Labu and Ricko, plagued by mosquitoes and sandflies. The journey was often difficult, due to fallen trees in the river, and at times high water after heavy rain.

At Ricko he visited a Chinese mine, near land which, he recorded had been worked some twenty years ago by an American group, until they were thrown out by the district chief with the loss of six lives for operating without permission.¹² While at Ricko he also gave instructions that proclamations were to be posted. These appear to have been those signed by the Sultan on 18 November 1874, announcing the opening up of the state, and Braddell's proclamation of 25 January announcing the appointment of Davidson and Swettenham as Resident and Assistant Resident. The headman refused to post these, on the grounds that Ricko was under the jurisdiction of the Dato Klana of Sungei Ujong, not Selangor. The following morning Swettenham went personally to post them in the bazaar. Similar proclamations were posted and explained at other villages on Swettenham's route.¹³

He reached Kajang on 22 March, where he was received by Raja Kahar with a salute and all honours. Here he visited the Sungei Alok mine. His route thereafter took him, still by boat, to Cheras and up into Ulu Langat. Cheras was in a state of decay, with many of the shops deserted after the upheavals of the previous few years. By this time the river was all but impassable, and the boat party was confined to Swettenham, steering, the baggage, the boatmen and two polemen. As a result the party which was sent on foot reached Ulu Langat several hours earlier.

Here, typically for the diaries covering this trip, Swettenham was met by all the inhabitants when he arrived, and spent some time talking to them, encouraging them to settle down to steady work. The people of Ulu Langat in particular were resentful of Raja Kahar's influence in the area. Apparently they lacked any very good grounds for complaint. Moreover the Ulu Langat people had been involved, unnecessarily in Swettenham's view, in taking an armed party to Jelebu. As a result of this uncertainty, the mines were suffering. The Chinese miners, whom Swettenham also met, asked to whom the tin duties were payable. In reply, Swettenham attempted to establish a clear line of authority from the Sultan,

through Kudin, to his local appointee. He commented in his diary on this occasion that the ground rent should be reduced from \$3 to \$2 a *bahra*, Penghulus should be appointed at the major mining areas, and the \$2 should be divided equally between the Sultan and the Penghulu. It was one of the first occasions when Swettenham came to grips with the revenue problems of the mining areas in Selangor.¹⁴

The dissatisfaction at Ulu Langat was such that Swettenham decided to spend an extra day there, departing, on foot, on the 26th via neighbouring mines to the top of the Ulu Langat ridge, descending through Ulu Ampang into Kuala Lumpur.

The Kuala Lumpur of 1875 presented a very different picture from the collection of hovels which had greeted Swettenham on his earlier visit with Davidson in 1872. He was welcomed by Yap Ah Loy, in a palatial house where now the Central Market stands. Here he was offered champagne, which he declined in favour of beer, and was enormously impressed by the way in which Yap had redeveloped the town since he had recovered control in March 1873. There were wide streets, separate Malay and Chinese quarters, and, in front of Yap's house, gambling booths and the market. Boats were drawn up against the banks of the river to give access to Yap's, and the other houses. The population consisted of about 1000 Chinese and 500-700 Malays.¹⁵ Swettenham's sketch map is the earliest extant map of Kuala Lumpur.¹⁶ Interestingly it does not show the junction of the two rivers, Klang and Gombak, which is the dominant topographical feature. Instead, on the map, the undivided Klang river swings north-west on the line of the Gombak. This suggests that Swettenham wrote up the account of his visit and drew the map, a day or two after his departure from Kuala Lumpur.

Being tired and sore-footed after the previous day's exertions, Swettenham spent an extra day in Kuala Lumpur, going round the town with Yap Ah Loy, who suggested to him that a road be made from Kuala Lumpur to Damansara. It was to be unmetalled, with a ditch on either side at a cost of \$13,000, or \$750 per mile: a rate which Swettenham considered very reasonable, using Javanese labour. Meantime a message arrived to say that Davidson had been delayed in departing from Klang, and no meeting was possible. That night Yap Ah Loy entertained Swettenham and his party to dinner, followed by a show of Chinese opera.¹⁷ He departed the following morning at 9:00 a.m. north to the village of Kanching, which he reached at 3:15 p.m. accompanied by a guard of honour consisting of three fighting men, provided by Yap Ah Loy. The Kanching Chinese welcomed them with fire-crackers. Kanching in those days produced a little gold, some \$3-6 worth from every *bahra* of tin.

Being anxious to reach Ulu Selangor as soon as possible, he pressed on from Kanching that night to Bandar, visiting some more tin mines on the way. He was also impressed by the low, forested hills containing fine examples of camphor trees. Although there was a good road from Kanching to Bandar, the road from Bandar to Ulu Selangor turned out to be almost entirely overgrown. Swettenham raised his spirits with breakfast at 11:00 a.m. consisting of biscuits and claret. He and his party pressed on crossing the Batang Yam and Kali Rivers. Heavy rain and swollen rivers turned the rest of the day, and that night into a nightmare, as they camped on the ground under a primitive lean-to made of leaves and grass. The next morning they discovered from tracks that an elephant had passed within ten yards of them during the night.¹⁸

The following day they crossed the Renning River, and turned west to the small mining settlement of Ulu Selangor on the Selangor River. By this time Swettenham had worn the soles off his shoes, so confined himself to visiting one mine in the area. This was Chinese-run, on the site of a vast mine formerly developed and exploited by Malays.

Yap Ah Loy's representative in Ulu Selangor, one Haji Mohamed Nor expressed his concern about the activities in the area of a disaffected Pahang noble, Wan Abdul Rahman, and his brother, Wan Da. These men had allied themselves successively with Raja Mahdi and Tunku Kudin, using a base in Selangor to launch attacks over the border into their native Pahang. They had more recently been accused of being responsible for a murder in the Kuala Selangor district. Swettenham on this occasion found it desirable to act with caution, saying he could not possibly pass judgement on a matter in which his superior, Davidson was involved.¹⁹ Swettenham explained to the headmen his plans to appoint Penghulus in each place, to be responsible to the local Raja, who in turn would report through Tunku Kudin to the Sultan and the Resident.²⁰

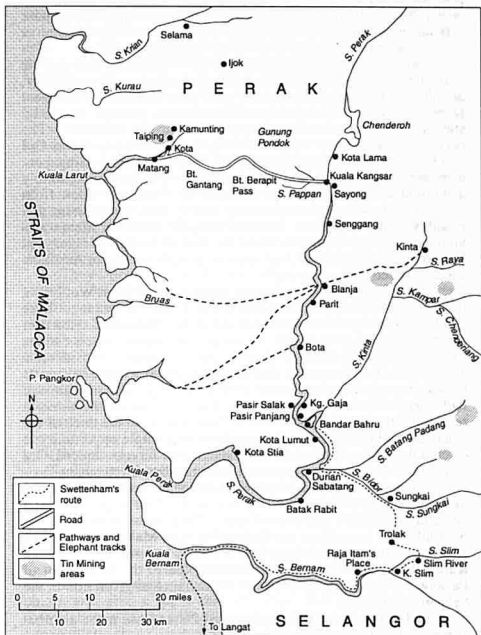
From Ulu Selangor, it was two days by boat to Kuala Selangor, where Swettenham was met by Denholm, recently appointed by Davidson as Collector of Land Revenue there. Kuala Selangor in those days consisted of about 200 people, a shadow of former times after all the fighting which had taken place in the vicinity. Denholm confirmed that Wan Da had been heavily implicated in a recent murder.²¹

The following morning at 3:00 a.m. Swettenham started on the ebb tide from Kuala Selangor, reaching Klang at 3:30 p.m. Talks with Davidson in Klang concentrated on land disposal, Swettenham being anxious that land should be sold for a fee, while Davidson preferred a quit rent. Swettenham argued that unless people owned

their land, they could scarcely be expected to stand up and fight for it. A few days later Davidson recommended to the Colonial Secretary that agricultural land should be granted without charge for the first three years. Then a simple fee would be charged on land for four-year leases, and at a fixed rate per acre for long leases. Mining land would continue to pay one-tenth of its produce to the government. This was Swettenham's first direct involvement in land administration, an issue which was to generate more heat than light some twenty years later.²²

The return trip from Klang to Langat was accomplished in a record eight and a half hours, thanks to catching the correct tides. The following week was taken up with administrative matters at Langat. These included a second and very much longer report to the Governor on the state of affairs in Langat, and an account of his recent visit to Kuala Lumpur. The report summarized the diary of his recent travels, in reverse order to his actual journey. It urged the building of a road from Damansara, the last navigable point upstream on the Klang River to Kuala Lumpur. In it Swettenham also stressed the importance of giving encouragement to both agriculture and mining in order to open up land. This would raise revenues. He also urged the employment of Penghulus in the local administration. The report in summary reflected all the major issues to which Swettenham was to devote so much attention in his later years as Resident. Swettenham had learnt his lesson from the hostile reception with which the first report was met: the second report is noticeably less self-satisfied in tone. The *Straits Times* was also rather more charitable: 'It is clear from this report that Mr Swettenham is not a mere pen and paper official, but one who knows how to use his tongue, his eyes and his legs.' That Swettenham had by this stage improved his relations with the *Straits Times* and was possibly acting as a stringer is evident from a note which appeared in that paper a few months later. In it, the editor indicated that with the aid of Mr Swettenham, the paper now hoped to give a better coverage of events in the Malay States.²³

On the evening of 13 April Swettenham received a letter telling him to meet the Governor in Malacca on the 16th. He left Langat on 14 April, meeting the Governor on the *Pluto* near Cape Rachado, and arrived in Penang on 16 April in the evening. The visit to Penang may conveniently be considered in the next chapter, as it relates to affairs in Perak. However, it is necessary to pause at this stage with Swettenham on his return from Penang with Sir Andrew Clarke to Singapore, where the Governor's party arrived on 3 May. Indeed they could not have afforded to arrive much later, for a farewell dinner and ball was to be given for the Clarkes two days later at the Town Hall.²⁴ Clarke's departure was marked by praise



Map 5. Route of Swettenham's return from Perak to Selangor, February 1875.

in a speech delivered by the Hon. Thomas Scott for the more positive policy which he had adopted towards the states of the west coast. Swettenham's gradual ascent in the hierarchy of Singapore officials was marked two days later at a meeting of the Legislative Council, where he acted as Clerk of the Council.²⁵

On 8 May, Clarke's successor, Sir William Jervois and his party arrived privately from England. He took the oath on 10 May, and entertained the great and the good to a levée in Government House on the following day, while Clarke, perhaps unwisely, stayed on in his private capacity for a further fortnight. The occasion was a festive one, for Clarke had been as popular as Ord had been unpopular. For Swettenham these few days in Singapore were especially significant, for Mr and Mrs Charles Rome, family acquaintances, were passing through on their way back from Australia. It seems certain that they met up with Swettenham, and possibly stayed with him. The wife Margaret Maria, or Meta was a young and vivacious bride, while her husband, slightly older, and later described as a farmer, had apparently made money in Australia. They travelled with a servant.²⁶

Like Ord and Clarke, Jervois had graduated from Woolwich, in common with Lieutenant-Governor Anson of Penang. Like Clarke, Jervois had also served in the Royal Engineers. However Jervois was senior to Clarke by about three years. Their careers may have been similar, but their rivalry provided a considerable encouragement to Jervois to change yet again the Straits Settlements policy towards the states of the west coast, just as Clarke himself had done. Since Swettenham was the only one of the three in residential posts at the time to have been present in the thick of the celebrations in Singapore, he must have had ample opportunity to discuss the affairs of the west coast states with Jervois. Indeed, Ord had given Jervois a letter specially recommending Swettenham.²⁷

It was not until mid-May that Swettenham returned to Langat, this time in the company of C.J. Irving, by then Acting Colonial Secretary in Birch's absence in Perak. The purpose of the visit was twofold: first, to reassure the Sultan that Raja Mahdi would not be allowed to return to Selangor, and secondly to resolve with Tunku Kudin the question of the recompense due to the Bendahara of Pahang, for the support which the Bendahara had given him in the Selangor civil wars.

In 1872 Tunku Kudin had visited Pahang and made a verbal agreement with the Bendahara, who subsequently claimed the revenues of Ulu Selangor and Ulu Klang. One of the Pahang leaders, Orang Kaya Pahlawan of Semantan was left in charge of the area. But whatever revenues he collected, he pocketed. Consequently in April 1875, Tunku Kudin received a letter from the

Bendahara reminding him of this debt which was alleged to amount to \$20,000. Such a sum was well beyond Kudin's resources. Indeed it must have alarmed Davidson, if he was not already aware of it, for the government was in the process of taking over Kudin's debts. At the same time he was anxious that peace should be preserved, more particularly as it was evident that if there were to be further hostilities, a dissatisfied Raja Mahdi in Johore would be only too happy to support the Bendahara in any attack on Kudin in Selangor. A compromise was reached under which \$3,000 worth of tin were to be sent round to the east coast in settlement of the Bendahara's cash debt run up since the war, together with a further six *bahra* of tin, worth about \$260 as interest on his investment in the war. The Bendahara was to withdraw the Orang Kaya Pahlawan of Semantan from Selangor territory. The tin was to be taken from Klang on the *Pluto*, with Irving and Swettenham as far as Singapore, and then by Swettenham, accompanied at Kudin's insistence by Ismail, brother of the Bendahara, to the Bendahara on the Pahang River.²⁸

They stopped a night in Singapore, where Swettenham dined with the Governor, and reached Kuala Pahang early on 23 May. Accompanied by O'Brien, a cadet in the office of the Colonial Secretary, Swettenham made his way up the Pahang River in a barge to the town of Pahang, now Pekan. They met the Bendahara in the Kapitan China's house. Swettenham thought he had aged a lot since they had last met in August 1872, when Swettenham had accompanied Ord to visit him. However the Bendahara remembered the occasion clearly. The various letters were handed over and their contents explained in a grand council chamber in the presence of some 200 men. The Bendahara asked to be allowed to study them until the evening. To Swettenham's relief, the Bendahara indicated over coffee and sweetmeats that he would not be disposed to ally himself with Raja Mahdi against Tunku Kudin.²⁹

The party were put up in a loft in the Kapitan China's house, with a separate house allocated to Raja Ismail. After a sumptuous dinner, the Bendahara returned at about 11:00 p.m. to discuss the problem with Tunku Kudin. The Bendahara was reluctant to take responsibility for recalling the Orang Kaya Pahlawan of Semantan, but after some pressure from Swettenham agreed to consult with his chiefs and give a reply the next day. The following morning Swettenham was out with O'Brien at 5:30 a.m. in an unsuccessful expedition to shoot peacock. There followed a day of prevarication by the Bendahara, culminating in a dinner at the house of his brother, the Tunku Muda. A further delay was occasioned at 2:00 a.m. the following morning when Swettenham and O'Brien were suddenly invited to attend a nautch at the audience hall.³⁰

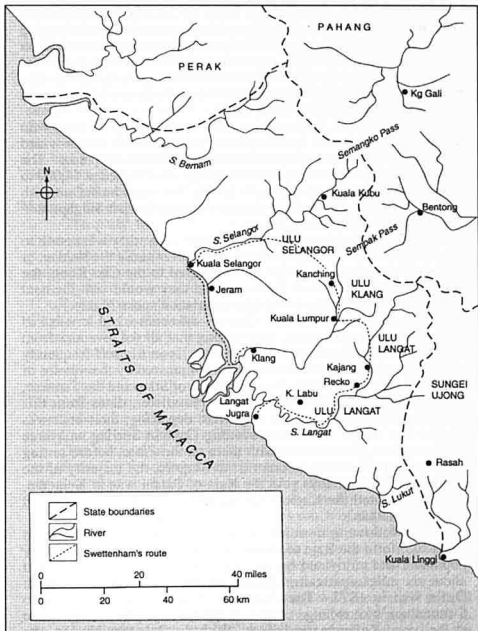
Swettenham and O'Brien arrived at 2:00 a.m. to find the raised audience hall full of spectators, who had been watching the dance since its commencement at 10:00 p.m. The performers were four girls, two of eighteen and two about eleven years old, exquisitely dressed in silk and cloth of gold, with exotic head-dresses of gold flowers, seated on a carpet, hiding their faces with fans. The instruments took the form of a Javanese *gamelan* orchestra. On completion of the overture, the dancers began to perform a series of five or six perfectly synchronized Malay dances using graceful movements of the body rather than the feet. The final, and wildest, a war-dance, involved the two elder girls going into a trance, until they were taken forcibly outside. The performance ended at 5:00 a.m.

The conclusion of the nautch coincided with a final discussion between Swettenham and the Bendahara, in which Swettenham extracted from the Bendahara a promise agreeing to Kudin's and Davidson's proposals. The necessary letter confirming these proposals arrived later in the day from the Bendahara and Swettenham returned to Singapore on 26 May. Here Raja Mahdi was still not prepared to drop his claim against Tunku Kudin for Klang, provoking a personal reprimand from Jervois.³¹

There is then a gap of two weeks in the diaries before Swettenham went on to Malacca and Klang. At Klang, Tunku Kudin was well pleased with Swettenham's success in Pahang. At Langat, the Sultan was also welcoming, and Swettenham took the opportunity of warning him, in connection with the Raja Mahdi threat 'not to be over-advised by him should he go to Langat.'³²

The remainder of the month was spent between Langat, and a trip to Penang accompanying Jervois on his first familiarization visit. The party stayed at Suffolk House, the Lieutenant-Governor's residence, and apart from discussions on Perak, Swettenham caught up on affairs in the Land Office. On the return trip, he took Jervois up the Bernam River, and, back at Langat, showed the new Governor round and introduced him to the Sultan. Jervois continued on his own to Singapore, leaving Swettenham to handle cases of murder and attempted murder.³³

More significantly, he had to discuss with the Sultan methods of revenue collection. The Sultan was keen for Swettenham to handle this himself. It was not until later in the month, almost certainly after consultation with Swettenham in Singapore over 9-11 July, that details of the arrangements were transmitted to Davidson.³⁴ Swettenham's Singapore visit over 9-11 July was in response to Jervois' wish to take him on a familiarization visit up the east coast, to include a visit to Patani. The party consisted of Jervois, Lieutenant H.E. McCallum, the Governor's private



Map 6. Route of Swettenham's journey from Langkat round Selangor, March 1875.

secretary, and Swettenham on the *Pluto*, with the *Thistle* under Captain Stirling going on ahead.

Upon reaching the Pahang River on 13 July, Swettenham at once set off in search of peacock, and this time succeeded in bagging one. The Bendahara proved to be in a worse state of health than on Swettenham's last visit. Over refreshments he dodged Jervois' suggestion that he accept British assistance in opening up the state by saying as was customary under such circumstances that he would have to refer the matter to his chiefs.³⁵

At Trengganu they met the aged Sultan, Tengku Omar, who had been on the throne for thirty eight years. Jervois was provided with a guard of honour of spearmen to escort him to the palace. The Sultan explained that he paid tribute (*bunga mas*) valued at \$4,000 to Siam, every three years, and made it clear that while he had no wish to visit Bangkok, he would welcome a chance to visit Singapore.³⁶ He did so in September 1875.

After looking round the town for half a day, they went north to the Siamese town of Singora. Here they met initially the Naidan, or Harbour Master, and through him indicated to the Cho Koon, the senior Siamese official in the town, that they would visit the next day. Only about one per cent of the population spoke Malay.³⁷

The Cho Koon lived in a Chinese-style house, and Jervois had a long discussion with him, ascertaining that all the revenues from Singora went to Siam, and that the Cho Koon himself frequently visited Bangkok. Swettenham was not impressed by the squalor of the place, and it is possible that his dislike of Siam and the Siamese, which was to become evident many years later, dates from this period. In the afternoon, as they were departing, their boat was caught in a storm. Later that evening Captain Stirling and three officers of the *Thistle* dined with them on the *Pluto*, before setting off for Patani.³⁸ Here, in contrast to Singora, the majority of the population were Malays. As the Raja of Patani was in Kelantan, they only visited the Kapitan China, and left at about noon on 18 July for Kelantan.

The following morning, Swettenham went up the Kelantan River to inform the Raja of the Governor's arrival, passing densely populated and cultivated banks. The Raja of Kelantan who lived about six miles upstream, clearly remembered Swettenham from Ord's visit in 1872. They had a long talk, a further tribute to Swettenham's knowledge of Malay, for the Raja presumably spoke in the broad Kelantanese dialect. With the Raja was his son, the Raja Bahru, and the Raja of Patani, who impressed Swettenham. They confirmed to him that the state was under Siam, though the Siamese did not interfere in the government of the country. They added that for the past one hundred years gold mines had been

worked in the state, but were now worked out, a clear reference, though Swettenham does not say so, to the Chinese gold mining community at Pulau.

Swettenham was taken round the town by the Kapitan China, the head of a community some 2,000 strong in a state where he believed there were 100,000 Malays. Debt-slavery was much in evidence. The Kapitan China himself had forty, and offered to sell some to Swettenham. Jervois arrived at 2:00 p.m. and was ceremoniously received by the Raja, who expressed himself delighted to meet Jervois, but was unable, in reply to Jervois' questions, to give any clear account of the boundaries of his state. He had never in his life been further than the mouth of the river. When the party left, the Governor was presented with a handsome kris, and the others with two sarongs each. The Sultan also sent down to the ship a bullock and a boat-load of fruit.

The party was back in Singapore by 22 July, where, in the absence of diary entries, Swettenham presumably busied himself in government offices till 7 August. Birch arrived on 31 July, to take part in key discussions on the future of Perak, in which Swettenham certainly was also involved.³⁹ On conclusion of the discussions on 7 August, Swettenham, accompanied by Birch and others left Singapore in the *Pluto* for Langat, stopping on the 8th for lunch at Malacca. At Jugra Swettenham brought Birch to see the Sultan. Birch mentioned his problems in Perak, indicating that this might be the prelude for more active measures against the Rajas there, and the Sultan replied tactfully that he would be very happy to hear of it. Birch carried on in the *Pluto* for Perak later that day, leaving Swettenham for what was to be his final month at Langat, apart from a stopover of a few hours in October.⁴⁰

The section of Swettenham's diary covering this period is remarkable for the references to the frustrations of working with the various rajas in Selangor. In writing this part of the diary, Swettenham was influenced by earlier discussions with Jervois on the need for annexation. He also makes much of the complaints of the common people against the rajas, in particular the Sultan's relations, Raja Kahar and Raja Yaacob, who, while paying lip-service to Swettenham's advice, were repeatedly found to have acted oppressively as soon as Swettenham's back was turned.

Swettenham indicated that disillusion with the present state of affairs had reached a very senior level, for in his first account of it, the complainants were one of Raja Kahar's chief advisers, and the Sultan's secretary. They were later joined by Tunku Sulong. They had to be pressed by Swettenham to speak out, but eventually did so, declaring that numerous people had complained to them: no-one was prepared to work for more than a bare living, because as soon

as they did so, pressure, which they were unable to resist, was exerted by one of the Rajas, to 'borrow' any surplus.⁴¹

At this stage, let Swettenham speak for himself:

I said what do you mean? I see no way to better these evils unless the country were under English rule. They said 'In plain words that is what we mean, and that is what we and all the people want. If you pity us you will give it.' I said are you sure the people want it? They said there is perhaps 1 in 100 who does not and he is a Raja. The people long for it to a man. You know, they said, the country, you have been all over it, Ulu and Hilir, and you have seen its distress and the reason of it. We have no real 'adat,' no laws, no Raja who will enforce them. If we had another Sultan, will you tell us who could fill this post worthily, who would defend the people from oppression, keep the Rajas in check, and give confidence to foreigners trading to or settling in Salangor? I then confessed I knew of no one whom I could recommend as an improvement on Sultan Abdulsammed [Abdul Samad].⁴²

Swettenham reported the complaints of abuse of power by Rajas Kahar and Yaacob to the Sultan, who appeared to be upset by the revelations, and asked for details. These Swettenham declined to give, on the grounds that this could lead to open disturbance. The old Sultan, who in his youth had been an outstanding practitioner of such mayhem was far too astute not to recognize the veiled threat in this. 'He said he must think over what I had told.'⁴³

Further confusion was recorded because the populace at large supposed that the country was now under full British rule. Swettenham pointed out that this was not the case: 'If it were under the English Government the evils they spoke of and which I deplored would cease to exist.' This was the reply of a man who foresaw that there could be a sharp change of policy in the near future, and was losing no opportunity to justify it in advance. He concluded, in exasperation:

It is rather a travesty on the "English Protection" under which the Native States flourish. On occasion some particularly bad case exasperates one into action, flying right in the face of Malay Rajas and their "adat Malayu", which is no "adat Malayu" but a very "fig-leaf of pretence" to cover the exactions, oppressions, and cruelties which they heap on a long suffering people.⁴⁴

Towards the end of August Swettenham made a brief, four-day visit to Lukut, where he was shown round by Raja Bot, and visited some of the pepper and gambier plantations in the area. The pepper vines, ten or twelve years old, were well grown and prosperous, but the gambier was overgrown with *lallang*.

During his year in Selangor, Swettenham had not only laid the foundations for the future administration of that state. He had established cordial relations with the Sultan, visited and reported on all areas of importance in the state, and made a preliminary assessment of its economic viability. If his experience in Perak in 1874 had given grounds for a claim to be an expert on that state, his Selangor experience left no doubt as to the value of his advice there as well. He was in short rapidly qualifying himself as the ablest and most knowledgeable of the younger civil servants in the Straits Settlements.

At the beginning of September, he was instructed to join the *Pluto*, taking the Governor, McCallum and McNair, together with Doctor Anderson, back up to Perak. Before turning to the troubled affairs of that state it is desirable to consider in rather more detail the subject of slavery in the Protected States: for it was in Perak that slavery was to prove a serious bone of contention.

NOTES

1. *Sw.J.*, p. 199.
2. His journal of this trip was published in *JSBRAS*, 5 (June 1880):51-68a, 'From Perak to Slim and down the Slim and Bernam Rivers.'
3. *Ibid.*
4. There appears to be an inconsistency in the dating of the diaries, for in the 1880 article he indicates his arrival at Langat on 18 February, while *Sw. J.* commences with, apparently, his first morning at Langat on 20 February: further confirmation that the diaries went through several manuscript editions.
5. See 'Instructions to a Resident of Selangor, 20 January 1875' (SSF 3/75), quoted in Sadka, 1968, *The Protected Malay States*, App. 3.
6. *Sw.J.*, pp. 199 and 202, 25 February 1875, PPC 1320:107, Vetch. 1905, *op. cit.*, p.180.
7. *Sw.J.*, p. 201, fn.1 and Swettenham to Clarke, 10 March 1875, SSF KL 61/1875. Also PSSLC 1873, papers 31 and 48.
8. *Sw.J.*, p. 207, 8 March 1875
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Sw.J.*, p. 209, 12 March 1875.
11. *Sw.J.*, p. 209, 14 March 1875.
12. For the mine at Ricko (or Rekoh) see Wong Lin Ken, 1965, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
13. *Sw.J.*, p. 213, 21 and 22 March 1875.
14. *Sw.J.*, pp. 215-8. 24-6 March 1875. 1 *bahra* = about 400 lbs.
15. S.M. Middlebrook and J.M. Gullick, 1951. 'Yap Ah Loy.' *JMBRAS*, 34(2). Republished June 1983, MBRAS Reprint No. 9.
16. *Sw.J.*, p. 219.
17. *Sw.J.*, p. 220, 27 March 1875.
18. *Sw.J.*, p. 223, 29 March 1875.
19. Haji Mohamed Nor was one of the leaders of the Pahang forces which came into Ulu Selangor and recaptured Kuala Lumpur from Raja Mahdi in the final (1872-3) phase of the civil war. They remained in Ulu Selangor, pending the

- discharge of Kudin's obligations to Bendahara Ahmad and finally settled down permanently. Linchan, *History of Pahang* and Chapter 8 below. Douglas had trouble with them in 1876-7. In Swettenham's time they were absorbed into the enlarged cadre of Selangor penghulus (Chapter 19).
20. *Sw.J.*, p. 229, 31 March 1875.
 21. *Sw.J.*, p. 231, 2 April 1875.
 22. Davidson to Col. Sec. 17 April 1875, SSF CS 12/1875. Quoted in *Sw.J.*, p. 232, fn.1.
 23. HC 1320:97 The report dated 8 April 1875 was forwarded by Clarke to Carnarvon in London, together with Swettenham's earlier report of 18 December 1874. It is reproduced as Appendix D in Chew Thesis. See also *STW*, 19 June and 20 November 1875.
 24. *Straits Observer*, 6 May 1875.
 25. *Straits Observer*, 10 May 1875 and Parkinson, 1960, op. cit., p.205.
 26. *Straits Observer*, 13 May 1875, *SDT*, 12 May 1875.
 27. CO 273/83:204 Ord to Round, 25 April 1876.
 28. For background to this episode, see HC 1320:113-4 and Cowan, 1961, op. cit., pp. 214-5, fn. 6.
 29. *Sw.J.*, pp. 244-5, 23 May 1875.
 30. *Sw.J.*, pp. 245-6, 24 May 1875. Although in his journal, Swettenham mentions that the performance was connected with the first haircutting ceremony for the Tunku Muda's daughter, some eight days old, the account which Swettenham read to *SBRAS* on 5 August 1878 makes no mention of this. *JSBRAS*, 2:163-7, 1878 reprinted in MBRAS Centenary Volume, 1977. Hobson-Jobson defines nautch as a kind of ballet dance performed by women. Swettenham also recorded the incident in *Malay Sketches*: 'The Joget,' pp. 44-52.
 31. HC 1320:116 and *Sw.J.*, p. 249, 26 May 1875.
 32. SSF KL 61/1882 Swettenham to Col. Sec., 29 June 1875, and *Sw.J.*, p. 252, 17 June 1875.
 33. *Sw.J.*, p. 254, 23 June 1875. This was doubtless in connection with his previous post as Collector of Land Revenue. Also *Sw.J.*, p. 255, 27 June 1875.
 34. *Sw.J.*, pp. 258-9, 4 July 1875 and SSF CS 77/1875 Irving to Davidson, 20 July 1875.
 35. HC 1505:9 Jervis to Carnarvon, 7 August 1875, and *Sw.J.*, p. 261, 14 July 1875. An anonymous account of this visit, possibly by McCallum, appeared in *SDT*, 29 July 1875.
 36. *Sw.J.*, p. 262, 15 July 1875.
 37. *Sw.J.*, pp. 264-5, 17 July 1875.
 38. *Ibid.*
 39. See Chapter 11.
 40. *Sw.J.*, p. 270, 9 August 1875.
 41. *Sw.J.*, p. 271, 11 August 1875.
 42. *Sw.J.*, p. 272, 11 August 1875.
 43. *Sw.J.*, p. 276, 13 August 1875.
 44. *Sw.J.*, p. 283, 22 August 1875.

Slavery, Debt-Bondage and Corvée Labour

When British administrators of the mid-Victorian era began to look closely at Malay society, they were immediately struck by the existence of three separate institutions, which affected the freedom of the individual: slavery, debt-bondage and corvée labour. (*kerah*) These were emotive issues in the eyes of the Victorian administrators raised in an atmosphere which had condemned and put a stop to the African slave trade.¹ However the three issues, while related, were in fact distinct. Some definition is therefore necessary. The enslavement of other Muslims is forbidden by Islamic law, and slavery as such was therefore restricted in Malay society chiefly to aborigines, or other non-Muslims, such as Africans brought into the Peninsula, after purchase by Malays on pilgrimage. There can have been very few of these.

Debt-bondage was much more widespread, particularly in Perak and Pahang. A Malay ruler in these states was to a large extent judged by the size of his retinue. Debt-bondage, and corvée labour formed the basis of such a retinue, and therefore played a key role in Malay society before the advent of the British. An individual who contracted a debt, generally to his ruler, was obliged to work for the ruler until the debt was paid off. Debt-bondage frequently had its origins in the need to raise money, for example, for a wedding in the family. Sometimes the basis on which the debt was contracted was genuine: sometimes less so. In any case the debt-bondsman's wife and children were usually also similarly treated.

Extortion and cynicism also played a part. Swettenham recounted one such incident from personal experience of a visit to Kuala Kangsar, shortly before Birch's murder. Here, the people were preoccupied with an incident involving a Malay raja. This Raja, Alang, seeing a man from Patani raising his trousers to keep them out of the mud as he passed by, took the action as an insult and attempted to fine him \$200. As the Patani man could not pay, Raja Alang took him and his family prisoner in his house till the money

was paid. They were given no food, and two days later, Raja Alang threatened to sell the wife and children into slavery to raise money for the fine. The following morning the man grabbed a neighbour's kris, ran amok, killing five people in the process and escaped. Such was the lawlessness of the time. One day later, while posting proclamations with the Bendahara, Swettenham spotted Raja Alang in the crowd. The Raja denied he had ill-treated the man, but finally admitted that he had been in the wrong. Now reformed, he wished, as do all devout Muslims, to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca, and requested that Swettenham lend him \$1,000 for the purpose.²

In certain parts of Perak, rich individuals chose to invest their surplus funds in debt-bondsmen, making loans to other Malays in the district. Some of the debt-bondsmen served in and lived in the creditor's household, others lived in their villages, but could be called upon to provide services. Such a situation naturally enhanced the creditor's prestige locally. While there were indeed cases where debt-bondage led to considerable injustice and hardship, this was not always the case, and debt-bondsmen were to be found who had developed a mutually satisfactory *modus vivendi* within the retinue of the creditor. The arrangements were in any case somewhat arbitrary. The ruler, or a local headman of influence might well expropriate property, or even seize a young girl who had taken his fancy. After a year or two, the girl might be passed on as wife or mistress of one of his retainers, perhaps himself a bondsman, or employed in some domestic capacity in the household.

Finally *kerah*, or corvée labour, was a kind of tax: 'In those days every able-bodied *rrakyat*, (unless specially exempted) had on demand to give so many days forced labour to the Sultan or local chief, or pay recognized compensation.'³ This was a 'much more onerous and disruptive burden than slavery or debt-bondage.'⁴ It enabled chiefs to mobilize labour on a comparatively large scale, at short notice, and whereas debt-bondage generally laid upon the creditor or chief the requirement to provide board and lodging, *kerah* did not. *Kerah* labour might fall at any time of the year, including the busiest time in the agricultural cycle. In response to these risks, the Malay farmers abandoned their houses and orchards and moved elsewhere. In any case they tended only to cultivate sufficient for their immediate needs. As a result of the threat of corvée labour, Malay communities, in the early years of British rule, were enormously unstable, to the detriment of longer term agricultural development.⁵

Swettenham's involvement with the problem began with the Pangkor Engagement. The text contained nothing to justify the abolition of debt-slavery: a source of considerable aggravation during Birch's period in Perak. Indeed his high-handed treatment of

fleeing bond-debtors, combined with his total failure to appreciate the social background, largely contributed to the alienation of the Perak chiefs. Moreover Perak was a much more settled and traditional society than was Selangor, for the Perak Sultanate dated back to 1528, whereas the Selangor Sultanate only began in 1756, with an immigrant Bugis prince and a population which included large numbers of immigrants from Sumatra. The problem was thus confounded. For in Perak traditional chiefs were required to maintain large households of retainers, providing a social justification for the institution which was largely absent in Selangor. There were estimated to be some 3,000 debt-bondsmen in Perak at this time.⁶

The issue first came to the attention of Jervois in 1875, in Penang and while on a visit to Langat to see Sultan Abdul Samad. During the visit he was introduced to a raja from the Bernam district, who asked Jervois for assistance in recovering debt-bondsmen who had fled to Pangkor. Jervois consulted Tunku Sulong and Swettenham over dinner that evening, and as a result asked for memoranda from Swettenham, Birch and Davidson.⁷

Swettenham's memorandum was prepared promptly, and submitted.⁸ In it, Swettenham set out in vivid detail the abuses of the debt-bondage system, particularly as practised in Perak, the state where he noted that most abuses occurred. 'In different states this debt-bondage is carried to greater or less extremes, but in Perak the cruelties exercised towards debtors are even exclaimed against by Malays in other states.' Families were made debt-bondsmen for generations, and their women often forced into prostitution. He distinguished between debt-bondage and full slavery, but made no mention of corvée labour. He concluded bleakly:

I have often discussed this question of debt-slavery with the Malays themselves, but they say they see no way under the rule of their Rajahs to put down this curse of their country, with all the evils that follows in its train.⁹

Swettenham returned to this theme two months later in his diary, with an account of an appeal to him by a woman whose husband had sold her into debt-slavery at Langat and then disappeared. The woman had been obliged to become a prostitute. At this point in her story, the guardian of the Sultan's house appeared. Swettenham in his journal gives an interesting account of the man's discussion with him, drawn between what he has been told to do by the Sultan's sons, to uphold the traditional arrangement, and what it would be reasonable to do, in view of the plight of women such as the one they were talking with. Swettenham supported reason, arguing that if the women, as in this case were provided only with rice, 'I think you had better not beat them

because they are using the only means at their disposal for clothing their nakedness.'¹⁰

It then became evident that the guardian of the Sultan's house was sympathetic, because his own daughter had been taken by the Sultan, before the age of six, and would in due course by the age of fourteen be indebted to him for eight years' food. In an interesting passage which illustrates how Swettenham's views were moving towards the need for a dramatic change in the system, he wrote:

I told [them] I could see no means of helping them whilst the country was under Malay rule. If it were under the English government the evils they spoke of and which I deplored would cease to exist. They both said "But it is under the English Government, it is no longer under the Malays." I told them this was not the case. Draman said "...Before you came here I can't tell you what our misery was...I can't tell you how glad I felt when I heard you were going to collect the taxes and would perhaps give me wages."¹¹

If there was no immediate solution to the end of debt-slavery in sight, Swettenham was certainly rapidly becoming reconciled to the prospect of very much more forceful intervention on the part of the British.¹²

Swettenham's pragmatic approach was in marked contrast to the outrage expressed by Birch when similar incidents were drawn to his attention.¹³ The position in Selangor, as outlined by Davidson, was very much less serious for, as we have seen, the Selangor Malays were to a large extent an immigrant community. As a result of the Selangor Civil War in the early 1870s, most of the Malay population had fled. Davidson, the Resident, was anxious that as people returned to the state, a firm line should be taken by the government, forbidding the re-establishment of slavery by the rajas.¹⁴

For the resolution of the problem it is necessary to move beyond the Perak War, which totally changed the position of the chiefs in that state. No longer were they obliged to maintain large retinues of followers, and thus no longer was there any urgent necessity for the institution of debt-bondage and *corvée* labour. In its place they had regular allowances from the state.

Positive policy on the subject from Whitehall arose from Speedy's 1875 report on Larut. This was picked up by the Secretary of State for the Colonies who directed that the practice be abolished 'with as little delay as is consistent with the necessary caution which is to be observed in the new relations with Perak.' The administration in Singapore was heavily preoccupied with the Perak War, and the mopping up operations afterwards. There was probably little chance to consider this problem. In 1878 Sir William

Robinson, by then Governor, noticing constant references to debt-slavery by Residents and Assistant Residents in their journals, requested Swettenham to obtain fuller details on the position. This he did.¹⁵

The response from both Selangor and Perak revealed that some progress had been made. Douglas in Selangor was able to report that the Sultan, Abdul Samad, had lent his support to the abolition of the institution, while Low in Perak reported that he had made it clear on his arrival in the state that no one should, from that date, be forced into debt-slavery. However he had the sense to realize that to attempt any wholesale abolition of the practice was likely to lead to a further breach of the peace.

Under his tactful influence as Resident (1877-1889), the problem faded away, largely of its own accord.¹⁶ In 1878 Low thought that a sum of around \$60,000-\$80,000 would discharge all the debtors. The matter was discussed in some detail at the meeting of the Perak State Council held on 9 October 1882 when Low was present, in which the Regent, Yusuf, was recorded as saying that he was anxious to act on British advice and abolish slavery in Perak. However he hoped that an exception might be made in respect of certain of his personal retainers.¹⁷ Eventually Yusuf complied with bad grace with a written instruction issued personally to him by Low.¹⁸ By the end of 1883, Low was able to report that debt-slavery no longer existed in Perak.¹⁹

This cannot have been completely correct, for after Swettenham took over in Perak when Low went on leave in March 1884, Smith, as Acting Governor reported to London that on 23 April Swettenham had paid to the Regent, Yusuf, arrears in respect of a backdated increase in allowance authorized by Weld for payment as soon as the debt-slavery problem had been solved. The papers make it clear that by that stage the only person to retain debt-slaves was Yusuf himself. He was given every consideration, because, while 'open to objections as his character is,' he had 'loyally supported the British.'²⁰

In the case of corvée labour, the Perak government under Low attempted a complicated compromise which first provided for the obligation to perform four days' labour to be commuted for \$1. This poll tax in turn was waived in respect of anyone who paid quit rent on his land. The system proved unpopular, and Swettenham recommended its abolition in the Perak Annual Report for 1884. But soon conditions of peace and prosperity led to the disappearance of corvée labour with no further legislative encouragement.²¹ A similar position was reached somewhat earlier in Selangor, for by 1879 Anson was suggesting to the Colonial Office, no doubt at

Swettenham

Swettenham's instigation, that a sword be presented to the Sultan of Selangor in recognition of his help in suppressing the problem.²²

It was thus that a combination of administrative tact and firmness, combined with radically changed social conditions on the west coast led to the almost painless disappearance of slavery.

NOTES

1. The background to this chapter is drawn from Gullick 1987b. See also Swettenham's own account in *British Malaya*, pp. 141-3 and 195-6. The best account of Malay debt-bondage is by Aminuddin bin Baki, 'The Institution of Debt Slavery in Perak,' *Peninjau Sejarah* 1(1), 1966. P.Loh Fook Seng, 'The British Approach to Slavery in the Straits Settlements and the Malay States, 1819 to 1910,' *JHSUM*, 3, 1964-5, is a methodical account of the abolition process.
2. *Malay Sketches: 'A Personal Incident,'* pp. 248-69.
3. HC PAR 1890, by Swettenham.
4. Gullick, 1987b.
5. *Sw.J.*, p. 303, 23 September 1875.
6. Chai Hon-Chan, *The Development of British Malaya*, OUP, 1964. Appendix B.
7. *Sw.J.*, p. 255, 27 June 1875 and fn.3. All the reports were eventually published in HC 3285.
8. It was dated 30 June, three days later. Besides appearing in HC 3285 cited above it was also published in part as Appendix B in Isabella Bird, 1885.
9. HC 3285:9-13.
10. *Sw.J.*, p. 282-3, 22 August 1875.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. See next chapter and Birch's letter of 28 July 1875 to Secretary for Native Affairs, Singapore, HC 3285.
14. HC 3285 J.G. Davidson to Secretary for Native Affairs, Singapore, 23 August 1875.
15. HC 3285:2 Swettenham to Residents of Perak and Selangor, 21 May 1878.
16. See Low's letter to Col. Sec., Singapore of 28 May 1878 for a progress report, and his policies in Wilkinson, p. 271.
17. Wilkinson, 1932, op. cit., pp. 250-1.
18. Douglas to Colonial Secretary, and Low to Colonial Secretary, both May 28, 1878, reproduced in Chai Hon Chan, 1964, op. cit.
19. HC 4192:39.
20. CO 273/127:33 OAG Straits to Sec. State, 188 of 13 May 1884.
21. HC 4958 PAR 1884, para. 199. See also Gullick, 1987, op. cit., p. 122, note 75.
22. CO 273/98:614 Anson to CO, 126 of 4 April 1879.

Perak and Birch's Murder

When he was not occupied in 1875 with affairs in Selangor or the east coast, Swettenham spent almost all his time in or concerned with Perak. Once again, with the arrival of a new Governor, Jervois, there was a radical policy-change by the Straits Government towards the Malay states. Swettenham was intimately involved with this change, which led partly and indirectly to Birch's death.

Since Swettenham had last visited Perak, in mid-1874, Birch had continued in his attempt, with little success, initially as Acting Resident, to extract from Raja Ismail the Perak regalia, without which Abdullah could not legitimately be regarded as Sultan. His instructions from the Governor, Sir Andrew Clarke, were clear. Moreover they reflected favourably on Swettenham.

Do not bother about the regalia, or any ceremony of making Abdulla sultan, and above all things I hope you will not forget to show every gentleness and deference to Ismail. Do not hurry him to any settlement of his own affairs, or to giving up anything. Interest him in inducing him to live where Abdulla will live, with the honours of a sultan. Interest him in planting sugar, tobacco, etc. Swettenham has in this direction managed his old Sultan very well.

You will have to watch the Mantri with all your eyes, and urge Speedy to do the same. Speedy will still believe him. I should make him, [Abdullah] I mean induce him, to go with you everywhere. Tell him the Sultan of Selangor is doing it with Swettenham; that his doing so will make him stronger in his country, etc. In short, organise a regular 'progress' with him, you, of course, taking care to be Al and the prominent figure.¹

Yet the instructions were disregarded. Moreover Birch had largely neglected a provision in the Pangkor Engagement. The chiefs that signed it were to be given civil pensions, in exchange for their assumed right to levy taxes on tin and any other goods passing through their territory.² As a result, and not surprisingly, the chiefs were very reluctant to give up their traditional sources of income.

Meantime, although the inquiry in Singapore had found him guilty of no more than 'an act of indiscretion' in the handling of the revenue farms in Singapore, certain of his actions in Perak either had, or were, in the course of 1875 to arouse adverse comment.

His attitude to debt-slavery was one of high-handed moral outrage. He encouraged slaves to run away from Abdullah and other chiefs to the Residency, where he hid them, and either smuggled them out of the country, or, in at least one instance, allowed one of them to marry a servant in the Resident's house. This of course was without the permission of her former owner, Abdullah. On one occasion Jervois felt bound to order that two fugitives should be sent back. In all cases the slaves were girls, a point which did not escape the notice of the Malay chiefs.³

Birch's Victorian arrogance may be summed up in a comment he made in December 1874: 'But really it concerns us little what were the old customs of the country, nor do I consider they are worthy of any consideration in dealing with the present taxation of the country.'⁴ Clarke, though not at the time aware of all the details, realized that Birch was acting in an intolerant and high-handed manner. In early 1875 he advised:

Limit all your efforts to the sea-coast and navigable waters, never mind the regalia, now and then have Ismail told quietly that he was losing money by holding back, but do not bother about the upper rivers where there are only Malays. Have patience with them. Debt-slavery is a bad thing, but until we are prepared to compensate in full and to show a better system to secure credit, let it for the present alone.⁵

As if the experience of an inquiry in Singapore in 1874 had not been sufficient, Birch further mishandled the leasing of the Perak revenue farms. The exact details are unclear, but the Governor and Executive Council were obliged to intervene to restrict the lease of the farm from three years to one year, and the price which Birch had recommended of \$6,000 per month was eventually ratified at \$7,000 per month.

Clarke in a letter to Anson, commented: 'I am very much annoyed with Birch and the head-over-heels way in which he does things, he and I will come to sorrow yet, if he does not mind. He has made a regular mull of the farms, and does not seem to have impressed either the Sultan or the ex-Sultan favourably.'⁶ In short, by early 1875 Birch had exasperated the Governor. By his ill-advised behaviour in financial matters, in Singapore and in Perak, both of which would have been well known in government circles, he must have all but forfeited the respect of his colleagues. Moreover his inflexible and high-handed attitude towards debt-

slavery and traditional methods of revenue raising had alienated the hierarchy of Perak chiefs.⁷

Scarcely had Swettenham reached Langat on 20 January 1875, when he was instructed by Braddell to proceed to Perak. This he did, accompanied by Tunku Sulong, of Sumatran descent, who had travelled extensively in the Peninsula, having lived for periods in Johore, Perak and Selangor, where he settled at Langat. Swettenham regarded him as 'exceptionally clever and enlightened for a Malay.' He became one of Swettenham's followers. This was a further instance, that of Raja Mahmood being the prime example where Swettenham's immediate rapport with Malays of standing was to serve him well in the future, for Tunku Sulong was to prove invaluable as a scout and intermediary over the following weeks.⁸

The immediate reason for Swettenham's dispatch to Perak was the failure by Birch earlier in the month to secure a reconciliation between Abdullah and Ismail. Birch feared this might lead to a disturbance, and requested the Governor to send him some troops and a gunboat. The weather was bad, and it was not until the evening of 24 January that Swettenham met up with Birch at Pasir Panjang on the Perak River. Birch was anxious to agree a site with Abdullah for his residence. They planned to go downstream to Durian Sabatang to get a boat to take Swettenham to Sayong, just short of Kuala Kangsar, to see the Bendahara. Swettenham was then to return to Bandar Bahru, meet Birch there, and travel with him up the Kinta River to visit Ismail. Thence Swettenham proposed to travel to Slim and down the Bernam River.⁹

Abdullah failed to appear the next day, so they went upstream to Rantau Panjang, meeting him at Che Mida's house. By this time the Laksamana and Raja Dris had joined the party, and Swettenham indicated to them that he regarded them as having been at fault in talking of the regalia at the abortive meeting which Birch had engineered between Ismail and Abdullah. After further discussion they agreed that Swettenham should go to Blanja the next day, to try to ascertain from Ismail whether he had any intention of signing the Pangkor Engagement.

The next night was spent at Pasir Garam, after they had met and discussed the problems with various chiefs en route. Swettenham recounted the discussions in some detail in his diary, attempting to sift out the elements of truth in a welter of contradictions, commenting, almost in desperation, 'in these stories they always take care to mix some truth with lies.'¹⁰ Reaching Pasir Telor the following day at about noon, he found Raja Yusuf, who maintained that he was prepared to sign the Pangkor Engagement only after Ismail had done so, or alternatively on the personal instruction of the Governor. As Yusuf said he planned to follow

upstream the next day to see Ismail, Swettenham commented in his diary that he would have to hurry to get an audience with Ismail before Yusuf appeared.

As they proceeded upriver, Swettenham noted with surprise that on this occasion the people fled on seeing them: a result it appeared of Birch's visit in December, when some of his followers had set fire to houses which they themselves had built. When eventually Swettenham reached Blanja on 28 January, he found Ismail in a truculent mood, indicating that he would indeed do nothing till he had seen the Governor; moreover that he was in no hurry to do so. Swettenham concluded in his diary that there was nothing to be gained by trying to force Ismail and Yusuf to sign the Engagement, or by trying to persuade Ismail to part with the regalia. His diary entry that day contains thinly veiled criticism of the impetuous and by implication tactless manner in which Birch had behaved. He could with justification claim years later: 'My visits, the general gossip of the countryside, and the information gained from friendly Malays made it clear that trouble was brewing.'¹¹

Swettenham continued his journey upriver to Senggang, where, with Tunku Sulong, he talked to various chiefs. The message was clear: they all wanted to see the Governor to get the terms of the Pangkor Engagement revised, and they had taken a dislike to Birch. Moreover they spoke of attempting to revive the sending of *bunga mas* to Siam, if by so doing they could enlist that country's help in stopping interference from Britain. Swettenham was inclined to believe that these ideas emanated chiefly from Yusuf. Later that same day at Sayong, the Bendahara indicated similar views.¹²

On 31 January, after looking round Sayong, Swettenham went on for the two miles or so to Kuala Kangsar where he spent two nights with his old friend, Che Mida. It was a relief to him, after the hostility of the previous week, to be given a warm and friendly welcome. He discussed with her the problems which she encountered with her mines in Larut. Although she was a woman of some standing within the community, even she was unable to avoid harassment by the chiefs when she tried to work the mines. The arbitrary imposition of taxes by the chiefs on all boats passing on the river had in the recent past led to a state of near famine in Kuala Kangsar, because no one dared to bring rice up into the area. Swettenham concluded that it was essential to station an officer at Kuala Kangsar, and put a road through from Kuala Kangsar to Larut. The administrative capital of the state was in fact moved from Bandar Baru to Kuala Kangsar the following year.¹³

There was then a mysterious gap of a day, which Swettenham spent with Che Mida at Kuala Kangsar. This

unexplained interlude strengthens the possibility that this was an opportunity for an amorous rendezvous. The following day, 3 February, he began his return journey. He met few of the chiefs on his swift return downriver, but Tunku Sulong reported on a visit he made to Ismail as they passed through Blanja. Ismail remained in an uncooperative frame of mind, disapproved of Swettenham's plans to visit Kinta, could not guarantee his safety if he did so, and refused his request for the loan of elephants: all fifty or sixty of them were allegedly sick.¹⁴

By the evening of 4 February, they reached Durian Sabatang, where they spent an uncomfortable night in the pouring rain. As they left the following morning, the Laksamana caught up with Swettenham's boat. In the course of their discussion Swettenham made what amounted to a final proposal: that the Governor should meet all the chiefs at Pangkor in about two months' time to give them a chance to sign the Engagement. Those that still failed to do so would be liable to be deprived of their offices by Abdullah, and replaced. The Laxamana appeared to approve, as did Abdullah himself and Birch when Swettenham met them at Batak Rabit. Swettenham discussed his future itinerary with Birch. It became evident that to go via Kinta would increase the journey by some five days, so he settled for a return via Bidor and Slim, 'with regret, because Ismail may think he has frightened me out of it.'¹⁵ The fact of the matter was that Ismail did indeed disapprove of the idea and Birch instructed Swettenham not to take that route.¹⁶

Little had changed by the time Swettenham's attention was again directed towards Penang, some two months later. Clarke, knowing by now of his imminent transfer to India, and concerned at the lack of progress in Perak, paid a final visit to Penang on 17 April. He and his party travelled up on the *Pluto* from Singapore, and collected Swettenham as they passed Cape Rachado. In Penang, there followed three days of deliberations, before the party set off for Larut, where they meet Speedy, and visited the mines. At Pangkor the following day Clarke met the Laxamana, and dispatched a long letter to Abdullah, reminding him firmly of his obligations under the Pangkor Engagement. Unfortunately the letter, apparently written at the same time by Swettenham to the Shahbandar at Clarke's request no longer survives.¹⁷

Thereafter Swettenham carried on south with Clarke, stopping at Malacca late on 23 April. Clarke continued the next day to Singapore, while Swettenham spent ten days in Malacca. This included a two-day visit to Rembau. Much of the remainder of the time was spent talking to potential investors in Selangor.

On his return to Singapore on 3 May, Swettenham's diary ends, till his departure for Langat on the 15th. We noted earlier that

he was closely associated with the social events and festivities marking the arrival of Jervois, Clarke's successor. The Perak chiefs were by this time so outraged and frustrated by Birch's behaviour in Perak that they sent a deputation to Singapore, headed by Raja Dris and the Laksamana, to complain direct to the Governor. It was the first of a series of alignments which placed Raja Dris in opposition, if not to Swettenham himself, then to his colleagues. Swettenham interpreted at a meeting between Clarke and the delegation a day or two before Jervois took over. Clarke reminded them that Abdullah had not replied to his (Clarke's) letter, written immediately on conclusion of the Pangkor Agreement, nor had he done anything to correct the abuses mentioned in the letter. He advised them to see Jervois. This they did on 9 May, with Swettenham again interpreting. But again they got no satisfaction. For Jervois it was one of the earlier of many signs that not all was well in Perak.¹⁸

Though from his junior position, Swettenham would scarcely have witnessed it at first hand, he was probably aware of the rivalry between the two governors. Anson recorded that Clarke stayed on after Jervois' arrival, 'to give him any information he might require. This was a great mistake, for Sir Andrew wanted to dictate to Sir William the policy he should adopt, and Sir William declined to be dictated to. There was jealousy between the two, and I received the confidences of both.'¹⁹ Clarke in a note to Anson said, 'Jervois has plunged into native states head-over-heels. He seems determined to get along. I hope he may not go too far.'²⁰

However before we try to follow Jervois' 'head-over-heels' activity and Swettenham's involvement, it is necessary to catch up on events in Perak since early February 1875. Birch had quarrelled over the system for collecting taxes with Abdullah in February and with the Kinta chiefs in March. He had publicly reprimanded the Mantri on 17 April, and quarrelled with Ismail and his associates at the end of the month. It was therefore not surprising that the Perak chiefs were showing signs of becoming increasingly restive.

The discussions which Swettenham had with Jervois in the early days after his arrival seem to have led to his being asked to prepare a memorandum on the position. This memorandum, dated 1 June 1875, was subsequently published in the fledgling *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* in December 1880. Swettenham had been one of the founding members two years earlier, and by the end of 1879, based by then as he was in Singapore, was conveniently able to act as Honorary Secretary. Possibly the *Journal* was short of articles, and this was considered a suitable stop-gap. It is described as, 'Part I. A Record of Events Prior to 1st June 1875.' The second part, never published, was to have been entitled, 'The Native States since 1st June 1875.'²¹

The document is of considerable interest. Assuming the original date of 1 June 1875 is correct, it reads very much like an aide-mémoire, written at the instigation of Jervois, while Swettenham was on his visit to Pahang in the second half of May and during the few days he spent in Singapore at the end of the month. In it, Swettenham gave the full history and background to events in the Peninsula. The near exasperation of the Colonial officials in Singapore at events in Perak was clearly hinted at, as was the possibility of annexation:

One solution likely to suggest itself was, no doubt, annexation, but considering the reluctance with which the Home Government had hitherto sanctioned even the slightest interference in the Malay States, that course was little considered. The only other alternative, which recommended itself as having prospect of success, was to give the native chiefs an opportunity of governing their countries under the advice and assistance of British Officers, and see whether under these circumstances they were capable of being entrusted with such responsibility. Should they after trial prove themselves unable or unwilling to maintain order in their own countries, and amicable relations with our possessions, then the other alternative would still remain.²²

The article included a British-biased account of Pangkor, and the events thereafter, which, with minor changes were to become the Swettenham gospel of later years.²³ Swettenham stressed the importance of arranging for a civil list for the chiefs, and attributed much of the present trouble to unscrupulous British lawyers: 'Neither ex-Sultan Ismail nor Raja Yusof would probably have ever taken up the attitudes they have had it not been that certain designing persons, British subjects, with the sole desire of making money, represented that if their services were employed at a sufficiently high figure, anything might be done, even to the annulling of the Pangkor Engagement and the constituting of Yusof Sultan of Perak.'

Lawyers at this time had a poor reputation in the Peninsula, and until 1873 unqualified 'law agents', not always of good character, could appear in Straits Settlements courts. It seems likely that Swettenham was referring in this instance to a lawyer, possibly Duke from Penang, who was on one occasion captured by a naval force lurking in a stockade at Larut. He explained his presence by saying that, 'he was there for amusement.'²⁴

Swettenham continued the article with a summary of what the major chiefs in Selangor and Perak were doing, adding, in a footnote dated 1880, that certain chiefs had distinguished themselves in the Perak War by their assistance to the British, and been recommended to the Secretary of State for recognition. Swords had

been sent out to Singapore for presentation to them, but had never been presented: as we shall see a malicious piece of backbiting.²⁵

Finally Swettenham concluded: 'It is possible that it must shortly become a matter for the serious consideration of Government how long this policy can be carried on, at least in Perak without some advance upon it. Abdullah's impracticality ... all force upon the Government the careful reconsideration of Perak affairs.' In late July, Swettenham prepared a further memorandum on the subject. It is noteworthy that as early as 1875, in this paper, Swettenham was aware of potential border problems between Perak and the Siamese state of Reman.²⁶

It seems likely that these notes were prepared in anticipation of further discussions which took place between Birch and Jervois in Singapore in the first week of August. It is interesting to compare the two papers. That of 1 June had only hinted at annexation. The July memorandum was much more specific: after discussing the various claimants to the position of Sultan, Swettenham says '... the present state of things cannot last. The probability is that unless steps are taken to meet it, the end will be violent, and lastly the result of that end must be a greater British interference with the affairs of Perak.' It was a telling prophecy. Yusof was now coming to the fore as a key figure amongst the chiefs of Perak. Following the opinion of most of the Perak Malays, Swettenham had little good to say of him: 'Yusof, the Raja Muda, chief of free lances, and black-mail levyers is disliked and distrusted by almost everyone in Perak. He is an inveterate gambler, a determined robber, removing elephants and buffaloes whenever he is pressed for money, while his ill fame as an abductor of the wives and daughters of the peasants is the talk of Perak.'²⁷

Further on in the same memorandum, Swettenham presciently pointed out that Yusof, unpopular as he was, had made it clear he would 'undertake any office or accept any salary from the British Government if they will annex Perak.' Finally, having discussed the problems of administration, Swettenham concluded: 'There is no hope of dealing successfully with them except from the Commanding point of complete possession of, and control over the Country where they arise.'

From the unpolished nature of this memorandum, it seems unlikely that it was ever submitted officially. Yet it very accurately mirrors Jervois' comments to Carnarvon, suggesting that the British Government should 'take possession' of the Malay States.²⁸ This would involve pensioning off all the chiefs who accepted these proposals. Jervois had even sounded out Kudin on the possibility of outright annexation.²⁹

By mid-August, Swettenham's view had hardened further: a suggestion was made from Singapore that the post of Assistant Resident be abolished. Swettenham hastened to reply to Braddell, Secretary for Native States, emphasizing the importance of retaining a British officer and a small police force at Langkat, to prevent a return of anarchy, 'in default of the one great and complete remedy of putting Salangor under the British flag.' Nothing more was heard of the suggestion, but the frustrations of Selangor and the hardline influence of Jervois were clearly having some effect.³⁰

Immediately after the early August discussions in Singapore, Jervois wrote again to the Secretary of State: 'Everything seems tending to render it inevitable that Perak must become part of the British Dominions — and that without costing a farthing or firing a shot.'³¹ Without waiting for London's response to these proposals, Jervois decided to act. At the end of August, he determined to see for himself the state of affairs in Perak. His move to do so may well have been hastened by some forthright comments in the press:

The appointment of Residents and Assistant Residents has been a failure: partly from the inherent defects of such a system, and partly from the very bad choice Sir Andrew Clarke made of men to fill these posts.... The reports from the Resident of Perak and the Assistant at Langkat would be laughable from the style in which they were written, were it not enough to make one savage to see such glorious opportunities, like pearls cast before swine, thrown in the way of these two officers, which their overweening self-esteem and vanity would not allow them to take advantage of.³²

Jervois arrived at Pangkor on 2 September to meet Birch with a large party which included Major McNair, Davidson, McCallum and Swettenham, whom he had collected from Langkat en route. Their journey took them through Larut to Kuala Kangsar, then down the Perak River via Blanja and Kampong Gajah. The intention was to persuade the chiefs to agree to Perak being handed over to Britain, to be administered by British officers.

At Blanja, there was a major meeting of the chiefs with Jervois. Swettenham was instructed to read out in Malay the text of the document which Jervois wanted them to sign, inviting British rule, and ask the chiefs if they would accept such proposals. The four senior chiefs present were Raja Yusof, Raja Dris, Ismail and the Bendahara, seated on chairs with the Europeans. The rest sat on the floor. Raja Yusof and Raja Ismail indicated they would support, but the others prevaricated. The meeting then adjourned, and the chiefs met among themselves. They returned some time later suggesting some minor changes, which were agreed, raising the

hopes of the Governor and his party that the letter would now be signed. Then further arguments arose among the chiefs. Raja Yusof and Raja Dris pulled out in disgust, that Ismail should prefer the advice of the disreputable Toh Nara to theirs.³³

On the last day of the visit, Jervois met Abdullah. Swettenham was surprised to see in his crowd of supporters Syed Mashor, who was one of the most famous Malay fighters in Selangor in the early 1870s. Many years later, when Swettenham got to know him well in Selangor, he reminded him of the occasion. Was it true, Swettenham enquired that if Abdullah gave the signal, it was agreed that Mashor and his men should run amok in the Governor's party? 'Rather hurt and deprecating the question, he said, "Yes, but the signal was not given."³⁴ Jervois, oblivious of the risk he had run, gave Abdullah fifteen days to decide whether or not to sign the letter, and returned to Singapore on 15 September.

A group photograph dating from this period, and often mistakenly attributed to the time of the Pangkor Engagement, includes the young Swettenham. His stance and look well demonstrate the self-assured, and arrogant young man that he must have been.³⁵ Back in Singapore Jervois promised Carnarvon a detailed account of the visit, but events overtook him, and this was never written.³⁶

Meantime the Perak chiefs' dissatisfaction was becoming more pronounced, though not necessarily more overt. Birch, though aware of rumours of possible assassination attempts, seems to have been able to allay the concern of Jervois during his visit. After the chiefs had complained earlier in the year to Singapore about Birch's behaviour, and been rebuffed by the Governor, they had met on 21 July to plot his removal; the use of poison, magic and assassination were discussed. The meeting was noteworthy in that the chiefs were unanimous for the first time in many years: ironically it was Birch's tactless behaviour which had brought about that unanimity. By 12 August Birch was aware of a poison plot, and was almost certainly aware that arms were being brought into Perak from Penang.³⁷

Despite all the evidence to the contrary, as late as mid-October Birch was reassuring the Governor: 'Nothing can exceed the general good feeling, and this Yusof and Dris do all they can to foster. Everything is perfectly quiet.'³⁸ More than one commentator on events at this period in Perak has remarked that there seemed to be an element of suicide in the way in which Birch courted the unpopularity of the chiefs, and at the same time concealed from Jervois the seriousness of their opposition.

If Birch had been guilty of positive deception, in hiding from Jervois the true state of affairs, Jervois himself did little better in his

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dealings with Carnarvon in London. Carnarvon had been kept informed of affairs up to Jervois' Perak visit in early September. Thereafter, he was kept in the dark. Jervois did not report in detail on this visit till a month later. When he did so, he gave a detailed analysis of the troubles in Perak. Of the Residential system he had this to say:

The position of a Resident at the Court of a Malay State is in many aspects a peculiar one. If his advice be followed, he is in a position to be of great benefit to the State for the prosperity of which he is in a great measure held responsible. When however, as has been the case in Perak, his advice is for the most part not followed, his powers of usefulness must obviously be very restricted.³⁹

He went on in the same dispatch to consider annexation and direct rule, but discarded the idea as a result of his discussions with the chiefs. He then outlined his proposals for governing the country through Queen's Commissioners. Davidson and Birch were to be the first, as coequals, while Swettenham would take over temporarily in Selangor from Davidson. At a later stage, Birch was to be posted to Selangor. This of course enabled Birch to be removed without apparent loss of face. We must therefore conclude that Birch had by then forfeited Jervois' confidence. In this he reflected press opinion, which scarcely a month before, had reported:

The policy we must adopt in future must be more decided, with less talk and more action, and assuredly such a policy cannot be carried out with the instruments Sir Andrew Clarke chose to use. If these are relegated to their former positions they cannot blame either the present governor or the Colonial Office, they must rather impute it to their patron's rashness and their own incompetency.⁴⁰

Reporting on his departure from Perak in the same dispatch, Jervois wrote that he was leaving, 'Mr Birch, the Resident in Perak, and Mr. Swettenham (who, as I have already observed, has a special knowledge of the Perak people, and, I should add, is a most perfect Malay scholar), to await Abdullah's reply which he had promised to give me in 12 days.'⁴¹ The final paragraphs of this dispatch are revealing:

It might possibly be suggested that the Malays might make some forcible resistance to the Government of Perak being undertaken by British Officers. I beg to assure your Lordship that I have made most particular enquiry on this point, and am convinced that there is not the least probability of such an event.⁴²

The penultimate paragraph of Jervois' dispatch read as follows:

I am sensible that, in acting without instructions, I have incurred a grave responsibility, but I felt it was impossible to carry on negotiations with Abdullah and the other Chiefs unless I spoke as if charged with full authority. I accordingly took upon myself to do what, under the circumstances, I considered your Lordship would wish to have done, and in the course which I pursued, I endeavoured to avoid any step which could in any way embarrass Her Majesty's Government. Should the policy I have adopted not be approved, it will be possible without difficulty either to recede or advance, according to your Lordship's desire.⁴³

A few hours after Jervois had sent this dispatch, he received a private letter from Carnarvon in answer to his of July, talking of annexation, in which Carnarvon specifically rejected such a policy. But it was now too late.⁴⁴

After Jervois returned from Perak to Singapore in mid-September, Birch and Swettenham remained, to try and ensure acceptance of the new policy by Abdullah and the other chiefs. A revealing press comment, supplied presumably from Jervois' deputation, recorded that the Resident and his Assistant were 'at daggers drawn.' No other trace of such disagreement survives from the welter of documentation produced later. But such a state of affairs seems eminently possible as Swettenham surveyed the position with far greater perception than his superior.⁴⁵

Swettenham was left under no illusions as to the serious state of affairs, for the next day he noted stories circulating of Abdullah's plans to murder Birch and commented in his diary: 'There seems to be only one opinion amongst the Malays of any sense, and that is that a very little would lead to a quarrel now, and the only way to prevent a disturbance in Perak is to let them see we are in earnest.'⁴⁶

The first event of significance was Ismail's refusal to sign the letter drafted by Jervois. Not only did he refuse to sign, but sent a letter back, evidently composed by the Mantri explaining why. Meantime Abdullah was making no attempt to consult the other chiefs, whose advice he maintained was necessary before he could sign Jervois' letter.

The 17 and 18 September were taken up with endless consultations, rumours, counter-rumours and threats, which involved Swettenham and Birch ordering the sepoy with them to fire blank cartridges. However there was a setback on 18 September, when Birch received what he regarded as an impudent letter from Abdullah asking for certain supplies to be sent to him. Birch fulminated to the messenger bearing the letter, Dato Sagor, that he was not a shopkeeper, and was disinclined to help Abdullah,

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who had broken his word to the Governor by not going to consult the chiefs. He did however agree to pay for the supplies. Yusof and Dris eventually signed the necessary letters on 19 September. These had been drafted by Birch and Swettenham two days earlier.⁴⁷

Having extracted the necessary letters from Yusof and Dris, Birch and Swettenham cabled the news to Jervois, indicating that they thought any agreement between Abdullah and Ismail was now impossible. Finally they requested a small body of troops be sent to them at Bandar Bahru, together with a gunboat and sepoy at Kuala Kangsar. This, they said, 'will preserve order easily and prevent any disturbance.'⁴⁸

By this time they were seeing a lot of their new allies: 'Raja Dris, Nakhodah Trang, Raja Yusof and some of his sons were on the most friendly terms with us, constantly in the Residency and some of them dining with Mr Birch and myself.'⁴⁹ At this point it is perhaps worth noting that the letter signed by Yusof and Dris asked for 'complete assistance,' rather than a British officer 'to govern Perak.' It was enough in the eyes of Birch, Swettenham and Jervois in Singapore. But the Governor significantly did not send a copy of it to the Colonial Office in his dispatch of 16 October 1875.⁵⁰

Swettenham set off upriver for Kuala Kangsar, which he reached on the evening of 22 September, to await the arrival of Speedy's sepoy from Larut. They appeared the following evening. Swettenham's attempts over the next five days to persuade the Bendahara to sign a suitable letter were fruitless, despite the intercession on two occasions of the indefatigable Che Mida. He therefore departed early in the morning on the 29th, reaching Pasir Panjang in the evening, where he found both Birch and Abdullah. Birch had spent much of the previous week in a futile exchange of messages with Abdullah on the advisability of signing the letter requesting Jervois' assistance. Abdullah had wavered between truculence and near imbecility, but still had not signed.

Birch felt, rightly as it turned out, that Abdullah was about to capitulate. While he was therefore encouraged by further messages from Jervois the following day, he chose not to reveal the contents of this letter to Abdullah. Jervois' letters included a final offer to Abdullah, providing, instead of annexation, an offer to administer Perak with British officers in the name of the Sultan. The second, for use in event of Abdullah's absolute non-cooperation, was addressed to Yusof, and offered to make him Sultan in Abdullah's place.

However on 1 October, with Swettenham's involvement as emissary of Birch, and interpreter, Abdullah finally capitulated by

putting his stamp on a letter requesting, 'complete assistance to Perak and [to] govern Perak.'⁵¹ In exchange he received a written promise of a pension. Once again Tunku Sulong was instrumental in obtaining Abdullah's signature.⁵²

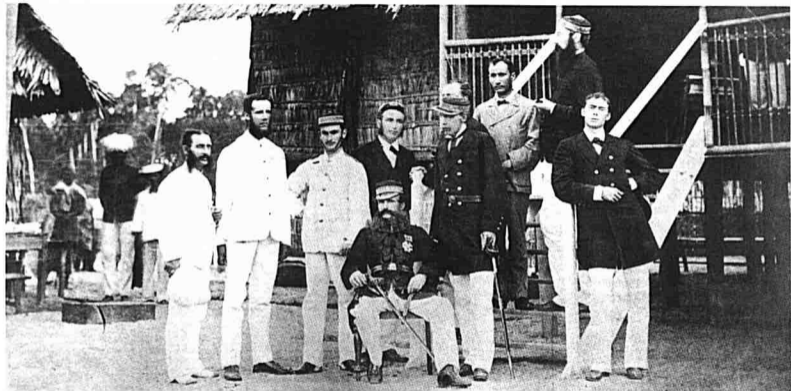
At this stage Birch and Swettenham seem to have made a serious tactical error. The sensible move would have been to congratulate Abdullah on his wise decision, tell him nothing of Jervois' move to replace him with Yusof as Sultan, and generally allow tensions to ease. Instead they put pressure on him to sign further documents implementing a concession of authority which he had already made. When he balked at this, they showed him Jervois' letter to Yusof, and told him that if he did not sign within twelve hours, Yusof would be made Sultan. Faced with these pressures, Abdullah capitulated once again, and signed, with half an hour to spare.⁵³ The documents acknowledged the British Residents and gave complete control of the judiciary in Perak to British officers, excepting only in religious matters. They also provided for British Residents to be given full powers in the Sultan's name to administer the country and collect and spend revenues. The capitulation was complete, and imposed in a manner which Abdullah must have found humiliating in the extreme. It was this treatment, more than anything else which must have hardened his heart against Birch.

Swettenham was responsible for the translation of all the letters and drafts. He had a full time, for there were a number of drafts which ultimately, for one reason or other, were not used. Consequently he was badly in need of sleep when finally he embarked on the *Pluto*, at 2:00 a.m. on 4 October, taking with him to Singapore the signed documents for printing.

From 6 to 23 October Swettenham was kept busy in Singapore, getting Abdullah's proclamations printed, together with revenue notices which Birch planned to distribute on 1 November, the date the new arrangements were to come into force. Although Birch had concealed from Jervois the tense state of affairs in Perak, Jervois cannot have been entirely ignorant. The press, in addition to carrying rumours of the annexation of Perak, also carried rumours of plans to assassinate Birch.⁵⁴ When Swettenham left Singapore, he had with him another proclamation, this time from Jervois, declaring that HM Government, 'in compliance with the request of the Sultan and chiefs of Perak' had decided to administer the government of Perak through Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners of the Queen. 'They are to act under the Governor's instructions, but to be advised by a Malay Council of Rajahs of Perak of the highest rank.'⁵⁵ At the same time, Swettenham had also been appointed temporarily as Resident in



11. Captain Speedy of Larut in Abyssinian dress.

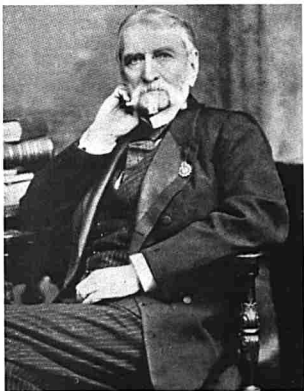


12. Group photo probably of 15 September 1875. From L. to R., Captain Anderson, W. Innes, H.E. McCallum (private secretary to Governor), Sir William Jervois (seated), H.F.P. Plow, J.W.W. Birch (standing with walking stick), Major J.F.A. McNair (partly obscured by Birch), Captain F. Stirling, T.C.S. Speedy (standing sideways on the steps) E.A. Swettenham, lounging against the pillar.



13. Sir Harry Ord,
Governor, 1868 - 1873.

14. Sir Andrew
Clarke, Governor,
1873 - 1875.





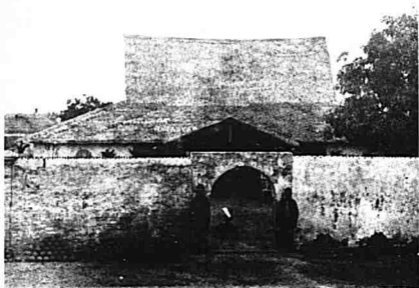
15. Tunku Kudin and Syed Zin, seated, J.W.W. Birch, Raja Ismail (large headgear), J.G. Davidson (facing sideways) and attendants.



16. Sir William Jervois, Governor, 1875 - 1877.



17. The town of Klang, 1870s.



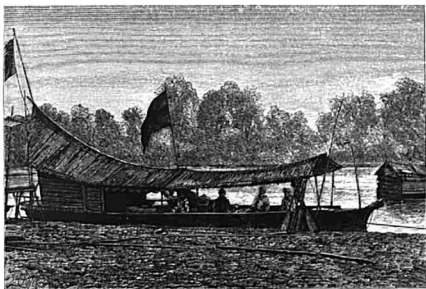
18. Tunku Kudin's compound at Klang. Note cannon in doorway, and cannon balls against the walls.



19. The Sultan of Selangor's *istana* at Langat.



20. Sir William
Robinson, Governor,
1877 - 1879.



21. The Resident's boat on the Perak River.



22. 'Our boat at Blanja' Swettenham, Kassim, the cook and J.W.W. Birch.



23. Sultan Abdullah and the Perak Chiefs.

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Selangor to replace Davidson who, with Birch, had been made a Queen's Commissioner in Perak.⁵⁶

Swettenham, when in Singapore and as one of the most knowledgeable men on Perak must have advised Jervois on the conditions there. Others have argued that Swettenham was too junior to be consulted, and was too ambitious to volunteer his own assessment of the precarious situation against the advice of the Resident.⁵⁷ Yet what we know of Swettenham's personality suggests that he was anything but timid. Indeed his diary indicates that on arrival in Singapore on 6 October, he went straight to Government House.⁵⁸

In the absence of documentary evidence to the contrary, we must assume that Swettenham decided to give his unwavering support to Jervois' new policy, unauthorized by London. In so doing he acted with total disregard for the danger to which he was exposing not only his superior, Birch, but also himself, by failing to advise the Governor on how serious the situation was. Having for one reason or another kept to himself the true state of affairs in Perak, Swettenham left Singapore on 23 October with the necessary proclamations and revenue notices.

After a brief stop in Langat, Swettenham reached the mouth of the Perak River on the morning of 26 October, accompanied by two of Yusof's sons, Raja Mahmood of Selangor fame, and two others. Where Tunku Sulong had guided and advised Swettenham in the early stages of the Perak affair, Raja Mahmood now stepped in: partly perhaps because he scented trouble and wished to be involved, partly no doubt as a result of his regard for Swettenham's role in Langat over the previous year. The river was flooded, so they did not reach Bandar Bahru till 5:00 p.m., where they found Birch laid up with a badly sprained ankle. After dinner Swettenham explained to two of the Perak chiefs who were there the contents of the Governor's proclamation.

The afternoon of the following day was spent on a visit to Kuala Kinta, where tolls were being exacted illegally, despite Birch's instruction that these should stop. Those responsible were driven off, and Swettenham, Birch and Lieutenant Abbott R.N. who formed part of the group, returned to Bandar Baru, to find that some of the sepoy were drunk. The sergeant-major in charge, a giant of six-foot-four was in the same state, and violent. It was only with some difficulty that they overpowered him, and got him into the lock-up.⁵⁹

It was agreed the following day that while Birch went downstream to post the notices at Kota Setia, Swettenham would do likewise as far upstream as Kota Lama, and talk to the chiefs on the way. He would return to meet Birch on 3 November at Pasir Salak,

where they were expecting trouble. Calling at Blanja, the village where ex-Sultan Ismail lived, he failed to get an interview. Yusof at Senggang assured him that nothing would be achieved without a fight. From Senggang he went on to Kuala Kangsar.⁶⁰ On the final day of his stay at Kuala Kangsar, Swettenham visited the notorious village of Kota Lama, in the company of Raja Mahmood. When Birch had attempted to land there in July that year, the villagers had threatened to kill him. Swettenham however was allowed to land, and visited a man who had been shot in the shoulder the night before, in an attempt to settle a grudge.

Swettenham claimed he had forgotten to bring the proclamations with him. This may well have been calculated forgetfulness on his part, for he was well aware of the truculent attitude of the Kota Lama people. This impression was reinforced by his discussions with the elders of the village: the deputy headman and five elders were armed to the teeth. They said that they acknowledged only the Bendahara, the Sultan lived a long way away, and if Swettenham wished to post his notices, they would not actively oppose him. Through all this Raja Mahmood stood silently by, amazed, as he later told Swettenham, at the way the villagers were talking. Swettenham considered that it was only Raja Mahmood's presence and his reputation as a fighter which had prevented violence. Swettenham took his leave of Che Mida in Kuala Kangsar early in the morning on 4 November, and heading downstream, reached Blanja by 4:00 p.m. The weather being hot and sultry, Swettenham relaxed in the boat wearing only his sarong.⁶¹

At Blanja they found a large collection of boats and men gathered. While they were still some distance from the shore, one Haji Ali waded out to their boats: 'This Haji Ali, a tall, well-made man in the prime of life, was the genial person of evil reputation who...had already distinguished himself by murdering one of the low-country chiefs. Notwithstanding this fact, the Haji was always anxious to convey the impression that he was entirely friendly to me, but I distrusted him in common with the rest of the Blanja faction.'⁶²

At this stage, according to Raja Mahmood's own later account of events, Raja Mahmood suggested to Swettenham that he should run amok, no doubt killing Haji Ali in the process, and as many other of the hostile Malays as he could reach. Swettenham dissuaded him: it would have been suicide for the whole party.⁶³

Haji Ali then seated himself in Swettenham's boat, and announced that Birch had been murdered at Pasir Salak by Maharaja Lela. As proof, Maharaja Lela had sent Birch's boat to Ismail at Blanja, but Ismail had refused to receive it, and sent it back

downstream two hours earlier. After initial disbelief on the part of Swettenham, he and his party began to realize the truth of Haji Ali's story. Raja Mahmood at this stage seized his kris, and by his own account, put on his trousers in front of Haji Ali. As Malay single combat entailed leaping about, for reasons of modesty Malay warriors donned trousers before going into battle. Hence Mahmood's act was a declaration that he, a much-feared killer, meant to fight to the death: the message would not have been lost on any of the Malays present.⁶⁴

Haji Ali ended his account by telling Swettenham that the Malays had staked the river at Pasir Salak to prevent him from getting through as he proceeded downstream, and were lying in wait to murder him as well. They believed that once having rid themselves of Birch and Swettenham, there would be no further interference from these unwelcome Europeans. Finally, on behalf of ex-Sultan Ismail, he extended to Swettenham an invitation to go on land to meet him. Ismail, it will be remembered, had refused to see him on the upstream journey.

Swettenham, with considerable presence of mind, told Haji Ali to go back with the news that he would follow. This was merely a ruse to get rid of him so that Swettenham could take Raja Mahmood's advice. Mahmood said it would be madness to land at Blanja, where they would all be murdered. A return upstream would be almost impossible, so they had no option but to take their lives in their hands and try to force a way downstream through the blockade back to Bandar Bahru, or whatever might remain of it.

Since all the men in both boats had heard Haji Ali, and the local Perak boys to a man refused to go on, Swettenham was left with an experienced Manila boatboy, Nino, three foreign Malays and Raja Mahmood's two men as crew. Raja Mahmood and Swettenham were the passengers, together with Swettenham's Chinese cook, who to Swettenham's surprise elected to join the downstream party: 'he was not a man of war, and I thought he would prefer to remain where he was, for they all realized that the danger would be in staying with me. When I asked him, however, he smiled a not quite pleasant smile, and producing a long knife said he did not mean to move [from the boat.]'⁶⁵

Swettenham now hurriedly scribbled a final paragraph in his diary in pencil, explaining the position, paying tribute to Raja Mahmood's role: 'Mahmood is a real plucky fellow and I'm fortunate in having him. I will leave this book with a man of the boat who'd rather not go, in case I should not get through to Singapore. But D.V. we will go for them yet: anyhow I can't turn back.'⁶⁶ This done, the party prepared to get the boat into mid-stream.

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Just at this moment Haji Ali reappeared to take them ashore. He was genuinely surprised when they told him they had decided to press on downstream. 'You cannot pass, it is certain destruction,' were his words. They insisted, and as they passed beyond Blanja downstream, his final words rang out: 'No doubt you think yourselves very fine fellows, but you will be killed all the same.'⁶⁷

NOTES

1. Vetch, 1905, op. cit., pp. 176-7, quoting Clarke's letter to Birch, 16 November 1874.
2. Item 9 in the Pangkor Engagement.
3. Khoo Kay Kim, 1965-6, op. cit.
4. EPO, p. 6 and CO 273/88: 518-49 Birch to CS, Singapore, 14 December 1874.
5. Vetch, 1905, op. cit., p. 182.
6. Clarke to Anson, 25 March 1875, cited in Anson, op. cit., p. 323.
7. Winstedt and Wilkinson, 1934, op. cit., give an extended analysis of the two protagonists, Birch and Abdullah.
8. SSF KL 61/1882 Memo by Swettenham, 27 June 1875.
9. *Sw.J.*, p. 183, 24 January 1875. See previous chapter.
10. *Sw.J.*, p. 185, 26 January 1875.
11. *Sw.J.*, pp. 186-9, 28 January 1875 and *Footprints*, p. 54.
12. *Sw.J.*, pp. 190-1, 30 January 1875.
13. HC 1709:52, Jervois to Carnarvon, 29 of 19 August 1876.
14. *Sw.J.*, p. 194, 3 February 1875.
15. *Sw.J.*, p. 196, 5 February 1875.
16. CO 273/87:140 Swettenham's detailed evidence.
17. *Birch Journals*, p. 255, 23 April 1875.
18. HC 1709:103.
19. Anson, 1920, op. cit.
20. *Ibid.*
21. 'Some Account of the Independent Native States of the Malay Peninsula, especially of the circumstances which led to the more intimate relations recently adopted towards some of them by the British Government,' by F.A. Swettenham. *JSBRAS*, 6:161-202, December 1880.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
23. See Chapter 48.
24. Winstedt and Wilkinson, 1934, op. cit., p. 86.
25. See Chapter 16.
26. This is reproduced in full in *Sw.J.*, Appendix 1, pp. 332-5. It is preserved as SP 55/83, in ANM.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Jervois to Carnarvon, 10 July 1875, in PRO 30/6-40 quoted by Cowan, 1961, op. cit. p. 227, fn. 41.
29. See Gullick, 1986b, op. cit., p. 33.
30. SSF 61/1875 Swettenham to Col. Sec., SS, 21 August 1875.
31. PRO 30/6-40, quoted in Cowan, p. 227 fn. 41.
32. *Straits Observer*, 27 August 1875.

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33. CO 273/87:190 ff. Swettenham's detailed evidence.
34. *Footprints*, p. 57
35. J. Falconer and J.M. Gullick, 1988, 'The Bandar Bahru Photograph of 1875.' *JMBRAS*, 61(1):21-34. This article gives a convincing account of the dating and identities of those pictured.
36. HC 1505:16 Jervois to Carnarvon, 12 of 18 September 1875.
37. Parkinson, 1960, op. cit., p. 227 quoting Mallal, p. 104.
38. Birch to Jervois, 16 October 1875 quoted in Parkinson, op. cit., p. 227.
39. HC 1505:31-9 Jervois to Carnarvon, 16 October 1875.
40. *Straits Observer*, 24 September 1875.
41. HC 1505:31-9.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. Carnarvon to Jervois, 13 September 1875 in PRO 30/6-40, quoted in Cowan, 1961, op. cit., p. 230.
45. *Straits Observer*, 21 September 1875.
46. *Sw.J.*, 16 September 1875, p. 297.
47. *Birch Journals*, 17 and 19 September 1875, pp. 323-9, *Sw.J.*, 17 - 19 September, pp. 297-302.
48. *Ibid.*, 19 September 1875, p. 329.
49. Swettenham's detailed evidence, CO 273/87:156.
50. HC 1505:31-52.
51. *Birch Journals*, 1 October 1875, p. 350.
52. *Sw.J.*, 10 October, p. 306.
53. *Sw.J.*, 1-3 October 1875, pp. 306-8, and Appendix 2, p. 339.
54. For example *Straits Observer*, 1 October 1875.
55. HC 1505:50-1.
56. SSGG, 22 October 1875. This reflects Jervois to Carnarvon, 16 October 1875, in HC 1505:31-9.
57. See Parkinson, 1960, op. cit., p. 232.
58. *Sw.J.*, 6 October 1875, p. 309.
59. *Sw.J.*, 27 October 1875, p. 313.
60. See Chapter 10 for his experience there of the inequities of slavery.
61. CO 273/87:513 Haji Ali, detailed evidence.
62. *Malay Sketches*: 'A Personal Incident' pp. 248-69.
63. J. de Vere Allen, (ed.), 'Raja Mahmood of Selangor's Account of the Perak War, 1875' in *Peninjau Sejarah*, 3(1):63-70, 1966. The original text is in CO 273/384: 395-411 Sir Arthur Young to CO, 65 of 26 February 1912.
64. This episode was related a number of times. HC 1505: 190-1 contains Haji Ali's statement of 29 November 1875. For Raja Mahmood's story see J. de V. Allen (ed.), 1966, above. Clifford explains the significance of putting on trousers in preparation for a fight in *Studies in Brown Humanity*, p. 37. Swettenham's own account of the incident is found in *Malay Sketches*, pp. 203-5, and *Footprints*, pp. 57-60.
65. 'A Personal Incident,' op. cit.
66. *Sw.J.*, 4 November 1875, p. 318.
67. 'A Personal Incident,' op. cit.

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As they travelled downstream to Bota any doubt which Swettenham and his party may have had about the truth of Haji Ali's report was quickly dissipated. For scarcely an hour into their journey, moored on the opposite bank to the village they spotted Birch's boat, the *Dragon*. Swettenham resisted Raja Mahmood's suggestion that they stop to attack the people in charge. Haji Ali also made his way downstream, to Durian Sabatang, where he caught up with Abdullah, and reported to him: 'There only remains now Mr Swettenham, he is the most cunning of the two.'¹

The men had been paddling since 8:30 a.m., had eaten only one meal, and now faced the prospect of a night's work if they hoped to pass Pasir Salak by night, let alone get beyond Bandar Baru, which they believed to be in enemy hands. In addition, their government boat was painted white, and so conspicuous in contrast to the unpainted native boats that they did not consider it worthwhile even to lower the Union Jack. The prospect of an unsuccessful and bloody outcome was only too real.

Although there was no moon, for it was in the first week of Malay new year, the night was initially starlit. The only factor in their favour was that the river was high, the current consequently strong, and the risk of running aground on the shoals of the river thus reduced. For arms they had only a shotgun and two Snider rifles, which they doubted would be adequate for the opposition which they anticipated. Later in the evening, a thick mist began to rise from the river, and this so confused them that at one stage only a snag in the current indicated to them that they were rowing in the wrong direction: a loss of about thirty minutes, according to Swettenham's calculation.

By about 10:00 p.m. the boatmen were falling asleep over their paddles, and lights on both banks suggested that the Malays were watching out for them. Swettenham himself was exhausted, and told Raja Mahmood to wake him as they approached Pasir Salak. Their hopes rose when it became evident that the strong current would get them there well before dawn. Mahmood woke

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him at about 1:30 a.m. The shoals on the river meant that they had to choose the deep water, under one bank or another. They chose the deepest water on the Kampong Gajah side.

Huge fires were blazing on the bank, and round each were grouped a number of armed men — indeed the whole place was on the *qui vive*.... We made for the deep water under the bank. Just at this moment the thick white veil of mist came down over the river, and under its sheltering cover we glided swiftly down, the light of blazing logs, close though they were, shining vaguely through the fog, while now and then a man's figure, of seemingly gigantic proportions, looked out from the firelit haze.²

To their enormous surprise, they found themselves at the downstream end of the village, apparently unnoticed by the watchers on the banks. The barrier never existed, except possibly in the mind of Haji Ali. Perhaps the Malays had assumed that there was no chance of the boat arriving before dawn, and had planned to stake the river in the early morning. The last challenge lay ahead:

Just as I was thinking a very sincere thanksgiving, the bow of the boat suddenly ran on the shore and stuck there fast. We were so close to the bank that this happened without the slightest warning. For an instant the steersman had given the rudder a wrong turn, and we were stranded. To my dismay I saw on the high bank, exactly over us, a large fire with eight or ten men round it. I seized the shotgun, Mahmud had a rifle and we knelt with fingers on trigger covering two of the figures that were distinct enough in spite of the mist, for we were hardly ten feet distant from them.

Two of our men with poles were making superhuman efforts to push off the boat, when a man on the bank called out, "whose boat is that?" One of our men replied, "Haji Mat Yasin's," having seen his boat at Blanja. "Where are you from?" was the next enquiry, and the reply was "Blanja." "Where are you for?" and other questions followed, but by this time the boat was off and we were drifting stern-foremost out into the stream and the sheltering mist. As the distance widened and shouts came to stop, the answers returned were derisive and misleading, for everyone felt the real danger was past...³

Such was Swettenham's account of the event at the time and as recounted at the turn of the century. By the 1920s however, he had embellished the story: a Malay girl-friend had hidden him in the bottom of the boat, under sacks of copra, and thus he had passed through without detection.⁴ It would not of course have been politic to give that story at the time. It could just have been true, for

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Swettenham had on several occasions previously passed up and down the river without other disapproving Europeans to retail his extra-curricular liaisons in the gossip-mills of Penang or Singapore. Attention has already been drawn to the opportunities which might have been open to him on his visits to Che Mida. On balance however, it seems an unlikely story, for the boat in which they were travelling was white, and was flying the Union Jack. Had it been spotted, on the assumption that Swettenham had been murdered upstream, whoever was in it would have been expected to stop along the river to relay the news. Why in any case should such a boat be carrying copra? Moreover, while such a story could well have its attractions when relayed forty-five years later in London, it was not consistent with, or flattering to the image which the young Swettenham was at such pains to project. It seems wisest therefore to conclude that once again, Swettenham was indulging in his well-known habit of embellishing a good story.

Five miles further downstream they slipped past Bandar Baru, without challenge although they were tempted to shoot at the sentries on watch by the lights. It was not till some ten miles further on at 3:00 a.m. that they were eventually challenged, and found to their great relief that they had met up with the Selangor steam launch. From those on the launch they learned that Bandar Bahru was not in enemy hands. They therefore returned upstream and reprimanded the sentries for exposing themselves to attack.

Subsequently they learned that a party had been sent to pursue them downstream. It was headed by a notorious brigand, Panglima Prang Semaun, about whom Swettenham was later to write, but they did not succeed in overtaking Swettenham's boat. Swettenham himself remained throughout his life grateful to Raja Mahmood, who had saved him on that occasion, both by his wise advice and by his formidable presence, which certainly made all the other Malays hesitate before attacking.⁵

Years later in 1911, when the old warrior had retired to Mecca in the odour of sanctity and some poverty, he wrote to the Colonial Office in London, requesting changes in his pension arrangements. The account which he then gave of events thirty five years earlier matched in some, but not all respects, Swettenham's, and it has been suggested that Swettenham helped him draft this shortly after the events occurred, perhaps in justification of the sword eventually awarded him,⁶ or in the 1890s, when on two occasions Mahmood applied for a pension. Had the story of the copra sacks been true, Raja Mahmood would have been the only credible witness, and it would have been in Swettenham's interest to assist in the drafting of Mahmood's expurgated version of events. If there were expurgations, Raja Mahmood was not a man who would readily

accede to an account that was other than wholly truthful. It is a further argument against Swettenham's 1920s version involving the copra sacks.⁷

Back at Bandar Bahru they heard from Lieutenant Abbott, R.N. the story of Birch's murder. Birch had returned from downstream earlier than expected, reaching Pasir Salak at midnight on 1 November. He was accompanied by Abbott, a party of twelve Sikh guards, an orderly, a Malay interpreter and a number of boatmen, in all about forty, with adequate arms and ammunition. He had however ample warning that trouble was likely for at least the last three months. It is therefore remarkable that on heading upstream he should have sent away the five British seamen he had with him, and retained only twelve of the fifty sepoy available. By arriving a day earlier than planned in Pasir Salak, he effectively ensured that neither Swettenham nor Raja Mahmood would be there. Birch's party anchored in mid-stream, and the next morning crossed over to the bank. Abbott left, presumably with Birch's approval, to shoot snipe, thus further reducing his support at a crucial moment, while Birch sent word to Maharaja Lela that he wished to see him, either on the boat or at his house. Maharaja Lela's reply was, 'I have nothing to do with Mr Birch.' Thus the overall effect of Birch's arrangements,

...was to combine maximum provocation with the minimum strength. Birch's last journey could be plausibly described as something between a desperate gamble and deliberate suicide. If his mission was to ensure the military conquest of Perak, he could hardly have gone about it in any more effective way. If he wanted to turn personal failure into a legend of heroic martyrdom, he took every step which would make this almost certain. Of his physical courage there can be no doubt at all.⁸

Maharaja Lela had earlier summoned his people and told them that if Birch attempted to post notices, he was to be killed on the orders of the Sultan and the downriver chiefs. He then told his men to follow the orders of his father-in-law, Pandak Indut, as if they were his own. On Birch's arrival, the people were summoned. When Birch's interpreter posted a proclamation on a goldsmith's shop by the bank of the river, Pandak Indut tore it down. The news was relayed to Birch, and to Maharaja Lela. Birch meantime proceeded to take his morning bath in a floating bath house by the riverbank, under the guard of a Sikh orderly. This in itself calls for some explanation, for if he was aware that the first notice had been torn down, he should under the circumstances have been on his guard for trouble. Moreover taking a bath, albeit screened from public view by the attap walls of the bath-house would have been regarded by the Malays as ill-mannered. Under the circumstances it

was irresponsible, and only heightens the impression that the whole episode was engineered by Birch as a deliberate invitation to murder. The boatmen were cooking rice. The large crowd on the bank became restive, and when the interpreter posted a second notice, Pandak Indut again tore it down. The interpreter remonstrated, and Pandak Indut thrust a spear into him, crying, 'Amok, amok.' The crowd thus rushed for the bath-house, and Birch was stabbed to death almost instantaneously through the flimsy walls of the structure. The Sikh guard dived into the river and swam for his life, while the interpreter who had also been stabbed staggered into a boat, with the help of the Malay boatmen, but died soon after. A Sikh and a Malay boatman were also killed, and various others wounded. The rest escaped.⁹

Word was passed to the Laksamana, and through him to Abdullah. Ismail as we have seen declined to accept Birch's boat. Birch's possessions were shared out among those who had had a hand in killing him, and the arms and other property were taken to Maharaja Lela's house, where orders were given to build stockades. Orders were also given to storm the Residency at Bandar Baru. However this was never carried out.¹⁰ Abbott, warned of what had happened while shooting snipe, got away downstream with difficulty, under fire from the Malays.

The above details are drawn from Swettenham's accounts of the event, and Parkinson's interpretation, eighty years later. Swettenham gives no hint of the element of deliberate suicide in Birch's actions, although this aspect must have been evident to him. Swettenham commenced his thumb-nail sketch of Birch by pointing out, in unwritten contrast with himself, 'Mr Birch, unfortunately for all his long Eastern experience, knew very little of Malays, and almost nothing of their language....' We know that the latter point was incorrect. He described Birch's misdirected energy during his twelve months in Perak, and claimed that, 'Mr Birch was assassinated solely and entirely for political reasons ... of personal feeling there was none... The Malays have always admitted this ... Europeans who did not know have suggested that the Resident's murder was for non-political causes, a suggestion for which there is not a semblance of foundation.' Swettenham's own comments on Birch first appeared in *Malay Sketches*, in 1895, a mere twenty years after the event, and while Birch's son, E.W. Birch, was still serving in the government. It was too soon after the event for an objective assessment. A year later, when addressing the Royal Colonial Institute, Swettenham remarked: 'When I first visited the Malay States, the Malays of Perak laughed at the idea of a British soldier or sailor ever making his way through their roadless forests, and there is no doubt they believed that if they could get rid of Mr

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J.W.W. Birch and me, the only two white men they knew, no others would ever come to seek satisfaction of them.'¹¹ Swettenham was right in his assessment of the attitude of the Perak chiefs. The error of their assumptions was now made painfully clear.

When Swettenham returned to Bandar Baru, he found that Abbott had already sent word of the murder to Penang in the *Pluto*. Anson heard the news on the evening of 3 November, and immediately dispatched Captain Innes R.E., the Colonial Engineer, with two officers and sixty men of the 10th Regiment, thirty policemen led by Plunket, Superintendent of Police, an apothecary, and Kynnersley, a young cadet, as interpreter. Innes was appointed Assistant Commissioner. The instructions were to leave Penang early the following morning, 4 November, inquire into the circumstances of the murder, and prevail upon the chiefs to hand over those implicated. Anson simultaneously cabled Jervis in Singapore with the news, and the action he had taken. Captain Welner, in command of the *Pluto* also saw fit to transmit by the same opportunity Birch's final telegram dated 1 November, which assured Jervis that all was well. Further exchanges of cables were needed before Jervis accepted the correct state of affairs.¹²

Indeed, such were the communication problems that as late as 9 November 1875, Speedy was writing to the Governor, 'In the second report, that of 7th instant, Sergeant Din states that he was told by one, Kulup Riau, that Mr Swettenham had been murdered by the Maharajah Lela at Pasir Salak on the 5th instant. I regret to state that I have every reason to believe that the report is but too true.... I have sent detectives ... to enquire into the matter and obtain, if possible, the remains of these unfortunate officers.'¹³

The belief in the rumour of Swettenham's death also accounts for Anson's appointment of Innes as Acting Assistant Resident, thus superseding Swettenham. The result however was a motley group in which Innes had no overall command. In particular, the soldiers in the party were under Captain Booth, and the sailors under Abbott at Bandar Baru.

The Penang party reached Bandar Baru on the evening of the 5th. Meantime Abdullah, the Laxamana and the Shahbandar with supporters had appeared offering help and assistance. Swettenham wisely and politely requested them to wait for his further instructions downriver: 'I inform my friend that I am obliged to him for having come down to Bandar Baru to assist the officers of the British Government who are here. I now think that my friend, his Chiefs and men may all move a little lower down the river, for if there are many Malays here, we cannot know friends from enemies; it is on this account that I beg my friend and his men may go a little

lower down.¹⁴ The Penang party were just in time to attend the funeral service for Birch, whose body had been found earlier in the day by Swettenham's Bugis scouts, spying out the land round Maharaja Lela's stockade.¹⁵

It fell to Swettenham to read the burial service.¹⁶ Birch's servants, 'who would allow no natives to go near him, carried the coffin.'¹⁷ Three volleys were fired by the Sikhs over the grave. To read the burial service over a former colleague, recently murdered, and in the knowledge that he had narrowly escaped a similar fate must have exercised a profound effect on the twenty-five year old Swettenham. It was perhaps this experience which contributed to his lifelong morbid interest in the paraphernalia of death. As we shall see his other writings contain a significant number of accounts of death-scenes.¹⁸

For the moment however there was little time for reflection. After Birch's burial, a discussion was held that evening, in which Swettenham proposed, and it was agreed that an attack should be mounted the next day, 7 November, on Pasir Salak, Maharaja Lela's headquarters.

We all agreed that it was necessary at act at once, to avoid the appearance of indecision, and to give the enemy no time to strengthen his position. It was therefore decided to get up at 4:30 a.m. next morning, put everyone into boats, pole up stream two miles, land, and walk the other three miles to Pasir Salak. It was arranged that the bluejackets should take the howitzers in boats, and keeping in line with the advance of the shore party, deal from the river with any stockade that might be met with.¹⁹

The old and antiquated guns were of many makes, and it was doubtful whether anyone fully understood how they all worked. Swettenham and Innes had disagreed on whether or not the guns should be taken, and Swettenham later clearly laid the blame for the failure of the mission on the lack of guns:

It was only after we had started that I learnt the intention of taking guns had been abandoned, a very unfortunate change of plan as it turned out. To attack, without guns, any work defended by Malays means a certain sacrifice of life, as we found, to our cost...²⁰

They set off, then, the following morning, travelling at first by boat upstream. It was only with difficulty that they could get boatmen. All went well till they landed from the boats. Swettenham was in front with his scouts, consisting of the redoubtable Raja Mahmood with two men, the Manila boatman and a Sumatran Malay, Nakodah Orlong, who was known to Swettenham and had appeared the previous night with fourteen followers. Their path

took them initially single file through a field of maize. As the scouts entered the field, they fanned out, Nakodah Orlong to the right of Swettenham, and one of Nakodah Orlong's supporters further to the right. On the left were Raja Mahmood and the rest of the party.²¹ They passed a huge fig-tree on the edge of the river. The party were still talking and laughing, being a long way from Pasir Salak. It was no doubt the noise which alerted the opposing Malays, for the scouting party suddenly came to the end of the cover, the last few feet having been cut down.

At this moment Nakodah Orlong said, "There they are," and the words were hardly out of his mouth when we were greeted by a volley from the enemy concealed behind a stockade not a dozen yards in front of us. Nakoda Orlong fell without uttering another sound.²²

Swettenham's reaction was to retreat, but Raja Mahmood shouted to him to stand fast and shoot. Since only Swettenham and the boatboy had arms, and the enemy were well hidden behind the stockade, the position was precarious. It became even less comfortable when the main party behind them, hearing the gunfire, themselves began to shoot. Swettenham and his party were thus caught between two fires. Word was hastily sent back to Captain Innes. Meantime the scouting party, together with Nakodah Orlong's body had retreated to such protection as the fig tree afforded: 'In that time we realised that even a large tree offers poor shelter from a cross-fire. It did not, however, take us long to decide that the side towards the enemy was the safest.'²³

Twice again in the course of the ensuing chaos they were caught in cross-fire. As a result of one of these episodes, the Sikh police gave up the battle and retreated, despite the attempts of their officer, Plunket, to stop them. The Penang police had retired even earlier, on the grounds, 'that it was not for this kind of work that they had been engaged.'²⁴ Such rockets as the attacking party had, all fired far above the ramparts, to the jeers of the Malay defenders. Thus when by 1:00 p.m. the diminished force, consisting of officers, the men of the 10 Bluejackets and the Malay scouts were ordered by Innes on the extreme right to charge the stockade, the lack of guns made the attack futile. Innes was uncertain of dispositions, and was shot down shouting: 'Where is Mr Swettenham, where is Mr Swettenham?' Two other officers were severely wounded, and there were other casualties. Captain Booth was thus effectively left in command.²⁵

Swettenham in the centre was unaware that Innes had been killed, but apparently accepted Captain Booth's order to retreat. He was hampered in this by the need to help carry a badly wounded sergeant. There was no surgeon and no stretchers, so the return to

Bandar Baru was a nightmare, in which at every moment they expected to be attacked from the rear by Maharaja Lela's men in pursuit.

To their surprise, this did not occur. Back at Bandar Baru, Swettenham offered a reward to anyone recovering the other bodies.²⁶ Nakodah Orlong's men took up the offer, and borrowed a boat to go upstream and search for the body, and for his man, Alang, who was missing. They returned at 8:00 p.m. having found Alang swimming downstream supporting Nakodah Orlong's body. Alang who had stayed behind at the time of the British retreat to guard his master's body, had also observed that the Malays had fled the fort at the same time as the British retreated. By not informing anyone of this, he had turned what could at least have been reported as a victory into a disaster.²⁷

That evening, it fell once again to Swettenham to read a burial service, this time for Captain Innes, who was buried next to Birch. He also went down to the river to inspect the body of Nakodah Orlong, provoking the following morbid comment:

... he looked just as I had seen him last, except that his hair and clothes were drenched with water and there was a great hole in the centre of his forehead, marking no doubt the track of an iron bullet from a swivel gun. Of that however he could never have been conscious, nor yet of the devotion of the man whose life had been in extremest peril throughout a long day to guard his chief's dead body, without thought of gain or praise, only determined that none but loving hands should be laid upon the voiceless, pulseless clay he once called master.²⁸

The affair had been mishandled. Swettenham by implication subsequently blamed Innes, to whom he attributed command of the ill-fated expedition. Anson blamed Swettenham and Abbott, though not by name, referring to them respectively as 'a colonial officer at Bandar Baru', and 'a lieutenant of the navy.' The press blamed both men: 'Had Lieutenant Abbott and Mr Swettenham placed themselves at the head of their Police and shown fight against the Malays, as we feel sure Mr Birch would have done, there might not have been so sad a tale to be told.'²⁹ Jervois, a couple of days after the event, wrote to Anson, 'Entre nous I feel that if *he* [Innes] had been the military officer in command, the business would have been a success.'³⁰

During the night of the 7th, Dunlop arrived at Bandar Baru to take charge of the situation, and on the 8th Swettenham reported to the Colonial Secretary in Singapore his account of the events. In the course of this he noted he had received a telegram the previous evening from Penang telling him that the *Pluto* was to rendez-vous

with the Governor's party at the mouth of the Perak River on the morning of the 8th. He explained that he did not like to leave the Residency at such a time, so sent Kynnersley instead. To this letter he attached a sketch map of the river, signing himself portentously as 'H.B.M.'s Acting Resident. Selangor.'³¹

Swettenham, writing many years later of Birch's murder, paid the conventional tribute expected from a junior colleague to a senior, and summed up the position: 'In Mr Birch, the British Government lost one of its most courageous, able, and zealous officers, but, by the action which his death made necessary, the State of Perak gained in twelve months what ten years of "advice" could hardly have accomplished.'³²

Jervois, when he eventually reported events to London in some detail on 16 November, was fulsome: 'The presence of mind shown by Mr Swettenham when passing through the disaffected district on the night after he left Blanja is worthy of all praise.'³³

NOTES

1. CO 273/87:513 ff. Haji Ali's evidence.
2. *Malay Sketches*: 'A Personal Incident,' pp. 265.
3. *Ibid.* p. 266. A similar account is to be found in *Footprints*, pp. 59-60.
4. The late T.B. Barlow, pers. comm.
5. *Malay Sketches*: 'The Passing of Penglima Prang Semaun,' pp. 122-46.
6. See Chapter 13.
7. J. de V. Allen (ed.), 1966, op. cit., pp. 65-70. See also Chapter 13 below.
8. Parkinson, 1960, op. cit., p. 237.
9. Exhaustive details are to be found in EPO.
10. See *Footprints*, pp. 60-1, *British Malaya*, pp. 205-6, and *Malay Sketches*: 'James Wheeler Woodford Birch,' pp. 227-47, reproduced in *Stories and Sketches by Sir Frank Swettenham*. (ed. W. Roff), 1967.
11. Swettenham's 1896 talk in P. Kratoska (ed.), *Honourable Intentions*.
12. See HC 1505 and Anson, 1920, op. cit., pp. 329-30.
13. See HC 1505 quoted in *Footprints*, p. 60.
14. HC 1505:117 Swettenham to Abdullah, 5 November 1875.
15. HC 1505:90 Swettenham to Col. Sec., 8 November 1875.
16. J.F.A. McNair, *Perak and the Malays: Sarong and Kris*. London, 1878, p. 378.
17. Swettenham's account of the funeral to Irving: item 10 in Rev. Birch's Record, 1875-1876 -- papers and letters on Birch's death.
18. See for example *Malay Sketches*: 'Nakodah Orlong,' pp. 270-80, quoted below.
19. *Footprints*, p. 61.
20. 'Nakodah Orlong,' p. 272. See also HC 1505:90 Swettenham to Col. Sec., 8 November 1875.
21. 'Nakodah Orlong,' p. 273.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 274.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 275.

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24. *Ibid.*, p. 276.
25. CO 273/87:304 Evidence of Mat Arkib and *Footprints*, p. 62.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Footprints*, pp. 62-3, and 'Nakodah Orlong,' pp. 278-9, HC 1505:91-2 Swettenham to Col. Sec., 8 November 1875, and CO 273/87: 304 Evidence of Mat Arkib.
28. 'Nakodah Orlong,' pp. 279-80.
29. *Straits Observer*, 3 December 1895.
30. Anson, 1920, *op. cit.*, p. 331.
31. Parkinson, 1960, *op. cit.*, p. 247-9 reproduces the map and much of the letter, to be found in full in HC 1505: 89-92.
32. 'James Wheeler Woodford Birch,' p. 246.
33. HC 1505:87 Jervois to Carnarvon, 16 November 1875.

Aftermath II : The Perak War

Jervois, by 4 November finally convinced of the accuracy of reports concerning Birch's murder, cabled the news to London, and reported the position to the Legislative Council on the 5th. The Legislative Council's reaction was one of regret at the murder, combined with a realization of how useful the event would prove to justify a stronger policy, which might be extended to all the States. Their attitudes were reflected in Swettenham's comments quoted at the end of the previous chapter.

Here is not the place to recount the acrimonious exchange of telegrams between Carnarvon, in London, outraged at the insubordinate actions of his wayward Governor in Singapore, who acted first and advised later on dramatic extensions of British policy to the Malay States.¹ Suffice to say that Carnarvon at first endorsed Jervois' requests for troops and supplies, then became increasingly concerned at Jervois' lack of explanation as to what he was doing.

Initially Jervois described the episode as one of 'an isolated character', and set off with Major Dunlop and a further small force for Perak. He stopped en route at Malacca and Klang, to check on reports of possible troubles there as well. Irving, the Acting Colonial Secretary left in charge at Singapore believed that trouble might occur throughout the Peninsula, with a general uprising. Jervois was not fully convinced till he met the *Pluto* on 8 November at the mouth of the Perak River. Here he learnt the news of the disaster the day before at Pasir Salak: panic set in. He cabled to Singapore for another 300 men of the 80th Regiment from Hong Kong, summoned a British battleship from Labuan, and headed upriver to between Batak Rabbit and Durian Sabatang to interview Abdullah, the Shahbandar and the Laksamana, with Swettenham acting as interpreter.² Abdullah promised help. Jervois also enlisted naval assistance to enforce a blockade of the Perak River. Dunlop and Swettenham were appointed Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner respectively to the military force to be sent up the Perak River, under the eventual command of Major-General Frances Colborne, while McNair and Maxwell were similarly appointed to

Dunlop's interview did not last long, and when he joined me I asked: "Did you alter the letter?" And he answered: "Yes."

"But you know it isn't true. Why did you do it?" "Because I was told that you agreed, but said that I must make the alteration because I had signed the letter."¹¹

There is no doubt from evidence that letters of instruction were concocted after the event to justify the opening words of Dunlop's amended report: 'In accordance with instructions from his Excellency, dated 9th inst....'¹²

It soon became evident that Maharaja Lela, the Shahbandar and their followers had retreated upstream to join Ismail at Blanja, and had thence moved eastwards some fifteen miles to the Kinta River, where they had set up defences. When Jervois' attempts to draw Ismail in a definite statement of his loyalties proved unsatisfactory, it was agreed that Colborne's party from the south should advance upriver to Blanja, and from there, having met Ross's force coming downstream from Kuala Kangsar, proceed together across country to Kinta.

The provisioning problems associated with these large numbers of forces were not inconsiderable. Swettenham was heavily involved in arranging for boats and supplies to take the southern party upstream to Blanja.¹³ This was no minor undertaking, involving as it did 50 boats and over 300 men.¹⁴ 'Swettenham and myself have had no end of trouble organising transport,' wrote Dunlop on 9 December. It was only with the greatest difficulty that they obtained three flat-bottomed boats and forty two native boats. Equally serious were the problems of getting polers, and eventually they had to rely to a large extent on their own forces.¹⁵ One of the leading suppliers of provisions was a young and enterprising Chinese called Loke Yew. Swettenham made no mention of having met him. But the two men must have met, and laid the basis for what was to develop into a discreet symbiotic relationship, from which both men were to benefit. Supplying of provisions for the British troops on this occasion made Loke Yew his first fortune.¹⁶

Meantime Swettenham acted as interpreter for those of the letters between Ismail and Jervois which passed through the southern camp.¹⁷ By 11 December, the southern party was only three miles from Blanja, but there was no sign of the northern group, who remained outside Kuala Kangsar. Blanja, occupied on 14 December, was found to be deserted. Despite the absence of the northern column, and against instructions, Colborne and Dunlop decided to press on in pursuit of the fugitives to the Kinta River.¹⁸ That the party was less than fully professional is evident from

Swettenham's account of camping for the night between Blanja and the Kinta River: 'Waking very early the next morning, I was astonished and rather alarmed to see a white figure moving through the trees, and as it got near I recognized Major A., a delightful old gentleman with white hair and moustache — clad in a long white English nightgown of antique pattern, and carrying towels, sponge and soap, who was looking for a suitable spot in the stream where he could make his morning toilet.'¹⁹

By 16 December they were ready to proceed to Kinta, and having obtained Colborne's approval, they set off from Papan that day. Raja Mahmood was to lead the scouting party, which was to consist only of Malays. Swettenham was much disconcerted at being left out in this manner, and put pressure on Mahmood to allow him to join the party. This was eventually agreed, on two conditions: that Swettenham would disguise himself as a Malay, a somewhat implausible proposition, as he stood well over six foot tall. Secondly he was to be subject to Raja Mahmood's orders.²⁰

Let us consider first the official account. The scouting party rapidly established that much of the path was clear, although in some places the retreating Malays had felled across it forest trees, thus making progress extremely difficult for the party mounted on elephants which was following. When the main party came upon one of these, Malays hiding in the undergrowth shot and severely wounded Dr Randall, who subsequently died.

The fact that both parties used elephants resulted in the path turning into a series of enormous muddy holes, as each animal followed exactly in its predecessor's footsteps. The going for those on foot was therefore extremely difficult. It was with some difficulty that on approaching Kinta, Swettenham prevented the rash Mahmood from marching straight into it. They encamped for the night a short distance away and when the following morning they eventually reached the village of Kinta, on the river of that name, they found the place completely deserted, although it was evident that the defenders had fled only a short while previously, Ismail still clutching the Perak regalia, which had played such an important role in recent events.²¹

If we now consider Raja Mahmood's report mentioned above, there are certain inconsistencies with Swettenham's own report, written shortly after the event. In particular Raja Mahmood maintained that the party descended on Changkat Bertam, (by which he means Kinta) that evening at 6:30 p.m., on gaining access to the village by a ladder over the fence. 'We entered in a body and raised the cry "Amuck." We captured the place the very same night.'²² He then draws a discreet veil over events between 6:30 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. when he notes that the village was finally captured. Knowing

what we do of Raja Mahmood, it is not difficult to imagine him making the best of his last chance for some old-fashioned pillaging. Swettenham, disguised as a Malay, was the only European present, and there must be a strong possibility that he was a willing and enthusiastic participant in whatever happened that evening.

Swettenham's own account as related above, talks only of entering the village the following morning. If we accept as correct Raja Mahmood's account of the capture of the village the previous evening, Swettenham must have persuaded Raja Mahmood and his men to withdraw, to enable an orderly capture of the deserted village the next morning. Raja Mahmood had the reputation of a man who never told a lie, and it is certain that Swettenham recognized this. Any discrepancy between the official version, published in a Command paper and Raja Mahmood's account could be embarrassing. It seems unlikely therefore if Swettenham did help Raja Mahmood write this account, that it was to support the award of swords in 1880.²³ The events would have been sufficiently fresh in people's minds to raise questions, and the details would have been passed to London. It is much more likely that this account was prepared for submission for a pension in Selangor or Perak in the late 1890s. By then, no-one would notice the discrepancy. Nor would it be necessary for the account to go beyond the Resident. This, in all probability was why Raja Mahmood's account, so vivid in detail, took so long to come to light. We are left once again with the uneasy impression that Swettenham's accounts are not always to be taken at face value.

Jervois, in a later dispatch, gave an account of this episode, making particular mention of Swettenham's contribution. 'I beg especially to bring to your Lordship's notice the admirable qualities displayed by Mr Swettenham who went forward with a scouting expedition of forty five friendly Malays in advance of the troops and blue-jackets.'²⁴

There was now acrimony between the northern and the southern columns, McNair believing that Colborne by his precipitate advance on Kinta had prevented the chance of Ismail going voluntarily to Kuala Kangsar to surrender. Reports came in that Ismail and Maharaja Lela had fled north and were heading for refuge in Patani, under Siamese jurisdiction. 'That was the end of military operations in Perak, at any rate in my neighbourhood,' wrote Swettenham, many years later.²⁵ While this is indeed the truth, it is not the whole truth, for there remained the turbulent village of Kota Lama, near Kuala Kangsar.

Meantime Jervois was diverted by two other campaigns: one, exceedingly acrimonious with Carnarvon in London, explaining why he had disobeyed orders not to alter the policy in Perak. The

other was an outbreak of disturbances in Sungei Ujong, which required the diversion of troops there. This provided welcome justification for his earlier requests for large numbers of troops. The major objective in Perak now was to capture Maharaja Lela and Ismail, and to encourage the return of the population to peaceful activities.²⁶

A lull in activities occurred after the successful capture of Kinta. It was after all the Christmas season. Ross's party was encamped near Kuala Kangsar, where conditions appeared to be relatively peaceful. However a few shots were fired, allegedly from the Kota Lama direction a day or two before Christmas. No damage was done, but Ross's wash-hand basin was shattered by a bullet. It was a favourite article, and had accompanied him throughout his campaigns. McNair tried to explain that it was unlikely the Kota Lama people were involved: indeed the incident could have been a practical joke.²⁷

Ross was furious at this, and wished to take immediate punitive action. However his colleagues pointed out that he would be wise first to remove the extensive cover of scrub, which had never been cleared round the camp, before taking action. This took about ten days, and must have occupied the party over Christmas and the new year.

On 3 January a scouting party consisting of W.E. Maxwell, a naval First Lieutenant, Garforth, and twenty sailors went to a place above Kota Lama. Here they found a man called Panjang Meru who was alleged to be a local trouble-maker and a fugitive from justice in Province Wellesley. 'They hanged him without judge or jury and it was a great shame,' said Swettenham's informant.²⁸ This was the only recorded case of military atrocity during the Perak War. McNair and Maxwell both subsequently denied responsibility, and for this Ross was later blamed.²⁹ The incident, which was not reported to Jervois at the time, had adverse consequences the following day, when an attack was launched on Kota Lama. The precise course of events is unclear, except that in the first sweep through the village it was apparently empty. Orders were given to burn the village. At a later stage it was alleged it was being looted. Meantime a second party of sailors went through the village, and discovered in the headman's house, a room full of Malay women.³⁰ McNair was reported to have spoken 'soothing words to them', but to no effect. The women continued to scream loudly, attracting the attention of the Malays who were hiding in the surrounding scrub. They descended on the British party, and killed Major Hawkins, the second in command.

It was subsequently noted that it was a naval party which was attacked in this way, and this was assumed to have been

retribution for the hanging of Panjang Meru the day before. The position was further complicated by two sections of the British forces firing on each other. Scott's account of the incident includes some colourful incidents, and a sarcastic dig at McNair:

"...He is good at the vernacular, I believe, Sir."

"Yes, he has told me that heaps of times, and he is great on what he calls 'a few well-chosen words and a tranquillising manner.' I don't know how often I have heard him say that a kindly address is worth far more than what he calls indiscriminate slaughter...³¹ But Carbolton [McNair] could never be got to talk of the Lota Kanna [Kota Lama] affair, nor for the matter of that, could anyone else who had had anything to do with it."³²

A retaliatory party was again sent to Kota Lama on 20 January. The Malays having been driven out, the whole village was burnt. The Panjang Meru incident, as we have seen, was not reported to Jervois for more than two weeks. The news appeared first in the *Straits Observer* of 21 January, which Swettenham may well have seen by the time he wrote his remarkable letter to Jervois from Bandar Baru on 25 January. He used this as an opportunity to make serious allegations against Maxwell, his near contemporary in the service. He opened the letter by explaining that he had received independent and corroborating information from two sailors and a Malay boatman who came down in a gig from Kuala Kangsar the day before, bringing, it appears, a curt communication from Maxwell himself to Swettenham: 'from Maxwell's letter it seems they are carrying on matters at Kuala Kangsar on so different a plane from what was adopted there that they can't both be right and so I should like to hear from your Excellency whether I am doing right or not.' He went on to accuse Maxwell of high handed behaviour against Raja Dris, Kulup Riau, and Che Mida: 'In the present state of affairs I think it would take but little to make any of our friends into enemies, and therefore I am sorry for Maxwell's treating these men apparently in the don't care how you take it principle.'³³

In his diary for the period, Swettenham related the Panjang Meru incident, making it clear that he regarded Maxwell as responsible, on the basis of information which he had obtained from two bluejackets and a Malay boatboy.³⁴ Swettenham added for good measure that in the attack on Kota Lama on 20 January the village of Sayong on the other side of the river was also fired upon, until Raja Yusof, supporting the British side was obliged to come over and beg them to stop. Although Swettenham prefaced his remarks by writing, 'What I am going to say now may be untrue...' he made it clear that the bluejackets and the boat-boy independently

corroborated the story, which he personally believed. He sent Jervis the originals of the depositions given by his informants.³⁵

The affair was an unsavoury one; none of the participants emerged with credit. Swettenham himself, while no doubt genuinely deploring the episode, took the opportunity of running down Maxwell. The incident merits close attention, for it is the first sign of the intransigent hostility between the two men, which was to continue for twenty years. It became a public *cause célèbre* in the early 1890s. It is possible that Swettenham's motive in writing about the death of Panjang Meru may have been to distract attention from his own failure to restrain Raja Mahmood from blood and rapine as they progressed through the Kinta Valley.

Swettenham subsequently gave a fuller explanation on the basis of information he gathered years later from a Malay who lived in the neighbourhood. There Swettenham claimed that it was the frustration of the British forces in failing to capture the ringleaders involved in Birch's murder which led them apparently in desperation, to seize on Panjang Meru, and hang him without trial. Swettenham with his characteristic concern for details surrounding a death added that he was hanged from the branch of a huge, purple flowering *bungor* tree (*Lagerstroemia speciosa*), which stood in the kampong.³⁶

Swettenham meantime had been appointed Deputy Commissioner to the southern group, after Dunlop's return to police duties on 23 December 1875,³⁷ a change which was reported to Carnarvon in mid-January. The dispatch also reposted McNair to Singapore, thus leaving Swettenham and Maxwell in charge of the southern and northern parties respectively.³⁸ Swettenham's area lay between Bandar Baru and Bota on the Perak River, and extended east to include Kinta. He had meantime been thanked by Jervis in glowing terms:

Major Dunlop, in writing to me upon giving up the post of Acting Commissioner in Perak speaks in the highest terms of you and your services with the forces under Major-General Colborne and Captain Buller, both of whom have also expressed to me their strong appreciation of the very great assistance you have been throughout the operations.

It has been exceedingly gratifying to me to receive these testimonies to your courage, ability, energy and zeal, and I have specially mentioned your name to the Secretary of State.³⁹

Rewards were announced for the capture of Maharaja Lela, Dato Sagor and Pandak Indut, who were regarded as the chief culprits. The hunt was still on for Ismail, and the whole exercise now took on the aspect of a mopping up operation.⁴⁰

Swettenham's final journal covers the period 17 January - 21 March 1876, when he operated chiefly from Bandar Baru. This also involved collecting evidence on the background and circumstances of Birch's murder and subsequent events, as well as more regular administrative matters. Thus on 17 and 19 January he took statements from the Chinese jeweller who witnessed Birch's murder, and Syed Mashor.⁴¹ These were forwarded to Jervois on 21 January, with a long covering letter, recommending that since conditions were now quiet on Swettenham's stretch of the river, 'a notice should be issued in Malay forbidding the wearing of arms under a heavy penalty.'⁴²

In the same letter he also saw fit to advise Jervois on how to handle the problems at Kota Lama, which was of course well outside his jurisdiction. The letter concluded with reference to a suggestion recently made by Jervois that Swettenham become Assistant Colonial Secretary in Singapore. He asked that he be allowed to take up the job soon, and pointed out that he had been constantly on the move since January 1874. He again alluded to this request in a letter at the end of February, reporting that he had been very seriously ill with fever: 'Your Excellency knows that I will stay here until the Doctor draws me away, but I think the accumulated [*sic*] rattle and exposure of 2 years' unceasing "going" usually at high pressure is concentrated into my present seediness.'⁴³

On 24 January Swettenham set off for Penang, stopping at Durian Sebatang to see if it would be suitable as a station for the troops. The first night was spent at Kota Setia, where he 'found the coolies here very mutinous, and very little for them to do.'⁴⁴ They had been building a road from Kota Setia to Bandar Baru, and were mutinous, partly because of back-pay owing to them, partly because it was now realized that the road was impracticable.⁴⁵ A further problem was that of keeping open communications with Kinta. This was important, for the authorities believed that those responsible for Birch's murder were hiding in the forests near there.

Swettenham's accomplices in the mopping up operations were chiefly Syed Mashor and Raja Asal from Selangor, Raja Outih, a Sumatran Malay who deserted Maharajah Lela before the British attack on Pasir Salak, and, of course Raja Mahmood of Selangor. However at this time Raja Mahmood was of little assistance, being seriously ill, so much so that Swettenham feared for his life, and personally accompanied him back to Selangor between 16 and 23 February 1876.⁴⁶ Of the others, Syed Mashor was of most help. He caught Ngah Ahmat, one of the three accused at the first trial held in early March.

That such hardened warriors, who had, by and large opposed British interests in Selangor earlier in the decade should

now so unreservedly throw their support behind the twenty five year old Swettenham says much for his powers of leadership. Swettenham in turn appreciated their work. Before he left Bandar Baru on 19 March 1876, he wrote to Jervois: 'I cannot leave Perak without bringing to the notice of Government the service of certain Malay chiefs.' After spelling out the assistance they gave, he concluded: 'These Rajas were bound to us by no obligation, rather the contrary, especially in the case of Raja Mahmood, Syed Mashor and Raja Asal, who have always been looked upon and treated as dangerous characters; they have fought entirely for friendship's sake, and have received no pecuniary reward, only their provisions whilst acting with us.'⁴⁷ While Raja Mahmood was not to be awarded the Victoria Cross, as recommended by an anonymous correspondent in the *Straits Observer*, he was to be given a sword in recognition of his work. This however was not to come for several years.⁴⁸

There is some indication that Swettenham was by now learning that it was important to maintain and cultivate the press. That there was already a link between Swettenham and the *Straits Times* is evident from a report in November, which specifically mentions Swettenham's assistance in preparing a report on the campaign. The date, 20 November 1875 indicates that it must have been sent by messenger from the front to Singapore.⁴⁹ A little later, the *Straits Times Weekly* published a leading article on the need to reward those who had been helpful to the British in Perak. Raja Mahmood, Syed Mashor and Che Mida were amongst those mentioned; the information given about them is such that it could scarcely have come other than from Swettenham.⁵⁰

The nature of Swettenham's association with the *Straits Times* remains something of a mystery. The paper at that time was owned and edited by John Cameron, who was then a senior Singapore citizen.⁵¹ The paper however was financially unsound, after a fire had destroyed its premises in 1869. It seems possible therefore that Cameron welcomed the occasional free and unattributable article from a member of the civil service. Swettenham made no mention of Cameron himself, though he later got to know well his brother William, who first discovered the Cameron Highlands.⁵²

The first trial, of those involved in the Perak disturbances which took place on 3-4 March 1876, was of Seputum, Che Gondah and Ngah Ahmat. Raja Dris, appointed by Abdullah, presided, while Davidson and Swettenham sat as assessors.⁵³ Douglas, the new Colonial Secretary from Singapore added, almost gratuitously 'And the great local experience possessed by Mr Swettenham will be of great advantage to you in the proceedings.'⁵⁴

Swettenham was still greatly weakened by his earlier and serious bout of fever. Nevertheless by 6 March 1876 he was well enough to write jointly with Davidson, reporting on the trial.⁵⁵ All three accused pleaded not guilty, though Seputum admitted being present at Pasir Salak at the time, and said that he was under threat of death from Maharaja Lela if he did not go there: 'If I have done wrong, it is in doing the Maharaja Lela's business.'⁵⁶ They were all found guilty and sentenced to hang, though Jervois advised Abdullah, through Swettenham, that only Seputum should hang, the sentences of the others being commuted to life imprisonment.

Seputum was accordingly hanged in the presence of Abdullah, the chiefs, and in all probability, Davidson and Swettenham, at Bandar Baru on 20 May. They were anxious that Abdullah in particular should be present, for there was alleged to be in existence a document signed by Abdullah to Seputum, offering him a reward of \$1,000 for killing Birch. It would do Abdullah no harm to witness the fate of the man he had apparently authorized to do the job.⁵⁷

Over 9-10 March, Dato Sagor was also tracked down with Syed Mashor's help. He had remained on the run, but had elected to stay in the vicinity of Bandar Baru. Abdullah was partly responsible for his surrender. He was regarded as a major suspect, and imprisoned till the others could be caught.⁵⁸ It was not long before the others were brought in. After considerable activity on and near the Kedah border by Hewick, another British officer, Ismail appealed to the Sultan of Kedah, Tunku Kudin's brother. The Sultan of Kedah assisted in his handing over to Colonel Anson in Penang, together with the long-sought Regalia. Colonel Anson 'found him a very gentlemanly and pleasant old man' and 'felt much sympathy for him,' not least because he and his party had been all but destitute in the forest. Many were in bad physical condition.⁵⁹

With Ismail caught, of the major suspects there was now only Maharaja Lela at large. This emboldened Jervois to set up, on 27 March 1876, a commission, headed by Mr Justice Philippo, with Plunket and Paul, to inquire into Abdullah's and Ismail's complicity in Birch's murder.⁶⁰ Three days later, it was announced that Swettenham was to be appointed Assistant Colonial Secretary in Singapore, with special responsibility for Native Affairs.⁶¹

We must now consider in greater detail the circumstances surrounding his appointment. When, earlier in the year, the question of appointing a new Colonial Secretary was considered, the Colonial Office was emphatic that new blood was needed: a suitably qualified individual should be posted in from outside. The choice fell on J. Douglas, C.M.G., who had served previously in Ceylon.⁶² However, acknowledging that Douglas would have no

experience in the very specialized field of the Malay States, Jervois was asked to suggest a suitably qualified and experienced member of the service to act as his assistant. The deliberations must have been well known to those serving in the Straits Settlements.⁶³ On 6 March therefore Jervois wrote to London proposing Swettenham for this job at \$3,600 per year:⁶⁴ 'Swettenham's intimate knowledge of native affairs renders him specially qualified for this post, and Your Lordship will no doubt concur with me in thinking that the excellent service he has performed during the late outbreak entitles him to promotion.' The minutes written on this dispatch by the officials in Whitehall are revealing. Lowther, one of the officials, commented on 17 April: '... I am not sure whether Mr Herbert has not some doubt on his discretion whilst employed in the Native States.'

Meade, a more senior official, apprehensive perhaps of yet another over-zealous official taking liberties with government policy, remarked: 'It should be made clear that the Asst. Col. Sec. is not to be responsible for native affairs, but mainly to assist the Col. Sec. in dealing with that and other business of his office. It may hereafter be found possible to dispense with this extra assistance, and Mr S. should be warned accordingly. He is junior to some civil servants, Mr Skinner, for instance, but I think he has fairly earned this promotion after the good service he has been rendering elsewhere.'

Herbert agreed and Carnarvon finally commented: 'Are we quite clear that Mr Swettenham is free from the pecuniary embarrassments of wh. we have heard so much in the States? Is anything known of him in the office on this subject? I agree to the proposals if the answer is satisfactory.' Ord was therefore consulted, and wrote:

I saw a good deal of Swettenham during the last two years I was at the Straits and had no reason to believe that he was at any time in pecuniary difficulties. Since I left I have heard from him occasionally, and as he speaks of having a good income and is able to send home money, it is very unlikely that he is in debt.

I have always looked on him as a well-principled, clever, zealous young fellow and I recommended him to Jervois' special notice when the latter was going out. I am glad to find he thinks so well of him.⁶⁵

The correspondence is interesting for several reasons: it helps explain why such a junior official as Swettenham was apparently accorded so much influence, as we have seen, when Jervois arrived in Singapore. It is tantalisingly uninformative as to his 'discretion whilst employed in the Native States.' It was however the first official allusion to the questionable financial

activities, which were such a marked feature of his later career. It also shows that the checking of Swettenham's credentials was undertaken after the official announcement on 30 March 1876. Swettenham's new salary of \$3,600 per year was extremely generous.

Carnarvon, in approving of Swettenham's appointment, stressed that it was 'sanctioned in consequence of the great importance attaching to the affairs of the Native States, and in consideration of Mr Douglas's want of experience in that particular branch of the work of his office.'⁶⁶ It was thus that Swettenham found himself *de facto* in charge of affairs relating to the Malay states. These events greatly strengthened his hand, and ensured that he played a major part in the proceedings of the Committee of Inquiry.

The coveted position of Resident, Selangor, was meantime vacant, during Davidson's time in Perak. Captain Bloomfield Douglas acted in Davidson's place, until he was formally appointed on 1 June.⁶⁷ That Swettenham was still hankering for the Resident's post may be deduced from an entry in Bloomfield Douglas' diary: 'I saw Swettenham, and he of course tried to make it appear that the Governor thought he would be more useful in Singapore than as Resident of Selangore, and *I am of the same opinion.*' (Douglas' italics)⁶⁸

Back in London, *The Times* reported a letter from Swettenham on the graves of Birch and Innes, dealing with the subject in some detail. Noting that the graves were five feet apart, in sandy soil, with the water level two to three feet below the surface, Swettenham continued: 'We propose to enclose the graves in a piece of ground 50' x 20' with an iron railing, neat, low and strong, cover the whole enclosure with flags of granite from Singapore, placing a flat marble slab over each grave, with a short inscription in plain Roman capitals. Swettenham's concern for, and interest in graves was to prove characteristic.'⁶⁹

Meantime the hunt for Maharaja Lela was being pursued diligently, but initially unsuccessfully by W.E. Maxwell.⁷⁰ Eventually Jervis, with the assistance of the Maharaja of Johore managed to negotiate Maharaja Lela's surrender, together with Pandak Indut and others, in the vicinity of Kota Lama. By 30 July they were safely in Singapore Civil Prison.⁷¹ The surrender was apparently prompted by Maharaja Lela's fear that Abdullah might arrange for his murder if he remained at large, for Maharaja Lela might have evidence to incriminate Abdullah.

However evidence already given to the Commission of Enquiry, including that of the late Seputum was sufficient to point the finger of suspicion at Abdullah, the Laksamana, the Shahbandar

and others. They were summoned to Singapore, arriving on 4 September. Who was to act as Regent in Abdullah's absence? Jervois favoured Yusof, but eventually Abdullah's preferred candidate, the Bendahara, was chosen.⁷²

A legal problem now arose, for Jervois decided it would not be possible to try Abdullah in court in Singapore, and acting on instructions from Carnarvon, heard the evidence in the Executive Council. The recording of the proceedings, partly in English and partly with Malay interpreters must have been difficult and cumbersome. The shorthand writer was a Mr Arthur Knight⁷³ who was, significantly, to follow Swettenham into the Colonial Secretary's office. The examination took the form of a letter, addressed to Abdullah, dated 16 September 1876. It was signed by Douglas, the Colonial Secretary, but almost certainly drafted by Swettenham. It required Abdullah to refute in writing, before 7 October, ten specific allegations. This he did, with the help of I. Swinburne Bond, the legal adviser whom the government had made available to him.⁷⁴ By the end of November, the Committee of Inquiry had completed its Summary of Evidence, which was considered by the Executive on 9 December. They concluded:

It appears impossible to doubt that not only was Sultan Abdullah aware beforehand that Mr Birch's murder was in contemplation, without taking any steps to prevent it, but there is no reason to doubt that it was committed with his approval and consent, and that for a considerable time before it took place, he and his chiefs had been plotting Mr Birch's destruction. There is also evidence, apparently reliable, that after the murder was committed, he assisted and protected some of the perpetrators thereof.

It must be admitted that provocation was given to the Sultan and his Chiefs. The late Mr Birch was a most zealous and conscientious officer. He was however much thwarted from the outset, and there is reason to believe that his manner may at times have been overbearing. It must also be admitted that, in some instances, he showed a want of respect for Malay custom. It was also injudicious to interfere with local taxes before the generous scale of allowances had been fixed in lieu of them. These are circumstances which may tend to palliate the criminality of the acts, but they cannot in the opinion of the Council be held to justify them.

The Council further decided that Sultan Abdullah would not be allowed to return to Perak, and eventually he, the Laksamana, the Shahbandar and the Mantri were exiled to the Seychelles. Abdullah personally, and through his legal adviser, Bond, continued to

maintain his innocence through a correspondence from the Seychelles and Mauritius which extended over fifteen years. Moreover he made the very valid point that he was obliged to defend himself without having heard the evidence on which the Government acted.⁷⁵ The suspicion must remain that the Singapore authorities found that the constitutional dilemma of where and how to try Abdullah provided convenient cover. Not only did it prevent him from receiving an open trial: it also ensured, in a way which could have been very convenient to Swettenham, that the government, in this instance effectively Swettenham himself, had total control of all the evidence brought to light.

It is difficult to believe that Abdullah was not implicated in the planning of Birch's murder, despite his protestations. At the same time there is more than a suggestion of a cover-up by the Singapore authorities. Abdullah hinted as much in his letter from Port Louis, Mauritius of 26 October 1885:

I feel convinced that when Her Majesty is made acquainted with all the facts of my case, and if the information relative to the case received by Lord Derby from the Straits Settlements is in accordance with the truth (the attitude of several persons there towards me causes me to doubt them,) Her Majesty the Queen will give Her Royal assent to my petition.⁷⁶

Similarly, the Mantri, who was only brought to Singapore by Swettenham in March 1877, complained bitterly in a memorial, but to no avail, that he had not been given a chance to be heard. According to him, Swettenham and Douglas came to the gaol on 29 March, and simply passed sentence on him, banning him from ever returning to Larut.⁷⁷ It remained to deal with Maharaja Lela, Pandak Indut, Dato Sagor and their followers. The Bendahara as regent and shortly before his death, nominated as judges Raja Yusof and Raja Allang Hussein. Thus, by the time of the trial, Raja Yusof had succeeded the Bendahara as Regent. The assessors were Davidson and Maxwell, who had replaced Speedy as Assistant Resident in Larut.

Once again there was a change of plan over Swettenham's role. Swettenham himself wrote officially as Assistant Colonial Secretary to Davidson, making arrangements for the trial, and stated that he himself was to act as prosecutor.⁷⁸ For reasons which are no longer clear, this arrangement was not allowed to stand, for by mid-January, Jervois was reporting to Carnarvon: 'Your Lordship will observe that I had at first intended that Mr Swettenham, assistant secretary for Native States, should act as prosecutor, but I subsequently considered it advisable to appoint Major Dunlop,

inspector-general of police as such, with Mr Swettenham to assist him in prosecution.⁷⁹

J.D. Vaughan was to defend the accused. Swettenham was effectively the prosecutor, presenting seventeen prosecution witnesses, and cross-examining ten for the defence, all in Malay. If any credence is to be given to subsequent, and unsubstantiated allegations that Swettenham's journals and later accounts of Perak between 1874-1876 ensured that no evidence discreditable to Swettenham himself emerged, it should perhaps be noted that in his role as effective prosecutor, he was in a position greatly to influence what was brought to public attention in the trial. Moreover the trial proceedings concentrated almost exclusively on events which led up to Birch's murder. There was no occasion to ask for independent accounts of the pacification of Perak thereafter. A hint that all was not quite in accordance with Swettenham's version of events in the aftermath of Birch's murder occurred many years later, in a comment on one of Swettenham's short stories.⁸⁰ The trial was conducted inside the Mantri's badly damaged house at Matang, lasting from 14 to 22 December, when all seven of the accused were found guilty and condemned to death. Despite his official demotion as assistant to Dunlop, the scanty records of the trial which survive show clearly Swettenham's pre-eminent role. Dunlop concluded his report of the trial: 'The happy manner in which Mr Swettenham conducted the examination of the witnesses, and his closing review of the whole case, reflect the greatest credit on him. I would again beg to bring his name to the notice of His Excellency the Governor.'⁸¹ Sentences on Maharaja Lela, Pandak Indut and Dato Sagor were confirmed, and they were duly hanged near Larut jail on 20 January 1877. Sentences on the remaining four were commuted to life imprisonment on the anniversary of the Pangkor Engagement. Abdullah, the Mantri, the Laksamana and the Shahbandar were exiled via Mauritius to the Seychelles in the middle of 1877. Swettenham, by then on leave in London, was asked to prepare a memorandum on the food and accommodation which would be required.⁸²

Ten years later a further inconsistency was publicly brought to light, when a document purporting to be a copy of a letter from Abdullah to Syed Mashor was produced. Apparently translated by Swettenham himself on 10 January 1877, this letter promised Syed Mashor a small piece of territory if he killed Birch. Syed Mashor had of course subsequently changed sides. Whether the letter was only produced by Syed Mashor after all those involved in Birch's murder had been dealt with must remain a moot point, for besides incriminating Abdullah further, it also pointed fairly clearly to Syed

Mashor's own complicity. Once again it seems unlikely that the truth of the matter will ever be known.⁸³

In outline the account of Birch's murder and the Perak War appear to be substantially correct. However the way in which the authorities in Singapore set up and handled the subsequent enquiry and trials gave a skilful manipulator in command of the facts, in this case Swettenham, full opportunity to suppress those episodes reflecting unfavourably on the British government, its troops and Swettenham himself. It was one of Swettenham's first steps to mould the history of British Malaya for his own ends. He subsequently made only the briefest reference to these trials, and indeed to his activities as a whole in 1876 after he left Perak in March of that year. However passing references in Bloomfield Douglas' diary for the year indicate that he was leading an active life from his new base in Singapore.

The death of the Bendahara in Perak referred to above on 30 October 1876⁸⁴ completed the change of faces on the Malay side in Perak, leaving Yusof supported by the British, as Regent, all the other senior chiefs having been removed. Speedy, as Assistant Resident, did not find favour with Jervois and the authorities in Singapore, chiefly because it was felt he resented no longer being independent, under the Mantri, and free of interference from Singapore. Moreover there had been signs of inefficiency in his dealings with the forces in the Perak War. He was therefore demoted and duly resigned, Maxwell taking his place. Davidson 'although he liked his post in Selangor, where he was well known, [he] did not care for a similar but far more difficult task in Perak.'⁸⁵ Nor did he approve of Jervois' arbitrary treatment of Speedy. On his resignation, Hugh Low, the Colonial Secretary in Labuan was brought in to succeed him. In Selangor, Bloomfield Douglas in Klang was assisted by James Innes, while Murray remained in Sungei Ujong.

Finally, after his wanton disregard of instructions from London, Jervois received a cable on 13 February 1877 instructing him to visit Australia to report on the fortifications. While there he was offered, and accepted the post of Governor of South Australia. He was replaced in August 1877, after a few months in which Anson acted, by Sir William Robinson, a brother of Sir Hercules Robinson, who had first reported on proposals to dissociate the Straits Settlements from the India office. Like his successor, Weld, Robinson had also previously served as Governor of Western Australia. Music was said to be the ruling passion of his life.⁸⁶

Thus by mid-1877, all the major figures of the turbulent events in the Malay States of the last four years with the exception of Swettenham had been removed from the scene. Even Swettenham

took a year's leave, well deserved, in the light of his recent activities. Before we follow him on leave, we may remark that, effortless as Swettenham's upward path may have appeared at a distance, he was twice, in the space of two years, appointed and then, apparently in response to opposition, demoted: first from the post of Resident in Selangor, and then as prosecutor in the trial of 1877. In each case, whatever the opposition, from the middle ranks of the Singapore hierarchy, Swettenham appears to have retained the support of the Governor, and of the individuals posted in his place above him.

A further example of this occurred just before he left on leave. We saw, at the end of his time in Perak, that he took the trouble to recommend to the British government the presentation of swords to Raja Mahmood, Syed Mashor and three others, in recognition of their assistance. These proposals were duly approved by Carnarvon, the swords being ordered from the Crown Agents, and inscribed in Jawi script in accordance with a text agreed by Swettenham and Hervey, assisted by Swettenham's old teacher, Munshi Mohamed Said. The proposed inscription came to the attention of McDougall, retired bishop of Kuching who criticized the Malay text, and suggested that Sir Peter Benson Maxwell, that old war-horse, be enlisted to correct it. This provoked a spirited protest from Swettenham, in the form of a private letter to Sir William Jervois:

Here we look upon the Malay spoken by the Rajas of the Peninsula as the best Malay known, and we, in common with the Malays proper regard Sarawak and Labuan Malays as lately emerged out of Jacoonism, Sakei-ism, Dyak-ism, Brunei-ism, in fine barbarism, and as such speaking an impure language and unacquainted with the finer distinctions in use amongst the educated Malays.⁸⁷

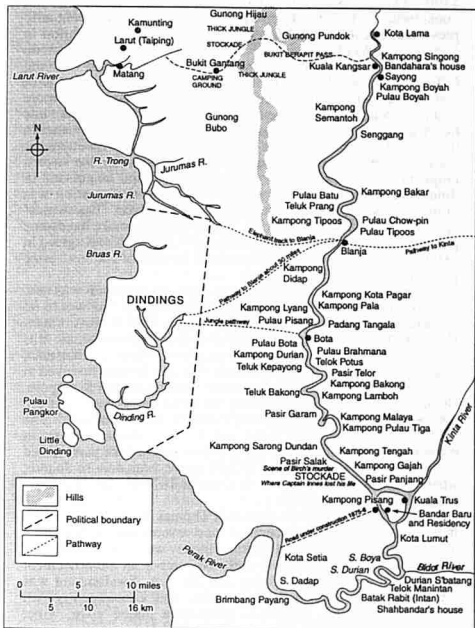
Swettenham continued with a detailed rebuttal of McDougall's comments, which involved an explanation of the finer points of Jawi script. This, if incomprehensible to Jervois and the Colonial Office, at least gave them the measure of Swettenham's own estimation of his abilities in this field. The point was not lost in London, where one of the officials commented, 'Our youthful civil servants evidently think well of their own scholarship.' Swettenham concluded with a final dig: 'I have deeply felt the imputation that ... we should not be considered capable of producing so small a specimen of Malay as an inscription of a few lines in length, and that Sir Benson Maxwell (whose acquaintance with Court Malay was not known during his residence here) should be suggested to repair our errors.'

However all was not plain sailing: the swords duly inscribed were received in September 1877 while Swettenham was on leave. Anson, always hostile to Swettenham, reported that his own enquiries, backed by those of Low and Bloomfield Douglas suggested that such awards were inappropriate for individuals of the doubtful character of Raja Mahmood and his colleagues. Anson also noted that Raja Asal, one of the proposed recipients, had already been given extensive tin mines at Papan by Swettenham. This provoked a series of queries from the Colonial Office officials. Meade, agreeing Anson's proposals that the swords be withheld, minuted, 'Yes, and ask for an explanation of Mr Swettenham's action in the matter of the tin-mines. It was not reported home, I feel sure, and it will be interesting to know whether it received the Governor's sanction.' Herbert was even more scathing: 'The Straits Civil Service is about as bad as we could wish any Civil Service to be in many ways.' Carnarvon commented, 'It seems a singular piece of negligence to say the least on the part of the Colonial Government to make such a recommendation.' There was clearly, added to concern over incompetence, a strong suspicion, fostered by Anson, that Swettenham had acted corruptly in his dealings with Raja Asul. This part of the correspondence concludes with the enigmatic comment, 'The proposed dispatch to the Governor was subsequently cancelled, and this paper "Put by." ' From this we can only conclude that Swettenham in the course of his leave, visited the Colonial Office and explained the position.⁸⁸

The matter was raised again at the instigation of Raja Mahmood, who in 1880 enquired of Weld, by then Governor in Singapore what had become of the swords. Weld investigated the position and concluded that Anson had been misled, unintentionally, by a confusion of names, and in particular had mistaken Raja Mahmood of Selangor for another raja of the same name. In this Weld was incorrect, for Anson had been right in his claim that Mahmood was a friend of Raja Mahdi in Selangor. Swettenham, who must have been available for consultation, apparently chose not to correct him on this point, perhaps not wishing to jeopardize Mahmood's chances of a reward.⁸⁹

Weld further maintained that Jervois had known his facts when he made the original recommendations, and the reference to dishonest dealing by Swettenham in the case of Raja Asul's mines could not be sustained. It was Jervois who had given permission for the grant. Weld concluded by recommending that in addition to

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Map 7. Perak River before and during the Perak War, 1875 and 1876.

the sword, Raja Mahmood at least should be given a cash award of \$400. On this occasion it would appear that Anson was not consulted.⁹⁰ The sword for Mahmood at least was eventually presented, but it required Swettenham's personal intervention in London, and Weld's, three years later, to ensure it. Swettenham on this occasion came close to a rebuff in the eyes of the Colonial Office at the hands of Anson. As is so often the case with Swettenham, one is left with the feeling that there was slightly more to the incident than now meets the eye. Possibly Swettenham had his own reasons for prompting Raja Mahmood to raise the matter in the more favourable climate which prevailed, for Swettenham himself, on Weld's arrival. For some reason, however, the swords prepared for the others were never presented, and languished in Singapore for some twenty years. Eventually the question was raised with the Colonial Office, but was not resolved. 'The swords' opined a Colonial Office official, 'would certainly make handsome presents for well-behaved African chiefs.'⁹¹ Finally it was agreed in 1899 that the remaining swords should be sold at the best price possible.⁹²

Based back in Singapore once again, Swettenham was now in a position to enjoy the social life of the Colony. As was to be expected, he attended the Queen's Birthday Ball at Government House in August. He also played cricket on several occasions. It is evident he was far more successful as a bowler than as a batsman, where he was generally out for a duck. He also became involved in amateur dramatics, which had recently been revived in Singapore. He played Mr Loophole, 'the young but rather gay young man from the country' in a one act piece 'My Friend from Leatherhead.' The newspaper critic, in a long report, noted that he seemed at home in the part. Amongst the semi-official events in which he participated at this time was the award of KCMG to the Maharaja of Johore, where he acted as interpreter. In October 1876 he was appointed Magistrate for Singapore.⁹³

He was staying at this time at St Thomas, River Valley Road. In the absence of other evidence we must assume that despite Ord's reassurances on his financial position, money was short, particularly with leave coming up, for in early November an advertisement appeared in the papers advising that Mr F.A. Swettenham was 'removing' from River Valley Road, and consequently 'all household furniture, procelain, glass-ware plated ware, wine, horses, conveyances (including two splendid Deli ponies, harness and an American buggy)' were to be sold by public auction, accompanied by 'champagne tiffin' at 1:30 p.m. on 11 November.⁹⁴

There are several unusual features about this event. Swettenham was throughout his life an inveterate collector, but it is

remarkable that in six years, on a low salary, with frequent moves to uncongenial places in the backwoods he should have collected so much. More extraordinary, Swettenham was not in Singapore for the sale, having left, on 7 November with Bloomfield Douglas for Klang.⁹⁵ We know from Douglas' diary that Douglas had been in Singapore since at least 31 October, so it is unlikely that the visit to Klang was sudden.

It was a regular practice in the Dutch East Indies for officials with influence, which Swettenham now had, to put up for auction a small number of virtually worthless objects for which those who anticipated favours would pay an exorbitant price. Is it possible that Swettenham was undertaking a similar exercise? In the absence of any mention of the sale subsequently we cannot know, but it would not be inconsistent with reservations about financial problems which had worried London on his appointment as Assistant Colonial Secretary.⁹⁶

Swettenham's action becomes even less readily understandable and London's reservations more so when we discover that early in 1877, just before he did go on leave, he was in private correspondence with Bloomfield Douglas, explaining that he had taken over debts due by the Selangor State Government to two Chinese in respect of monies due on one of the coastal vessels. Would Douglas be so kind as to issue 6% Selangor State Bonds in settlement? That there was something slightly improper about the transaction may be deduced from his request, in a private covering letter, that the bonds should not be registered in his own name. It is unlikely that he had heeded Carnarvon's warning of 1875 prohibiting government servants from becoming involved in commercial undertakings.⁹⁷

By the time he went on leave, Swettenham had, if not as much money as he wanted, certainly very considerable influence. What resources he had, he looked after carefully, giving to an old school friend in the Chartered Mercantile Bank a power of attorney before he left on leave.⁹⁸

NOTES

1. These are chronicled in HC 1505, 1510 and 1512.
2. HC 1505:154.
3. HC 1505:83-6, 125 Jervois to Carnarvon, 16 November 1875. Irving to Dunlop, 17 November 1875, and *SSGG*, 19 November 1875, Extraordinary Edition.
4. HC 1505:24.
5. HC 1505:133 Dunlop to Jervois, 12 November 1875.
6. HC 1505:27.

7. Lieutenant W.V. Bayly's *Journal*.
8. *British Malaya*, p. 208.
9. *Straits Observer*, 26 November 1875.
10. HC 1505:128-31 Dunlop to Sec. for Native States, 16 November 1875.
11. *Footprints*, pp. 62-3.
12. *Ibid*.
13. *Footprints*, p. 64.
14. Parkinson, 1960, op. cit., p. 267.
15. JPWC Dunlop in Pasir Garam to Jervois, 9 December 1875.
16. Loke Yew's obituary, *TOM*, 24 February and 2 March 1917.
17. See for instance Dunlop to Jervois of 5 December 1875, enclosing a letter translated by Swettenham. JPWC.
18. HC 1505:224-5.
19. *Footprints*, p. 64. Major A. was Major Amiel.
20. CO 273/384:395-411 Young to CO, 65 of 28 February 1912. This contains Raja Mahmood's account of the episode. It could well have been written, with Swettenham's assistance in support of a pension application from Selangor (1896) or Perak (1899.) For the circumstances of its submission to the CO in 1911-12, see Chapter 47. It certainly does not read like the reminiscences of an elderly man, 37 years after the event. See also J. de V. Allen (ed.), 1966, op. cit.
21. This account follows Swettenham's report, written apparently at the request of Dunlop in HC 1505:246-8. Swettenham to Dunlop, 18 December 1875.
22. CO 273/384:395-411 Young to CO, 65 of 28 February 1912.
23. See below in this Chapter.
24. HC 1505:244 Jervois to Carnarvon, 29 December 1875.
25. *Footprints*, p. 66.
26. HC 1505:250-1 Jervois to Colborne, 23 December 1875.
27. Details of the Kota Lama incident are scanty, and with good reason. There were two detailed reports, on which this account is based. The first to be published was Swettenham's account, 'A Line Engraving' in *The Real Malay*, pp. 210-23 (1900). The second is J.G. Scott's 'Needs Explaining' in *Cursed Luck*, a book of short stories published in 1908. Scott was a newspaper reporter who was present at the Perak War, and later went on to a career of distinction in Burma. The names in both stories were all changed, but all the incidents reported which can be checked independently are substantially correct, and there seems little reason to doubt the accuracy of the remainder. By 1908, when Scott's story was published, most of the leading participants were dead, with the notable exception of Swettenham, who was not present at the incident.
28. JPWC, Swettenham to Jervois, 25 January 1876.
29. CO 882/3:37-8, quoted in *Sw.J.*, p. 324, fn.
30. Maxwell corroborates this in HC 1505:271, his report of 5 January 1876. See also HC 1505:272 Ross to Colborne of the same date.
31. 'Needs Explaining' by J.G. Scott, in *Cursed Luck*, p. 206.
32. *Ibid*, p. 219.
33. JPWC, Swettenham to Jervois, 25 January 1876.
34. *Sw.J.*, 22 January 1876, p. 323.

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35. JPWC, Swettenham to Jervois, 27 January 1876. Maxwell subsequently denied responsibility.
36. *The Real Malay*: 'A Line Engraving,' p. 220. See also Chapter 34 below.
37. HC 1505:249.
38. HC 1505:268 Jervois to Carnarvon, 132 of 14 January 1876.
39. *Footprints*, p. 66, quoting Jervois' letter from Penang of 5 January 1876.
40. HC 1505:274.
41. HC 1510:20.
42. JPWC, Swettenham to Jervois, 21 January 1876.
43. JPWC, Swettenham to Jervois, 29 February 1876.
44. *Sw.J.*, 25 January, p. 325.
45. JPWC, Swettenham to Jervois, 23 January 1876.
46. *Sw.J.*, under the heading 15 February, p. 331, summarizing later events.
47. HC 1709:1-2 Swettenham to Jervois, Bandar Bahru, March 19 1876.
48. 'Coomassie's' letter in *Straits Observer*, 23 November 1875. See p. 175 for presentation of the swords.
49. *STW*, 20 November 1875.
50. *STW*, 18 March 1876, leading article.
51. C.M. Turnbull, 1985, *A History of Singapore*, 5th impression, p. 121.
52. *Footprints*, pp. 94-5.
53. HC 1512:35 Douglas (Col. Sec.) to Davidson, 21 February 1876.
54. For details of Douglas, see p. below.
55. HC 1512:62-3.
56. Parkinson, 1960, op. cit., p. 299.
57. The facts, insofar as they were eventually established, were more complicated, and involved a blank signed letter from Abdullah to Maharaja Lela, which the latter subsequently filled out in Seputum's name. See Parkinson, 1960, op. cit., p. 302.
58. HC 1512:53 gives Swettenham's account of 11 March 1876, of Dato Sagor's arrest. It was accompanied by Swettenham's translation of Abdullah's letter of the previous day on the same subject.
59. Anson, 1920, op. cit., p. 348.
60. HC 1512:43.
61. *SSGG*, 31 March 1876, dated 30 March. Government Notice No. 68.
62. CO 273/83:4 ff. Jervois to CO, telegram of 5 January 1876 enclosing CO to Jervois of 19 January 1876.
63. JPWC, Swettenham to Jervois, 29 February 1876.
64. CO 273/83:192 Jervois to CO, 98 of 6 March 1876.
65. CO 273/83:204 Ord to Round, 25 April 1876.
66. CO 273/83:202 Gov. to CO, 100 of 6 March 1876 enclosing Carnarvon to Jervois, 28 April 1876.
67. SSF 186/1876 Resident to Col. Sec., 25 June 1876.
68. Private Diary of Douglas, 14 April 1876.
69. Revd Birch's Record, item 34.
70. Details are given in 'A Journey on Foot to the Patani Frontier in 1876' by W.E. Maxwell in *JSBRAS*, 9:1-68, 1882.
71. CO 273/84:240 ff. Jervois to CO, Telegram of 22 July 1876.
72. HC 1709:71-3 Jervois to Carnarvon, 22 September 1876.

73. *TOM*, 1 December 1916, carries an informative obituary.
74. Full texts of these documents, originally published in *Copies, or Extracts, of Correspondence with reference to the Case of the Ex- Sultan Abdullah of Perak*, H.M.S.O., London, 29 July 1891, are given in Cheah Boon Keng, 1991, 'Letters from Exile: Correspondence of Sultan Abdullah of Perak from Seychelles and Mauritius, 1877-1891.' *JMBRAS*, 64 (1): 33-74. Proceedings of the trial are given in CO 273/90:17-225 Governor to CO, 10 of 11 January 1876. See also HC 1709.
75. Cheah, 1991, op. cit., p. 42.
76. *Ibid*, p. 70.
77. The Mantri's memorial of 11 June 1877, published in *PP*, 29 September 1897.
78. HC 1709:120 Swettenham to Davidson, 5 December 1876.
79. HC 1709:116-7 Jervois to Carnarvon, 11 January 1877.
80. *MM*, 7 May 1898. Unfortunately no details are given.
81. HC 1709:120-2 Dunlop to Col. Sec., Singapore, 25 December 1876.
82. See Sec. State to Gov. Mauritius, 117 of 28 June 1877 encl. in Sec. State to OAG Straits, 141 of 28 June 1877.
83. The letter appears in Papers on Ex-Sultan Abdullah, UML Microfilm, in connection with an appeal by Syed Mashor to Rodger, as Acting Resident, Selangor, on 10 August 1886, p. 32.
84. HC 1709:80 Jervois to Carnarvon 14 November 1876.
85. *Footprints*, p. 69.
86. *A New History of Western Australia*, C.T. Stannage, University of Western Australia Press, 4th imp. 1987, p. 328.
87. CO 273/90:286 ff. Memo from Swettenham to Jervois, 27 December 1876, included in Gov. to Sec. State, 16 of 13 January 1877.
88. CO 273/91:462 ff. Anson to Sec. State, 290 of 29 September 1877, together with Meade's, Herbert's and Carnarvon's comments. See also CO 273/93:213 ff. Gov. to CO, 78 of 26 March 1878.
89. CO 426/7:32 Letter of 12 September 1891.
90. CO 273/109:419 Gov. to Sec. State, 297 of 13 August 1881.
91. CO 273/242:82 Gov. to Crown Agents, 21 March 1898.
92. CO 273/253:207 Gov. to Crown Agents, 20 October 1899.
93. *SDT*, 16 Augustm, 29 September 1876, 26 February and 6 March 1877 and *STW*, 26 August and 28 October 1876. See also cutting from *Straits Observer* encl. in CO 273/89:573 Condition of Chinese Women in Straits, Gov. to CO, 248 of 31 October 1876.
94. *SDT*, 6-10 November 1876.
95. Douglas Diaries, 7 November 1876 and *Straits Observer*, 8 November 1876.
96. Heather Sutherland, 1979, *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite*, Heinemann.
97. SSF 15, 16, 107 and 139/77.
98. SSF 144/77.

Leave and Married Life

Swettenham's departure on leave in March 1877 is a suitable moment to review his career so far. He had undoubtedly made a good start learning Malay, distinguishing himself before and during the Perak War. At the same time he had made enemies in Singapore, not least those who protested successfully at his appointment as Resident of Selangor. Some of the hostility may have been provoked by Anson, whose local contacts in Perak could well have told him of indiscreet liaisons by Swettenham with the local ladies. They almost certainly gave him unfavourable information on Swettenham's activities in the course of the Perak War.¹

It would take some time for such stories to lose their attraction in colonial dinner parties. For this reason, quite apart from the fact that leave was due, Swettenham may have welcomed the chance to escape from Singapore. Moreover at the age of 27, Swettenham must have recognized that for his career, if for no other reason, it was now appropriate that he should marry. A charming young wife would work wonders on his image in Singapore. Single ladies of the appropriate age and background were always in short supply there, so leave in UK was just the opportunity Swettenham needed to find a bride. Indeed this point could well have been made to him privately by his friends. Thus he set sail from Singapore in March 1877, travelling uncomfortably via Colombo.²

His activities in England were chiefly social, but with an eye as ever to his career, he played cricket for the Colonial Office. This was particularly significant, for those with whom he played cricket or in the Colonial Office were precisely those who dealt with the Governor's dispatches from Singapore. The officials in London welcomed this contact. Most of those coming home on leave did not bother to call on the Colonial Office.³ He also claimed to have met a number of stage celebrities, and his cousin William Overend, a QC and MP who was chairing a Commission to inquire into the London police.⁴ Overend encouraged him to take up hunting and mounted him with Lord Galway's hounds. Later he went to stay at

Hurworth, with his brother, Richard, who had also become a keen rider to hounds. Together they went out with the Hurworth, Lord Zetland's, the South Durham and the Bedale packs.

From his brief account of this period, it is clear that Swettenham valued highly the contacts which the hunting field provided. They were important to him later as the range of his socially desirable acquaintances expanded. But the most important feature of this leave passes without mention in his autobiography, written in 1940: his first, tragic marriage, which was to overshadow his life for the following sixty years.

How he first met his fiancée Constance Sydney Holmes, is unclear. It is possible that William Overend might have introduced him to the family of Cecil Frederick Holmes, a housemaster at Druries, Harrow, and father of a large, growing family. Alternatively it is possible that the contact could have come through his brother, William, who was settled near Shrewsbury, with which the Holmes family also had connections, through the school of that name. Of the seven children, his wife-to-be, Constance Sydney, usually known by her second name, was the oldest, aged nineteen in 1878. This effectively precludes the possibility that they could have met before his departure for Singapore in 1870.

The Holmes family were members of the well-to-do Victorian middle class. Cecil Holmes' father, Frederick, came from Belfast, where the family appear to have been small landowners and farmers, almost certainly Ulster Protestants. The Revd Frederick Holmes was, at the time of his son's birth on 31 July 1828, a professor at Bishop's College in Calcutta, a missionary training centre established in 1820 to prepare Indian converts for mission work. Cecil's mother was Anna Maria Loxdale, also apparently from a prosperous family from Shrewsbury, which included at least one rich and generous great-uncle who gave Sydney jewellery for her wedding.

By 1832, Frederick Holmes had returned from India and was settled in Shrewsbury, where Cecil was baptized on 13 June. There was at least one brother, Arthur, and several sisters. Subsequently Cecil went to Shrewsbury School, leaving in 1847 to go up to St John's College, Cambridge. His father meantime became a Burgess of Shrewsbury. Cecil followed in his footsteps in 1849: the family seems to have achieved some prominence in the local community. Cecil Holmes had originally intended to follow his father into the church, but during his time at Cambridge changed his mind and decided to become a public-school master. He graduated in 1851, coming top of the second-class honours list in the Classical Tripos, with honours also in mathematics, and promptly took a job as a

temporary master at Harrow, in which he was shortly confirmed. There he remained till his death in 1887.

On 28 July 1857, Cecil married, at the parish church in Montgomery, Constantia Louisa, only child of T.T. Laugher, previously of Leyton in Essex. It is not clear what her father did for a living, but he seems not to have been particularly wealthy, as Constantia on her death left only £451. Constantia herself played the modest and doubtless busy wife to her autocratic and indeed overbearing husband. She rapidly bore him two daughters and five sons. Cecil was a staunch conservative and firmly believed, as did many Victorian fathers, that a strong grounding in the classics was all that a young man needed for a good education. Indeed, his obituary is heavy with faint praise behind the traditional platitudes and makes it clear that Cecil, in addition to his reactionary views, was intellectually limited, being much less clever than his younger brother, Arthur: 'And Mr Holmes was not the man to change with changing times; that which he was in 1847 he was in the main in 1887: a Churchman of the older type, the staunchest of Conservatives, and tolerant of no new thing except the Primrose League.'⁵ It was in keeping with his stern and authoritarian image that he should have been a JP and usually presided at petty sessions, as well as being chairman of the Harrow Branch of the Conservative Association. As housemaster of Druries from 1864 he entirely rebuilt the house to improve the accommodation for the boys.⁶ He also appears to have been cantankerous and quarrelsome, and there are strong indications that towards the end of his life he fell out with his eldest son C.D. Holmes, whom he specifically cut out of his will.

It seems possible therefore that the Holmes family atmosphere was neither particularly warm nor peaceable, and though the young girl whom Swettenham had met in the summer of 1877 may well have been beautiful, she was certainly immature, and probably even then exhibited some of the highly strung nervousness which was to develop so tragically. Her nervous temperament could not have been helped by the rigidity of her father's views, and it seems likely that one of the major considerations which caused her to accept Swettenham's marriage proposal was the chance it offered for escaping from an increasingly uncongenial family atmosphere. Circumstantial evidence in support of this theory is provided by Swettenham's own, bitter sketch, years later: '... the girl ... is ready to accept almost any one who will take her from an uncongenial home, and it says a good deal for the Western world that the extraordinary difficulties of the position should, in so large a proportion of cases, be overcome as well as they are.'⁷ Against such a background, it is necessary only to observe the self-

confidence, if not arrogance, displayed by Swettenham in the photograph taken of him less than two years earlier in Perak to realize that the couple could have problems.

If Swettenham had been sufficiently perceptive at this stage to note a streak of irrationality and instability in Sydney, he might have paid more attention to the fate of her brilliant uncle Arthur, two years earlier. Arthur won prizes at Cambridge, though in 1859 he only obtained a second-class degree in the classical tripos. He was ordained a year later, and then spent two years as a fellow at St John's, before moving as a fellow to Clare College. He married in 1861, and for the next fourteen years lived a busy and active life in the University. Indeed he seems to have been something of a workaholic, for by the beginning of 1875 he was suffering from depression and overstrain. He became 'lately somewhat eccentric and occasionally much depressed,' being irritable and unsociable.⁸

He began to suffer from delusions that he had brain fever, or was going blind. His doctors advised a holiday which he took in the Isle of Wight, coming back apparently much improved in April. Then one morning he returned from taking the morning service at the college chapel and sent his servant for the doctor. When they arrived at his rooms, they found him with his throat 'cut almost from ear to ear'. He died shortly afterwards. The symptoms were such as would now enable us to recognize manic depression. It is a condition which is well known to run in families. Why did Swettenham marry into such a family? It is possible, of course, that he had fallen head over heels in love and was in no mood for caution, but this does not accord with the general picture we receive of his calculating character. It is more likely that he left Singapore determined, with the encouragement of friends, to find himself a wife during his leave, and Sydney was the first possible candidate. Being a man of action, he took the plunge without fully assessing the position.

The wedding, when it took place in February 1878 was a lavish affair and must have taken some months to prepare. This suggests that the couple became engaged in the late summer of 1877, by which time Sydney's father had no doubt satisfied himself that Swettenham had good prospects, if no money, and decided to spare no expense. No less than fourteen bridesmaids supported Sydney, including two Jones Parry nieces of Swettenham, daughters of his married sister Lucy Maria. The remainder appear to have been relations or friends of the bride. The marriage took place in the Harrow Parish Church on a warm late February morning. The bride was given away by her father and the ceremony was conducted by the Bishop of Hereford, the Revd James Atlay, one of

Holmes' Cambridge friends, assisted by the Revd Dr Butler, Headmaster of Harrow, and the vicar of Harrow.

After the wedding service, the registry was signed by Swettenham's father who came down from Scotland for the occasion, and Henry Mills, private secretary to Sir Andrew Clarke, witnessing on behalf of Swettenham. A military friend of Swettenham's, Major H. de Grey Warter, acted as best man. It is curious that neither of Swettenham's two elder brothers who were in UK appears to have attended the wedding. Both Richard and James had been at Cambridge, the latter at Clare, where he would undoubtedly have known of, if not met, Sydney's unfortunate uncle Arthur. Perhaps they were more perceptive than Swettenham, sensed that the occasion was inauspicious and stayed away.

The wedding was followed by a breakfast for 150 persons in the Public Hall, lavishly decorated with out-of-season flowers for the occasion. The cake was adorned on the sides with alternate Holmes and Swettenham monogram shields.⁹ The couple departed at 3:00 p.m. for a private house made available by a friend at Henley-on-Thames; scarcely the most inspiring place for a February honeymoon. Almost immediately after this, they left England for Singapore. It was certainly the bride's first long absence from home, but the prospect of an exciting life with a dashing husband in a far-flung outpost of empire must have had its attractions: escape from an overbearing father was not the least. They travelled out on the *Sindh*, catching the boat in Marseilles, arriving in Singapore on Saturday 4 May 1878.¹⁰

There is no indication of where the Swettenhams set up house in Singapore, nor do any glimpses survive of their early married life. However Bloomfield Douglas noted in passing that he stayed on occasion when in Singapore with Swettenham. He made no mention of Sydney, who, if she appeared at all, played no great part in proceedings. From the more detailed accounts which survive of her medical problems later in life, it is not difficult to surmise that she proved unable to cope with the starchy society of colonial Singapore. Despite the unhappy atmosphere which she had so recently left, she was almost certainly homesick, and even then perhaps subject to irrational outbursts, which no doubt caused embarrassment and sometimes offence to her social acquaintances. Swettenham's job¹¹ as Assistant Colonial Secretary, took him away from Singapore, visiting the states in the Peninsula for long periods. This no doubt made Sydney even more miserable, left as she was on her own in a strange tropical city. Additionally, she would have had to cope with a backlog of jealousy which Swettenham's ability, and meteoric rise in the colonial establishment had engendered. Where a more mature woman could have shrugged off or disregarded

vindictive jibes from the wives of her husband's colleagues, this would have been difficult for Sydney, and it is likely that she withdrew to a large extent from Singapore social life as a result.

Some nine months after Sydney's arrival, the formidable Isabella Bird passed through Singapore and up the west coast of the Peninsula. She was a remarkable woman, the daughter of an English country parson, and 'belonged, in short, to that colourful band of travelling individualists of the late nineteenth century.'¹² She had a sharp eye for detail, and, by the time she reached Singapore, a formidable reputation as a travel-writer, which ensured her all the right connections. During her brief stay in Singapore she recorded one of Swettenham's sardonic comments: 'the few upright rajas who exist say that there is no longer any 'adat Malayu' but that everything is done by 'adat suka hate!' Her acid picture of Singapore in January 1879 has no direct description of Swettenham himself.¹³

She was however tantalizingly uninformative over one of her Singapore contacts. On arrival she went to her hotel, where C. Smith visited her after breakfast. Shortly thereafter she was taken by an unnamed resident, who she refers to as 'Mr----' to his bungalow. Here she spent the day and after going alone to dinner with the Smiths that evening returned to Mr ----'s bungalow for the night. It has been speculated that 'Mr-----' could only have been Swettenham. No-one else in Singapore would have had the necessary knowledge of the Malay States which she was about to visit, or the Singapore contacts which she recorded. The precise date of Swettenham's return to Singapore from his audit visit is not clear, but certainly he was there within a day of Isabella Bird's visit.¹⁴ If he was in town, he was undoubtedly the right person for her to see. Yet it is difficult to ascertain the reason for her secrecy: she usually gave the full names of all her contacts.

On the assumption that Swettenham was her host, one possibility presents itself. We know that the lonely and increasingly unhappy Sydney was given to manic outbreaks, and it may be that Isabella Bird was witness to one of these. Swettenham had after all been away from home for a month at the least. The excitement occasioned by his return and the disappointment in discovering that her husband was accompanied by a strange and formidable middle-aged lady with whom he chose to spend his time may have been too much for her.¹⁵ Sydney refused or was in no state to go to the Smiths for dinner as had been planned, and Swettenham himself stayed with her for the evening. If Isabella Bird had been witness to a manic outbreak on Sydney's part, Swettenham may well have requested her never to mention in any manner her stay with him.

Nor were Swettenham's relations with Jervois' successors as Governor particularly warm. We have already noted Swettenham's poor relations with Anson, who succeeded Jervois as Administrator for some seven months. To Robinson, who succeeded Jervois, Swettenham took a strong dislike, partly because he believed that the Governor paid insufficient attention to the Native States. Either Swettenham had forgotten about, or never heard of Robinson's extensive visit there while he, Swettenham was on leave.¹⁶ We may assume that with as brash a personality as Swettenham, the dislike was reciprocated.

Anson had never been better than distant, in a chilly sort of way, so there can have been little improvement when he took over again as Administrator on Robinson's departure in February 1879. Moreover there are hints that relations between Swettenham and Anson on a social level at least may have reached breaking point in early 1879. The Swettenhams appear to have taken no part in the reception accorded to General Ulysses Grant of the United States, who paid an official visit to Singapore in the first days of April 1879. It seems possible that the couple might have made a tactical retreat to Penang to avoid the occasion.¹⁷ Swettenham's own contacts in Province Wellesley at the time might easily have suggested to him the possibility of an acting stint there as magistrate later in the year. It would in any case be a convenient way for the couple to avoid social ostracism in Singapore.

More humiliating must have been the omission of their names from the list of guests invited to the Queen's Birthday celebrations on 28 May.¹⁸ This was one of the social events of the year, and it would have been uncharacteristic for Swettenham to have missed this, however strained his relations with the Ansons who acted as hosts in the absence of the Governor. Yet he was certainly in Singapore around that period, writing peevish official letters to Douglas on signs of his unsatisfactory management in Selangor.¹⁹ Douglas' own diaries record on 28 May receipt of a note from Swettenham.²⁰

Finally, as an indication of Anson's dislike for Swettenham, which appears to have endured some forty years, we have the pointed lack of mention of Swettenham in the old man's reminiscences.²¹ Times were indeed hard for the thrusting Swettenham, though to what extent they were caused by his own behaviour, or that of his wife, we shall never know. Swettenham's own immediate superior, the Colonial Secretary, Smith, probably still lacked the experience to be able to contribute very much to the resolution of Swettenham's office problems. On top of all this, his marriage must by then have been under some strain.

Perhaps it was the humiliation of Swettenham's social ostracism in Singapore which caused him to apply for appointment as Lieutenant-Governor of Malacca.²² It was certainly not his only attempt to escape from Singapore, for on 14 July 1879, he resumed his old haunts as Police Magistrate and Commissioner of the Court of Requests in Province Wellesley for six months to replace Isemonger, who was on leave.²³ It would appear that early 1879 was a period of frustration and disappointment: so much so that the chance to escape from the hostile environment of Singapore was not to be missed. Swettenham would be away from unsympathetic supervisors, and his wife, who followed two weeks later, would have a chance to relax, and recover her poise.²⁴

Even during his stint in Province Wellesley, Swettenham remained in eclipse. We have a mention of him presiding over a case where an estate manager was accused of maltreating his workers,²⁵ and a cricket match in which he played in Penang in early September. In his own account of the period he put a good face on this episode. He enjoyed the constant travel in Province Wellesley and the snipe, where he looked forward to shooting twenty five couple in two to three hours, in the company of Laurie Brown, son of Forbes Brown, whom he had known in earlier days.²⁶

However by the end of 1879 the situation was beginning to improve: Robinson had departed in early December,²⁷ thus removing one malign influence on Swettenham's upward progress, and the couple returned to Singapore in late January 1880.²⁸ Ready as always to improve his terms of appointment, Swettenham hastened to write asking for an increase of 50 percent in his salary. This was in due course agreed.²⁹ That he was still not fully committed to a career in the Straits may be deduced from his application for the post of Colonial Secretary, Hong Kong.³⁰

Much of what little time Swettenham had at home in Singapore in this period must have been taken up with writing, for in early 1881, the first of his two volumes of *Malay Vocabularies* was published, followed by the second in 1882, each selling for \$2 a copy: no mean sum in those days.³¹ Swettenham perhaps saw this as an opportunity to register his linguistic expertise, for the basic vocabulary in roman script was accompanied by one in Jawi, the modified Arabic script used for the Malay language. The books were produced at the Government Printing Office in Singapore, when it was not occupied with other work. In the Introduction Swettenham paid warm tribute to his old mentor and friend, Munshi Mohamed Said, who had coached him in Malay ten years before. The latter responded with a favourable review in his newspaper, *Jawi Peranakan*, and other reviews were also complimentary.³² Some of

the English-Malay dialogues were dated even for the 1880s: 'When the fort is taken, there will be no difficulty about the stockades.' Swettenham had been mulling over the idea for five or six years, since the time when capturing such stockades had featured large in his life.

The review by Mohamed Said confirms that Swettenham kept in touch with his old teacher, who had by now collected at his Singapore establishment a number of the Malays exiled from the Peninsula for causing trouble to the British. One of these was Raja Bidin of Bernam, who had fallen out badly with Bloomfield Douglas in 1879.³³ Douglas had met Bidin in Singapore, living up to his reputation as a ne'er-do-well, and attempted, without success, to persuade the Sultan of Selangor to find him a post at his court. Although we cannot be certain, it is likely that he formed part of the entourage at Mohamed Said's establishment. Swettenham's linguistic expertise was marked at about the same time by an article in two parts in the *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, of which he was by then editor.³⁴

The announcement of the arrival of Sir Frederick Aloysius Weld to succeed Anson on 6 May 1880 gave a renewed impetus to Swettenham's official career, which was matched in the social field. The Swettenhams now regularly attended the leading social events in Singapore. He and his wife attended two functions at Government House within a month in May and early June 1880, while at the end of May he was sworn in as Clerk of the Councils.³⁵

Early November 1880 saw the fifth anniversary of Birch's murder. *The Straits Times* noted that while the military role in the Perak War had been duly recognized by the award of medals, no such recognition had been afforded to the civilians.³⁶ The hint was promptly taken, for less than three weeks later it was announced that Swettenham, amongst others was to get an award.³⁷ The ceremony took place in the Town Hall on 1 December, the awards being presented, after suitable speeches, by Lady Weld. In each case she was assisted in the presentation by the wife of the receiver. However this procedure was not followed in Swettenham's case: two assistants were needed in the form of Mrs Dunlop and Sydney Swettenham. Apparently the authorities, apprehensive that Sydney might have an emotional outburst, took the precaution of ensuring she was adequately chaperoned. Anson, though still in Penang, was mercifully absent from the ceremony, ostensibly sick.³⁸

Meantime back in Dollar old James Swettenham's health had declined. By early 1881 he was recorded as imbecile, and required a full time male nurse to look after him. He died on 31 May that year, thus bringing to an end the Swettenham connection with Dollar. It would of course have been unthinkable in those days for

Swettenham to return home on his father's death, so it fell to those family members in UK to handle matters. In the light of his apparently unsuccessful career as a solicitor, his personal estate of £4,592-1-11d is surprising. Apart from an annuity of £80 per year to his daughter Charlotte, the rest of the estate was divided among his remaining five children. Thereafter Charlotte, the dutiful unmarried daughter left the area, and eventually settled in London.³⁹

Early 1881 saw the formation of the Volunteer Fire Brigade, under McCallum, now Colonial Engineer, with Swettenham participating as Captain of D Company: the Hook and Ladder Detachment.⁴⁰

If we assume that Sydney Swettenham was still living with her husband, as seems likely, she must have been largely out of sight, for on 28 April 1881, Bloomfield Douglas recorded in his diary that he moved from Emmerson's Tiffin Rooms, 'to stay with Mr Swettenham, who very kindly offered me quarters.' There is no mention of Mrs Swettenham.⁴¹ However later in the year she seems to have come into her own, winning a tennis tournament in partnership with a Mr Earl, while Swettenham and his partner were beaten in the first round.⁴² She also participated successfully in the June flower show, winning first prizes for displays of ferns and moss.⁴³ Swettenham himself was winning awards, but only fourth, in the Melbourne Exhibition, for Native Costumes, and, somewhat incongruously, for a cigarette case which he sent for exhibition.⁴⁴

At the end of September, a ladies committee of three including Mrs Swettenham, arranged a fancy dress ball. Swettenham acted as one of the stewards, dressed as Mephistopheles. Perhaps exhausted by the organization, Mrs Swettenham appeared as Sleep: 'There was a lady got up as Sleep — we can hardly call it a fancy dress: it was an ordinary ball dress of the present day, straw colour, with a beautiful wreath of poppies round the front, coming from the back; the little strap made it more fanciful, it being a large poppy turned upside down, and carelessly dropped on one side of the head, the hair of which was powdered.'⁴⁵ The success of this occasion was such that when the Royal Princes, Albert Victor and George of Wales paid an official visit in January 1882, a Bal Costumé was held to celebrate the occasion in Government House. Mrs Swettenham, with wry humour, appeared as 'Follow the Drum,' while her husband was dressed as an officer of the French Guard at the time of Louis XV.⁴⁶

The early 1880s saw an upsurge of interest in artistic matters amongst the Colonial ladies of Singapore. A sketching club was established at the end of 1880, and their first exhibition took place in November 1881, while Swettenham was away on his Japan visit.⁴⁷ Mrs Swettenham was involved with the club, and lent two pictures

for exhibition by a Dr Lennox Browne.⁴⁸ Three further art exhibitions took place in 1882, at one of which 'Mrs Swettenham did a song.' Unfortunately the reports of these exhibitions referred to all the exhibitors by pseudonyms, and it is therefore not possible to establish whether either of the Swettenhams participated. These activities must have given impetus to Swettenham's own painting in Perak three years later.⁴⁹

We have one further glimpse of Mrs Swettenham in her social role in 1882: in June that year she launched the steamer *Cecil C. Smith*, at a champagne breakfast. The vessel was Chinese owned, and built for trading up the west coast of the Peninsula. Smith, the Colonial Secretary after whom the vessel was named made a speech: 'Her (Mrs Swettenham's) presence here today shows the great interest which she feels in the prosperity of the trade of this port, and that she is the very worthy wife of a very worthy officer of the Civil Service, whose interests have for so many years been interwoven with the daily history of the Straits Settlements.' He concluded with a call for three cheers for Mrs Swettenham. The account, with its slight undertones of condescension and even damning with faint praise, suggests that Sydney was trying hard, against considerable odds, to do her duty as a Colonial wife.⁵⁰ Finally we have already seen evidence of Swettenham's enthusiasm for collecting.⁵¹ His activities in Perak had evidently enabled him to amass a further collection of ceremonial crises from Perak. Sensing that the tide was moving in his favour he chose this opportunity to sell the whole collection to the Raffles Museum.⁵²

NOTES

1. Chapters 12 and 13.
2. He took three months' vacation and nine months' leave on half pay. *SSGG*, 4 May 1877 and *Footprints*, p. 70. He returned to Singapore in April 1878, not 1877, as indicated in *Footprints*.
3. Robert Heussler, 1981, *British Rule in Malaya*, p. 87.
4. His aunt Mary Swettenham had married Wilson Overend, a surgeon. William Overend, presumably a son of this marriage, was fifteen or twenty years older than Swettenham.
5. *The Eagle*, the St John's College Magazine, Vol. XIV, 1887.
6. Obituary in the *Harrow Gazette & Monthly Advertiser*, 30 April 1887.
7. *Unaddressed Letters: 'Daughters and Despotism,'* by Swettenham, 1898, esp. p. 104.
8. Obituary, *The Times*, 20 April 1875, p. 10.
9. *Harrow Gazette & Monthly Advertiser*, 23 February and 2 March 1878.
10. *SDT*, 6 May 1878.
11. See next Chapter.

12. *A Curious Life for a Lady: The Story of Isabella Bird, Traveller Extraordinary*, 1970, by Pat Barr, preface, p.15.
13. Bird, 1883, op. cit., p. 238. 'Adat Malayu' means Malay custom. 'Adat suka hate' means voluntary custom.
14. Douglas Diaries.
15. J.M. Gullick in J.M. Gullick (ed.), 1995, *Brief Lives - Adventurous Women*, Essay on Isabella Bird. Penerbit Fajar Bakti, Kuala Lumpur.
16. *Footprints*, p. 71. CO 273/93:208 ff. Governor to CO, 78 of 26 March 1878. Swettenham's dislike of Robinson was repeated in *British Malaya*, p. 245, where he recorded incorrectly that Robinson spent eighteen months in the Straits. In fact he spent only fifteen and a half months there.
17. *STD*, 21 April 1879, recording the return of Mr and Mrs Swettenham from Penang the day before.
18. *STD*, 29 May 1879.
19. SSF 179 and 198/1879. See Chapter 15.
20. Douglas Diaries, 28 May 1879.
21. Anson, 1920, op. cit.
22. CO 426/6:235 Application recorded 30 May 1879.
23. *SSGG*, 11 July 1879 and *Penang Standard & Mercantile Advertiser*, 17 July 1879. Also CO 273/102:154 ff. Anson to CO, 45 of 18 February 1880.
24. *PGSC*, 26 July 1879.
25. *Penang Standard & Mercantile Advertiser*, 16 September 1879.
26. *Footprints*, p. 70.
27. He was subsequently appointed Governor of Natal. *STW*, 6 December 1879.
28. *STW*, 20 January 1880.
29. CO 273/102:154 ff. Anson to CO, 45 of 18 February 1880.
30. CO 426/6:238 His application was dated 30 May 1880.
31. *SDT*, 9 January 1883.
32. *Vocabulary of the English and Malay Languages with Notes* by Frank A. Swettenham, Revised ed. 1886. It went through several editions, the last in 1927.
33. Douglas diaries, 25 March 1879.
34. 'Comparative Vocabulary of the dialects of some of the wild tribes inhabiting the Malayan Peninsula, Borneo etc.,' *JSBRAS*, 5:125-6, 6:293-4, 1881.
35. *STW*, 11, 25 May and 3 June 1880.
36. *STW*, 3 November 1880.
37. *STW*, 24 November 1880.
38. *STW*, 8 December 1880.
39. Census returns for Dollar, 1881, and will of James Oldham Swettenham, Somerset House, London.
40. *STW*, 11 April 1881, and Makepeace, Brooke and Braddell (eds.), 1921, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 337.
41. Douglas Diaries, 28 April 1881.
42. *STW*, 1 September 1881.
43. *STW*, 2 June 1881.
44. *STW*, 5 May 1881.

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45. *STW*, 8 October 1881 and 11 February 1882, quoting an account from *The Queen or Lady's Newspaper*.
46. *STW*, 14 January 1882.
47. See Chapter 16.
48. *STW*, 10 November 1881.
49. For reports of these exhibitions see *STW*, 14 March, 18 May and 8 September 1882.
50. *STW*, 22 June 1882.
51. See Chapter 13.
52. Makepeace, Brooke and Braddell, 1921, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 552.

Policy and Auditing

To follow Swettenham's professional career up to the time of his appointment as Resident, Selangor in autumn 1882, it is necessary to revert for a moment to March 1876, at the end of the Perak War, and before Swettenham departed on leave.

As we have seen, at the end of March 1876, Swettenham was appointed Assistant Colonial Secretary, with special responsibility for native affairs. In this post he was assisted by Arthur Knight, who combined the skills of shorthand writer and chief clerk. Swettenham had evidently formed a good opinion of him during the Perak proceedings in Singapore, and it seems likely that he arranged for Knight to follow him to the Colonial Secretary's office. Knight was seventeen years older than Swettenham, English by birth, and evidently an intelligent and cultured man: he was a keen musician and actor. He was however very much junior to Swettenham, being employed in what was basically a clerical job. Probably in these early years he assisted Swettenham in the preparation of his reports.¹

It is evident that for most of 1876 Swettenham was involved chiefly with the aftermath of events in Perak, and the various trials and investigations which we have already considered. But as will be shown below, Swettenham's influence behind the scenes was crucial at this time in determining future policy. The storm which had arisen between Jervois and Carnarvon, as a result of Jervois exceeding his orders in terms of involvement in the affairs of the Native States had almost blown itself out. While Jervois' firmness and decision in handling the Perak crisis was praised, his justifications for the actions which had provoked that crisis prompted outraged comments by Carnarvon: 'The insolence of this expression can hardly be matched in any Colonial Dispatch.'²

The position was finally set out in Carnarvon's dispatch of 1 June 1876:

I need not, however, delay longer to say that on a general review of the correspondence which has come before me, I fail to see any proof that the system under which Residents were appointed to the Native States has had such a trial as to justify

me in pronouncing that it has failed, or that any other course which has been indicated is not open to graver risk, larger expenditure, and more doubtful results. The obstacles which have interfered with its success are apparently such as can be removed.³

This was elaborated in a covering letter sent to the Residents (in fact largely quoting another part of the same dispatch.)

You will observe that in continuing the Residential system, Her Majesty's Government define the functions of the Resident to be the giving of influential and responsible advice to the ruler, a position the duties of which are well understood in the East.

The Residents are not to interfere more frequently or to greater extent than is necessary with the minor details of government; but their special objects should be, the maintenance of peace and law, the initiation of a sound system of taxation, with the consequent development of the resources of the country, and the supervision of the collection of the revenue, so as to ensure the receipt of funds necessary to carry out the principal engagements of the Government, and to pay for the cost of the British officers, and whatever establishments may be necessary to support them.⁴

Not for the first time, London stuck its head in the sand, and pretended that the Perak War had never occurred. The fiction that Residents were only to advise was preserved. The Malays of course knew little if anything of these deliberations. For them the grim precedent of Perak was enough to ensure that the 'advice' of Residents would not lightly be ignored in future.

The Colonial Office had realized that if the chiefs were finally to be deprived of their traditional sources of income, and indeed much of the prestige of their position, not only must allowances be paid, but an attempt must be made to get them involved, if only nominally in some instances, in the process of government. This led to the setting up of State Councils. The suggestion had first been made in 1875, when Jervois had proposed that British officers governing Perak be assisted by an advisory body.⁵ It is significant that Swettenham was in Singapore during the period in which that dispatch was prepared. Jervois further proposed they be extended also to include Chinese headmen.⁶ Carnarvon in his letter of approval, stated:

I am, however, disposed to approve your proposal of establishing a Council of mixed Malay Chiefs and British officers. Such a Council would, as you observe, give an opportunity to some of the principal Chiefs to take a useful part in the administration of the Country, and thereby uphold their

influence with the body of the people. It would, moreover, give the Resident and any other officers nominated by you to such a Council an opportunity of gauging the strength of native feeling on questions of proposed reform; and the knowledge so gained would tend to the exercise of greater discrimination in the nature of the advice given by the Resident to the chief native authority.⁷

Jervois took this matter up in March the next year, significantly just at the time Swettenham left for his first home leave. There is no mention of Swettenham in the correspondence, but the tone of the dispatch bears signs of Swettenham's hand in its composition.⁸

In this dispatch Jervois explained that so far he had been unable to implement Carnarvon's proposals for a State Council in Perak, as Abdullah and other chiefs implicated in the Perak War were still around. Low was now being asked to press ahead with the plans. He had however recently received the support of the Sultan of Selangor for the idea, and seven individuals had already been appointed. A simple memorandum on the constitution was enclosed. It read in part: 'The Selangor State Council is established with a view of connecting with the Government of the country influential natives and others with whom the Government may consult ... and who will afford support to the Government in carrying into effect any measures that may be determined upon after each such consultation.'⁹ The memorandum went on to remind members of the new Council that they should bear in mind the interests of the working population, as a sure means of promoting wealth and prosperity. It was also necessary to induce foreigners to settle in the State and bring in capital. Adequate protection must be afforded for the life and property of such people.

Swettenham had been on an extensive tour of the Protected States at the end of 1876 and early in 1877. This gave him the opportunity to obtain the Sultan of Selangor's approval for the proposals. Moreover the role and functions of the State Council closely reflected the complaints he had made in his diary about the inadequacies of the Selangor administration in 1875.¹⁰ Ultimately, the first State Council meetings in Selangor and Perak were held while Swettenham was on leave, on 18 April 1877 and on 10 September 1877 respectively.¹¹

That a major consideration in the development of a Residential policy involved paying off the Malay chiefs was not in doubt, after Birch's assassination. State Councils, involving at least nominal consultation with the leading Malays were the first practical effect. Yet further down the line of state administration there remained the problem of how to exert influence and control at village level.

Swettenham had addressed this question as early as 1875 in his report on Selangor. Here he recommended that local headmen, preferably of royal descent, should be appointed by the Sultan to each district. In each village under him there should be appointed a penghulu, with authority to settle 'trifling cases' and to collect local taxes. In his efforts to associate influential Malays with the regime Swettenham was to some extent confusing the traditional distinction between Malay aristocrats ('datos') as local administrators and penghulus who were traditionally drawn from their own non-aristocratic village communities.¹² He did this by securing the appointment as salaried penghulus of unemployed aristocrats. The enlarged cadre of penghulus included 'a large number of the Selangor rajas and all the Perak headmen (chiefs) of the third rank.' It was an expedient which gave little satisfaction since the performance of aristocratic penghulus was poor.¹³

He expanded on this theme in 1876 in two papers, dated 2 and 8 October. The first was entitled, 'Proposals for the Government of Perak through its Headmen with a small Auxiliary Police Force' and the second, a rather longer exposition on the same theme: 'Some Arguments in Favour of Governing Perak through its Headmen.'¹⁴ The first memorandum started from the premise that it would be impracticable to establish police stations throughout Perak, using, inevitably a force of foreigners, in the form of non-Perak Malays. For if this were to be done, the Police would be the governing body, despised and disliked by the traditional arbiters of authority, the local headmen (the penghulus and the datos).

The Headmen are the really influential body in the State. Datohs and Penghulus have for the most part been accustomed from time immemorial, to hold office from father to son or some near relation. This office has given them rank, consideration, influence and money. A system which throws them out of office will meet with their opposition. It is not necessary that this opposition be open or even active to render it more than troublesome.¹⁵

Almost as important, the administration of such a system would certainly be expensive, and involve the need to raise taxes, in itself an unpopular move. The headmen, preferably literate, would be responsible for villages and districts, collecting local revenues and acting as magistrates. The police would act as an auxiliary source of support for authority. 'With respectable Headmen in charge of districts and villages, with a small Police Force at some point within reach in case of necessity, the old customs of Perak would be unchanged, and instead of setting the Headmen, and through them the people against the Residential system, we should, in engaging their services, enlist also their sympathies on the side of a

Government which supported them and their tradition.' To the ever frugal Swettenham, they also offered the added advantage of being cheap.¹⁶

It is not clear why Swettenham wrote a similar, but longer memorandum six days later: possibly he was asked by Jervois to develop further his earlier ideas. In it he expanded on the philosophical justification for such a course:

First it is surely a most important point in our newly adopted relations with the Native States to interest the natives themselves in the government of their own States and not to take this government out of their hands.

To preserve the accepted customs and traditions of the country, to enlist the sympathies and interests of the people in our assistance and to teach them the advantages of good government and enlightened policy — advantages which they will be far more ready to see and admit when they themselves are instruments in the working of the plan than when they look on and see others holding the positions, which they think by right belong to them, introducing reforms which will be received with apathy or opposition because they are not their own reforms.¹⁷

His experiences in Perak had given him a shrewd understanding of Malay village life. These papers were written shortly after Jervois had been in correspondence with Carnarvon on the same subject, in answer to Carnarvon's recommendation 'to make the best use of existing materials' in the local administration.¹⁸ A subsequent reply by Jervois repeated Swettenham's arguments, in some cases almost word for word. Similar instructions were apparently given to Low on his appointment.¹⁹ Yet again Swettenham returned to the issue in 1878, when in June he wrote a memo on the Perak police, linking the reduction in the numbers of forces in Perak to the appointment of *penghulus* and headmen by Low. This, he noted, had not yet been done.²⁰ Weld later echoed this view when he spoke on 10 June 1884 to the Royal Colonial Institute in London: 'We may obtain very useful cooperation from chiefs and village headmen, by availing ourselves of the germs of organisation, which exist in their own habits and customs, more especially amongst the Malays.'²¹

Swettenham played a major role in establishing the ground rules for the Residential system in a series of private reports and memoranda in the years 1875 to 1878. Low's remarkable success in applying these ground rules in the early years of his residency in Perak ensured their successful adoption throughout the Protected Malay States. Swettenham meantime spent the next following years supervising their implementation, as Assistant Colonial Secretary.

He was not so much involved in Perak, where Low's evident ability and seniority guaranteed him a free hand, as in Selangor, and to a lesser extent Sungei Ujong. Eventually, as Resident in both Selangor and Perak, he personally continued their implementation with remarkable success.

Indeed Swettenham reflected on the subject in considerable detail, chiefly in *British Malaya*, and in passing in *Footprints in Malaya*. When recounting the circumstances of British involvement in 1874-75, as we have seen, Swettenham must be treated with some circumspection. He was at pains to create a myth, and to a large extent he succeeded.²² Where his account of the Residential system was concerned, there was no such need. Hugh Low in Perak was one of the best Residents in the history of the country, and if Bloomfield Douglas ultimately did not measure up to scratch, it was Swettenham himself by his critical audit reports who eventually unseated him, and at long last achieved the coveted post of Resident, Selangor.

On his return to Singapore in 1878, Swettenham was not slow in firing the opening salvoes in his war of attrition with Bloomfield Douglas. As it happened his return almost coincided with a report from Douglas to the Colonial Secretary on the case of Tunku Panglima Raja. The latter had been found guilty of offering a bribe of \$40 to Mr Neubronner, the magistrate in Kuala Selangor, to decide a case in his favour. Douglas thereupon suspended the Tunku from his position of eminence on the Selangor State Council, and cut his allowance from \$50 to \$25 per month.²³ Prima facie, and given the conditions of the moment, this would appear to have been a tough, but not unreasonable reaction on the part of Douglas. The executive council in Singapore having considered the matter two weeks later, after a visit by Douglas to Singapore thought otherwise.

They were no doubt assisted by Swettenham in coming to the conclusion that Douglas' actions, 'were uncalled for and ultra vires, and that he (Douglas) should be instructed to advise the Sultan to reinstate Tunku Panglima Raja as a member of the Council.'²⁴ This was duly done, and it is difficult not to conclude that Swettenham's personal sympathies lay with the father of his good friend Raja Mahmood.²⁵

There was however more to this than met the eye. Tunku Panglima Raja was known to be a close ally of Raja Mahdi, and the only member of Raja Mahdi's faction in Selangor politics who had been assimilated into the new regime. His position, ostensibly on the side of the British establishment was thus to some extent regarded as a guarantee of the good behaviour, at least of his son, Raja Mahmood, if not of Raja Mahdi himself. Even Swettenham, who we know had a soft spot for Raja Mahmood, remarked within

six weeks of the incident, that he had no doubt Raja Mahdi would attempt a further bid for power if he did 'not fear to try conclusions with this Government.'²⁶ 'The difference between Swettenham and Douglas was over the wisdom of putting the loyalty of Raja Mahmood to the test by humiliating his father and driving him into opposition.'²⁷

Yet while the wretched Douglas was in Singapore to receive an official reprimand for his actions between 4 and 9 June 1878, he stayed with Robinson at Government House: a clear sign of where the Governor's personal sympathies lay.²⁸ All the same, the episode provoked a warning from Robinson to the Residents almost certainly drafted by Swettenham: 'The Residents have been placed in the Native States as advisers, not as rulers, and if they take upon themselves to disregard this principle, they will most assuredly be held responsible if trouble springs out of their neglect of it.' This was followed by a reiteration of parts of the circular sent out in 1876.²⁹

While Douglas in Selangor and Murray in Sungei Ujong accepted these orders without comment, Low in Perak replied pointing out that in his state there was no government for him to advise: they had all been removed.³⁰ The Colonial Office response was comparatively mild, for though it approved Robinson's action, it added, 'I fully recognize the delicacy of the task imposed upon the Residents, and am aware that much must be left to their discretion on occasions when prompt and firm action is called for.'³¹ The Secretary of State in London reflected the views of his junior:

I am glad to be able to add that I feel I can rely on your keeping a watchful eye on the proceedings of the Residents, and taking care that they do not exceed their proper function.... I fully recognize the delicacy of the task imposed on the Residents, and I am aware that much must be left to their discretion on occasions when prompt and firm action is called for.³²

The Colonial Office was beginning to realize that their policy of 'advice only' was impractical. Swettenham assessed the real position shrewdly and accurately years later: 'It will be understood that even from the first, the Residents had exercised or tried to exercise an influence which could not be truthfully defined as the simple offer of advice, and when, in 1878, they were warned that if they departed from the role of advisers, they would be held answerable for any trouble which might occur, they accepted the responsibility as preferable to a position of impotence and an attitude which no native in the country could have either understood or appreciated.'³³ For the moment the discrepancies remained unresolved. Meantime the Colonial Office instructions in respect of the remaining states in which Britain had not so far established a

position of direct influence had been clearly set out in Carnarvon's direction to Jervois, to 'adhere to a line of policy which will, as far as possible, avoid a further and especially an undefined and uncertain extension of our political responsibilities in the Malay Peninsula.'³⁴

When Swettenham's superior, Douglas, was promoted to Ceylon, the newspapers speculated on the possibility of Swettenham succeeding. Odds on Swettenham were given as seven to four, with Braddell and Irving considered the favourites.³⁵ The speculations were all wrong, for Cecil Clementi Smith, a scholar in Chinese arrived from Hong Kong to take up the job at the end of October 1878.³⁶ Over the years, he and Swettenham were to forge a close and cordial working relationship. Although Smith was to prove very able, for some months at least Swettenham was yet again left in a position at the Colonial Secretariat where his advice remained the most authoritative on affairs in the Protected States.

In 1879, Robinson who had by then left the Straits, wrote to the Colonial Office, pointing out that in fact the Residents had far exceeded their terms of reference which involved giving only advice: 'That government should hold the Resident responsible for the administration of the country... and at the same time impress upon him non-interference in matters of detail, and matters of Malay custom, is a position almost impossible for any man to hold.'³⁷ In this letter Robinson was still actively debating whether annexation was not in the long run inevitable. He went so far as to urge the Colonial Office to send a confidential message to the Governor to this effect. This advice did not recommend itself to the Colonial Office, who therefore left Robinson's letter unanswered. Nevertheless it was becoming clear by the late 1870s, even to the Colonial Office that there existed a serious discrepancy between their own interpretation of policy towards the Protected Malay States, and the practice on the ground.

In May 1880 there arrived in Singapore Sir Frederick Weld, initially as Administrator, later Governor, and an expert on the outposts of empire. During his long tenure of office the last pretences that Residents advised rather than ruled were swept away.³⁸ He was an enthusiastic imperialist, who brought with him to Malaya, 'an outlook suffused with a sense of superiority and self-righteousness, qualities shared by many late Victorians.'³⁹ The officials in the Straits Settlements and Protected Malay States found in him an enthusiastic supporter for their plans to expand British influence, and with it trade, throughout the Peninsula. None was more enthusiastic in this venture than Swettenham. Weld very soon came to realize his abilities, and later felt moved to justify his opinion to Kimberley at the Colonial Office:

Of Mr Swettenham you will perhaps think I have said too much, but if Your Lordship will look into his record in the C.O. List, it will fully bear me out. Excepting Mr Cecil Clementi Smith (the Colonial Secretary) there is no officer here that is his equal. Taking him all round — with his sense of self-confidence, (without which no man can do much) and somewhat unpleasant brusqueness of manner, he may formerly have made some enemies, but that is toning down, and he is too superior a man not to have seen his own youthful fault and corrected it.⁴⁰

Weld was very conscious of the need to develop trade, to go hand in hand with the extension of British political power in the Peninsula: 'We must look to the development of the great resources of the Malay Peninsula for the extension of our trade. It has not a million inhabitants... it ought to have twenty million.'⁴¹ He worried about signs of Russian naval activity near the Peninsula.⁴² He was also concerned about French expansionist claims in the north of Siam. This provided further justification in his own mind for establishing a strong influence in the other states in the Peninsula.

In a crucial dispatch to the Secretary of State dated 21 October 1880, Weld discussed in some detail his plans. Weld felt it was 'Impossible to ignore the fact that we are, and have been, relying on something more than mere advice, and unless we are prepared to evacuate, the country must continue working on the same lines in the future.' There were three options: to retire from the Protected States, to annex them, or to continue with the present policy of advice, 'discreetly given but firmly administered.'⁴³ In the rest of the Peninsula British influence should be increased gradually, as circumstances appeared favourable.

Weld rejected the possibility of retiring from the Protected States, for that in his opinion would have meant a return to anarchy. The Malays had not been taught to govern themselves: 'We are merely teaching them to cooperate with us and govern under our guidance.' He added, that 'good native government' was not 'a plant congenial to the soil, and every year native rulers are confronted with greater difficulties owing to the growth of a foreign, and especially a huge Chinese population.' The example of Johore he dismissed as exceptional, for there the ruler had been closely associated with, and taken the advice of the Straits Government and his own European advisers for many years. Additionally Britain had an obligation to foreign capital invested in the Protected States on the assumption that Britain would retain control.⁴⁴

Annexation was also unsatisfactory, for, in his opinion, countries like the Malay States needed a 'somewhat elastic form of government', or a 'mild and equitable despotism.' Weld, and

perhaps to a greater extent Swettenham now appreciated the advantages of avoiding formal annexation, for it gave the Residents far greater freedom of action within the State than would have been possible otherwise, and avoided what they referred to as 'red tapeism.' Hence, Weld concluded firmly that the ideal solution was to retain the *status quo* in the Protected States, and extend the system elsewhere as circumstances offered. This would generally involve informal advice at first, followed by financial assistance which would eventually make the states dependent on the British.⁴⁵ Swettenham was about to go on local leave to visit China and Japan at the time the dispatch was sent, but once again he must have been closely consulted in the early stages of its drafting, and indeed on all other considerations of this subject in the early 1880s.⁴⁶

The Colonial Office officials who received this dispatch, chiefly Herbert, Meade and Branston, were Gladstonian liberals, who recoiled at the idea of extending the Residential system. Kimberley however effectively overruled them, and in a minute on the dispatch endorsed the idea of appointing Residents in due course to other states. His official reply, which was slightly more cautious, reads as follows:

Her Majesty's Government would view with satisfaction that the intercourse between the Straits Government and the Malay States should assume a character of more intimate friendship, but no measures involving a change in the relations of those States to the British Government, beyond what is already sanctioned should be taken without instructions from home; except for temporary purposes in case of urgent necessity.

The general policy which should be pursued is to avoid annexation, to encourage the Native Rulers to govern well and improve their territories, and only to interfere when misgovernment reaches such a point as seriously to endanger the peace prosperity of the Peninsula.⁴⁷

Swettenham's career had been launched by a change of heart in the Colonial Office induced when Kimberley became Secretary of State in 1870. Now, eleven years later, it was once again Kimberley's initiative which cautiously endorsed and encouraged Weld's policy: one which closely reflected Swettenham's own views. This was the policy which was to guide developments in the Peninsula up to Federation in 1896.

Some of Swettenham's most important work during this period involved his assessment of the finances of the Malay States. This was really an extension of the work he had done on the Selangor finances. Now it included Perak as well. His first report was dated 8 February 1877, and headed 'Memorandum on the Financial Condition of the Native States.' It was written in response

to a request from Jervois in connection with the financing of the Perak War debt. The paper was received favourably in the Colonial Office, where an official noted that although a paper had been laid before the Council in Singapore by the Governor, it was widely understood to have been written by Swettenham.⁴⁸ It ran to eighteen pages and exhibited Swettenham's customary grasp of intricate financial affairs. It was divided into four parts, which covered all aspects of the financing, recent and estimated, of Perak, Selangor and Sungei Ujong. In the case of Perak, presumably after consultation with Low, it recommended the transfer of the centre of administration from Bandar Baru to Kuala Kangsar, and a reorganization of the Perak administration, to give a saving of \$5,400 per year.⁴⁹

At this time, in one of his many brushes with Bloomfield Douglas, Swettenham noticed that certain changes had been made, notably an increase in salaries for both Douglas himself and Kudin, ostensibly under Kudin's authority. Douglas was reprimanded by the Colonial Secretary's office in Singapore, almost certainly Swettenham: 'It is clearly your duty to use your influence with the Viceroy to prevent such questions being reopened, and it is essential that on matters of this nature the Resident should possess sufficient influence to maintain, without question, the decisions of Government.' Douglas was only practising a ploy over salaries at which Swettenham, somewhat later became even more adept.⁵⁰

Meantime Anson had informed the Colonial Office, at the end of 1877 that Tunku Kudin wished to retire as Viceroy. Anson had acted improperly in negotiating the terms of Kudin's retirement before consulting London. The matter was referred to the Governor-designate, Robinson, who on arrival in Singapore called for reports from various individuals, including Swettenham as soon as he returned from leave in May 1878. This was completed in a matter of four days, and explained in some detail that Kudin really had no further reason to remain in Selangor: his position had effectively been usurped by the Resident. He had got on well, on balance, with Davidson, but Douglas, though he regarded him as a friend had sometimes been 'a little uncivil' to him. His position as president of the State Council was no more than nominal, with the Resident firmly in control. Moreover his marriage with Abdul Samad's daughter Raja Arfah, had completely broken down. He eventually settled for modest pensions, for himself and Raja Arfah, and despite Swettenham's advice to the Government not to grant it, an issue of \$30,000 in government bonds in respect of his wartime expenditure.⁵¹

Swettenham's next audit visit took place towards the end of 1878. Anson, acting at that time between Robinson's departure and

Weld's arrival noted, 'This duty was very carefully performed by Mr Swettenham, who was able to gather much valuable information, and I enclose extracts of his reports on the three states, which will I think satisfy you that the Peninsula is in a quiet and peaceful condition.' Anson rarely had a good word to say for Swettenham: or indeed even mentioned him.⁵²

Swettenham was particularly impressed by the enormous progress Low had made in Perak, and specifically mentioned in his covering letter, sent with the report that Datuk Sri Lela of Kota Lama had come in to see Low while Swettenham was there, and seemed very happy. Kota Lama of course had been the most difficult village during the Perak War. He went on to congratulate Low on the improvements which had been made in the State accounting procedures since his previous visit.⁵³ Sungei Ujong was also proceeding satisfactorily, and Swettenham concluded this section of the report with advice not to hurry change: 'and if in a Malay State the greatest good of the greatest number' is sought, then *festina lente* should be the motto in the introduction of reforms.'⁵⁴

This report was also significant for it contained Swettenham's first direct criticisms of Bloomfield Douglas's administration in Selangor. The main thrust of his criticism was that there were far too many taxes: 'It seems a pity at this early stage of the administration to attempt to raise a revenue on every legitimate means of livelihood.' The aim should be first to get a population settled, and only thereafter start to impose taxes in a moderate manner. On a more detailed note, the accounts were in some cases in a muddle, and in particular revenue received was on occasions not properly accounted for, but used directly to meet day-to-day expenses.

Swettenham dwelt at some length on Kuala Lumpur, still at that stage under the control of Yap Ah Loy, who he noted was clearing land nearby, starting the road from Damansara to the town, and operating kilns producing high-quality, light-weight building bricks for the Singapore market. The Resident visited once a month from Klang to try court cases.⁵⁵ Swettenham's report was widely and in general favourably commented on when laid before the Straits Settlements Legislative Council in March, although one paper complained of the cost.⁵⁶

Nor were Raja Mahmood's activities other than a nuisance to Douglas. Mahmood, no doubt with Swettenham's assistance, had been sent in 1877 to administer the district of Sepang, under the guidance of James Innes. He left the area without permission in 1878, and Innes, Acting Resident while Douglas was sick at the time, stopped his allowance. In this action he was later supported by Doughas. Swettenham was furious that his old friend should be

treated in a way which would appear to be well deserved: 'His Excellency cannot conceive that Residents are armed with such powers as to enable them to act as Mr Innes appears to have acted in this case without reference to Sultan, Mixed Council or Governor.'⁵⁷ The unfortunate Douglas was obliged to reinstate Raja Mahmood with full arrears of pay and make peace as best he could. Unfortunately Swettenham himself was too busy with his duties and the writing of official reports to leave any more informal account of conditions in the Malay States which he visited during this period.⁵⁸

By the end of 1878, Swettenham's position cannot have been easy. For though developments in Perak and Sungei Ujong were satisfactory, as were his own relations with the Residents there, such was not the case in Selangor. Cracks were beginning to appear in Douglas's administration, and Swettenham had here to deal with a much older, irascible man. Moreover until Weld's arrival, he could expect little help or sympathy from his superiors. Like Anson, Robinson seldom mentioned Swettenham by name, although he did have the grace to concede on one occasion that the work connected with the native states was exceedingly intricate and onerous.⁵⁹

The few references to Swettenham which are found in the first six months of 1879, apart from the visit to Penang early that year, show Swettenham pursuing his war of attrition against Bloomfield Douglas. This took the form of a series of queries from Singapore. By whose authority was the allowance paid to Raja Mahmood changed? Dissatisfaction with the Selangor accounts of 1878: 'The accounts do not contain all the information needed for a fair consideration of the financial results of 1878.'⁶⁰ Moreover, since the state accounts had shown such poor results, was it really necessary for Douglas to be accompanied on all occasions, including visits to Singapore, by a guard of five men?⁶¹ Both men must have felt penned in by unsympathetic supervisors or superiors.

By the time Swettenham returned to Singapore towards the end of January 1880, affairs in Selangor had deteriorated further. Douglas had paid no attention to Swettenham's earlier criticisms. This became obvious at the time of Swettenham's next audit visit, in March that year. In particular, Land Office records, 'were conspicuous by their absence,' the taxes were 'vexatious and unwise,' and quit rents in Klang were so high that the town was almost deserted.⁶² All these points were commented on, and Swettenham added that the time had now come to move the administrative headquarters from Klang to Kuala Lumpur. The price of tin had soared in the late 1870s, and turned Kuala Lumpur into a boom town, which had drawn the population away from Klang: a population which required careful treatment in their new country

'with the forms of whose Government they are imperfectly acquainted.'⁶³

Previously, European visitors including Swettenham himself had been accommodated in the resthouse which he had built on the northern outskirts of the village. It also housed the police detachment, which had till then been stationed in Yap Ah Loy's compound. Hence the resthouse was to have a defensive stockade. Sultan Abdul Samad on his first visit to Kuala Lumpur, placed the first pole 'with Malayan ceremony.'⁶⁴ Then, when Douglas came under pressure to move to Kuala Lumpur, he proposed to enlarge the building to make it a residence for his son-in-law, Daly, who was to be the resident government officer, and for the Daly family.

In his 1880 audit report, Swettenham proposed that, to avoid expense, the rest-house should be occupied by Douglas as a makeshift Residency. Further, to reduce the expenses of the move, Swettenham advised that only the key offices of the Resident, the Treasurer, the Police and the government clerks concerned needed to be moved to Kuala Lumpur.⁶⁵ Douglas secured Weld's approval for siting the Residency on high ground, on the west bank, in the area of the present Prime Minister's Department, currently the site of the Tunku Abdul Rahman Memorial. It was of course separated from the town by the river. He installed a howitzer on the Residency terrace and enlivened gubernatorial visits by target practice in the direction of the jungle outskirts.⁶⁶ Swettenham's report covered the general planning in outline, and was approved, although with modifications by Weld on his first visit to Kuala Lumpur later in the year.⁶⁷

Douglas was instructed to remove existing buildings piece by piece from Klang, and re-erect them in Kuala Lumpur. The total initial cost was \$9,230, of which \$4,250 was spent on the transfer of the Residency building. Weld took a close interest in this. An intriguing minute in Swettenham's hand, but over Weld's signature, dealing with the transfer, reads: 'I have personally arranged these matters with the Res[iden]t. The "Rest House" will also be a residence for the Sultan when he visits Kuala Lumpur, it seems politically desirable that he should not be of necessity a visitor to the Capitan China, and that his dignity should not be ignored. FAW.'

The cramped writing of the minute above Weld's initials suggests that it was inserted later, possibly as a means of convincing Douglas that the Governor meant business. The date of this minute is changed in pencil from 13 May to 13 July 1880, perhaps after realizing that by 13 May, Weld would not have had time since his arrival to visit Kuala Lumpur.⁶⁸ Swettenham was adept at modifying the record when it suited his purposes. Concern for the accommodation of the Sultan throws an interesting light on the

relations between the Malay and Chinese communities at the time, and British perceptions of them.

The Singapore response to Swettenham's critical report was sharp, and though signed by Smith, the letter was no doubt checked, if not written by Swettenham himself. Douglas was instructed to implement Swettenham's recommendations forthwith, while Daly, in charge of the Land Office came in for particularly strong criticism. The letter concluded that more energy and zeal was required by government officers. With Douglas's pained and slightly peeved reply, to which were added Swettenham's further comments, the matter came to an end, for the moment.⁶⁹ Weld fully endorsed Swettenham's report: 'I can find there no explanation which in any way detracts from the value of Mr Swettenham's report or impugns his conclusions.'⁷⁰ Meantime Raja Bidin, who two years earlier was loafing round Singapore, had been spotted, unexpectedly, by Douglas, at Abdul Samad's court at Langat.⁷¹ Douglas asked how he had come to return to Langat, after the Sultan's refusal to have him back two years earlier. He was told that the Sultan now thought it better that Bidin should live at his court.

Eventually matters came to head, and Weld was prompted in 1881 to send Swettenham to make discreet enquiries to ascertain if there was any chance of obtaining evidence against Douglas to show he was unfit for the position. Swettenham we may be sure made the most diligent inquiries, but was obliged to report he could find no firm evidence against Douglas.⁷² The investigations into Douglas' affairs were resumed in 1882, when Kimberley instructed Weld to make a further inquiry, as a result of allegations made against Douglas by James Innes. McCallum, the Colonial Engineer was sent to investigate. While Innes' allegations were with one exception found to be unjustified, McCallum's investigations into the Lands and Surveys Department headed by Daly produced a damning indictment of laziness, incompetence and in certain cases dishonesty, and more than vindicated Swettenham's earlier criticisms. In particular it was revealed that in November 1881, after Swettenham's visit to Selangor in the middle of the year, Douglas had bid for land at an auction conducted by Daly, who was then in charge of the Land and Survey Departments.⁷³ There was no doubt in anyone's mind that Daly should not be allowed to return to the Straits. The key question was whether Douglas should not also be sacked. He was therefore summoned to Singapore, to ensure that the Sultan should not be pressured in any way by him from revealing the truth, and Swettenham was again sent to Selangor at the end of June 1882 to pursue his inquiries.⁷⁴

While Swettenham visited the Sultan at Jugra, Douglas in Singapore wrote to an old friend, C.H.A. Turney, in charge at

Kuala Langat. In it he asked Turney to extract from the Sultan a letter, draft supplied by Douglas, to the Governor, confirming that such goods as Douglas had obtained for the Sultan were purchased at the Sultan's request. Turney pressed for the letter, refusing to leave Jugra. The Sultan was in a quandary. He had not ordered the goods, yet he expected Douglas to return as Resident: caution was the order of the day. He therefore ordered the letter to be written in Malay according to the draft, but arranged for it to be signed with his signet ring, not the large seal customarily used on all his letters.⁷⁵

Unfortunately this ploy to deceive the Governor did not succeed. Information was received by Swettenham, by now back in Singapore, drawing attention to the discrepancy on the seals. It was provided by none other than Raja Bidin, in a letter written to Mohamed Said.⁷⁶ Swettenham apparently used his influence with the Sultan to overrule the latter's opposition to Raja Bidin, who was placed at Jugra as a spy. Bidin reported through Mohamed Said, passing the information which enabled Swettenham to unseat Douglas.⁷⁷

With the information collected Weld established, 'that Mr Douglas and other of his officers, including Mr Innes had supplied articles to His Highness the Sultan, that their cost had been deducted from the Sultan's pay, contrary to the express written orders of this government,'⁷⁸ The Sultan, on being pressed by Swettenham, admitted he had not asked to be supplied with certain items of stores, nor did he feel it was right he should be charged for a godown which was used by the government.⁷⁹ As a result Douglas was forced to resign. Swettenham was instrumental in securing his resignation on grounds of conduct which was reprehensible, if not dishonest, although no more so that some of Swettenham's own land transactions a year or two later.⁸⁰

In a cable reporting this to Kimberley, Weld asked for permission to appoint Swettenham in his place. De Robeck in the Colonial Office commented:

This is most satisfying. With regard to Mr Swettenham being appointed to succeed to the position of Resident of Salangore, he is a clever energetic man, and well-versed in Native States affairs, having been for some time Secretary for the Native States in the Colonial Secretary's office.

After considering the claims of other candidates, he continued:

Mr Swettenham represents the aggressive school of politicians in Malay native affairs, but nevertheless would in my opinion do admirably at Salangore.⁸¹

Mr Meade however was not to be rushed into a hasty appointment, noting testily:

I dislike settling these important appointments in this fashion. The Gov[ernor] seems to think that a passage in a private letter or a curt telegram is sufficient grounds for a decision.⁸²

In a further revealing comment on this episode, the Colonial Office edged a step closer to abandoning the theory of 'advice' to the rulers: 'The fiction that we do not directly control the officers in the States is a very transparent one and will not shield us when the misgovernment of the country becomes a public scandal.'⁸³ Weld was therefore instructed to make the appointment an acting one, until such time as the Colonial Office had received from him and duly considered a fuller dispatch on the subject.

Kimberley meantime wrote privately to Weld: 'Mr Swettenham is a clever man, but he is junior to Mr Hervey and Mr Maxwell. For all I have heard of Mr Swettenham he will do his work well wherever he is. Is he however exactly the man for Salangore? Might he not drive the coach a little too fast?'⁸⁴ Swettenham was not slow to promote his own appointment to the post, for he wrote in to this effect at the end of September 1882.⁸⁵ Possibly it was this letter which encouraged Weld to revert to the attack in early October: he had, as requested, reluctantly made the Selangor Resident an acting appointment for the moment:

I was very unwilling to make a temporary appointment could it have been avoided, as your Lordship will recognize that it will be very disadvantageous to disturb the native mind in that State by a further change, and to unsettle those reforms in the administration to which Mr Swettenham will at once devote his attention and acknowledged ability. I know no officer in the Straits Settlements whose services, seniority and general capability for the post can be put in competition with Mr Swettenham, excepting Mr Maxwell.⁸⁶

Maxwell, perhaps by no coincidence was otherwise engaged, learning of the Torrens system of land registration in Australia.⁸⁷ Later in the same dispatch, Weld continued in his praise of Swettenham:

Mr Swettenham's services have been recognized by all my predecessors as particularly good; he was gazetted to act as Resident in 1875. He was only prevented from acting because his exceptional merit caused him to be selected to fill a position requiring special ability, tact and personal courage at a most critical moment in Perak. He willingly at the Government request gave up the acting appointment of Resident in Selangor where he had been Assistant Resident, and at imminent risk of his life tendered excellent military as well as civil services in Perak, — services such as these in the Native States I submit may fairly constitute a very strong claim to this appointment,

when accompanied by special fitness in a member of the Civil Service proper.⁸⁸

Kimberley continued to maintain his reservations about Swettenham, for as late as December 1882 he was writing to Weld, fearing that Swettenham:

... might press reforms too rapidly on the Malays. An energetic man who has seen what ought to be done to improve a backward country is sometimes apt to forget that it is better to go slower with the goodwill of the governed than faster with their dissatisfaction; and subject races, especially Orientals are very apt to conceal their dissatisfaction until suddenly it grows to a dangerous head.⁸⁹

At last that early reverse at the end of 1874 was to be corrected, and the force with which the arguments for Swettenham's appointment to the long coveted job were put forward hint that Swettenham himself may well have had a hand in their drafting.

However it would be wrong to charge Swettenham with vindictiveness against Douglas. That he was incompetent and that Swettenham ultimately benefitted from this incompetence there can be no doubt. Yet six years later we find Douglas unemployed in London, and Swettenham, by then on leave writing letters on his behalf to the Colonial Office begging that he be given some modest appointment overseas to save him from destitution.⁹⁰ A later acquaintance, in a brief character sketch of Swettenham recorded, 'There was nothing petty in his nature. I never heard of him letting anybody down.' It is a judgement which his later assistance to Douglas confirms.⁹¹

NOTES

1. *TOM*, 1 December 1916. Obituary of Arthur Knight.
2. CO 273/83:84 ff. Carnarvon's comments on Jervois to CO, 62 of 10 February 1876.
3. HC 1512:98 ff. Carnarvon to Jervois, 1 June 1876.
4. *Ibid.*
5. HC 1505:31 ff. Jervois to Carnarvon, 291 of 16 October 1875.
6. HC 1512:7 ff. Jervois to Carnarvon, 10 February 1876.
7. HC 1512:98 ff. Carnarvon to Jervois, 135 of 1 June 1876.
8. CO 273/90:613 and 639 ff. Jervois to Carnarvon, 88 of 22 March 1877. See also Emily Sadka, 'The State Councils in Perak and Selangor, 1877-1895' in *Papers on Malayan History*, K.G. Tregonning (ed.), 1962.
9. *Ibid.*
10. For Swettenham's audit tour at the end of 1876, see Chapter 16, and for Selangor in 1875, see Chapter 9.
11. The first Selangor State Council meeting on 18 April 1877 was held in 'Gedong Raja Abdullah' in a large room upstairs. Tunku Kudin presided and

- Bloomfield Douglas, the Resident sat on his right. Yap Ah Loy was a member, and Syers, the senior Police Officer was present as interpreter. Others were Tunku Panglima Raja, Syed Zin, Raja Kahar and Innes. R.J. Wilkinson, op. cit., 1971 and Selangor State Council Meetings Minutes, UM Microfilm 95. Swettenham was incorrect when he stated in *British Malaya*, p. 227 that the first meeting took place in Perak. The error has since frequently been repeated.
12. HC 1320:97-103. Report of HBM's Acting Assistant Resident at Salangore 8 April 1875, in Gov. Straits to Sec. State, 27 April 1875.
 13. Sadka, 1968, op. cit., pp. 113 and 276 and AR Selangor, 1896.
 14. Both are in CO 273/120:365 ff. Weld to Derby, 208 of 28 May 1883.
 15. Ibid.
 16. Ibid.
 17. Ibid.
 18. PPC 1512:98 ff. Carnarvon to Jervois, 1 June 1876.
 19. CO 273/85:90 ff. Jervois to Carnarvon, 369 of 18 October 1876. Sadka, 1968, op. cit., p. 106 fn. 4.
 20. CO 273/95:305-306 Governor to CO, 255 of 27 August 1878 enclosing Swettenham's memo on Perak police of 25 June 1878.
 21. Kratoska (ed.), 1983, op. cit., p. 46.
 22. See Chapter 48.
 23. HC 2410:2-7.
 24. Ibid.
 25. See minutes of sixth and seventh Selangor State Council meetings on 1 and 25 May 1878, UM Microfilm 95.
 26. CO 273/94:103 ff. Memo by Swettenham enclosed in Gov. to Sec. State, 170 of 13 June 1878. See also PPC 2410:2-6.
 27. J.M. Gullick, 1975, 'Selangor, 1876-1882: The Bloomfield Douglas Diary,' *JMBRAS*, 48 (2):1-51.
 28. Ibid.
 29. HC 2410:7 ff. CS to Residents, 17 May 1878, enclosed in Robinson to Hicks Beach, 13 June 1878.
 30. CO 273/94:117 ff. Governor to CO, 171 of 13 June 1878.
 31. HC 2410:7 ff. Hicks Beach to Robinson, 31 August 1878.
 32. Cowan, 1961, op. cit., p. 253 quoting CO 809/18.
 33. *British Malaya*, p. 221.
 34. HC 1709:42 CO to Jervois, 21 of 19 August 1876.
 35. *STW*, 27 July 1878.
 36. *STW*, 26 October 1878.
 37. CO 273/101:387 ff. Robinson to CO, private, 29 April 1879.
 38. Weld had been born in England, into a prominent Anglo-Catholic county family. He had begun his career as a sheep farmer in New Zealand, and risen to become premier there. He was then successively governor of Western Australia, Tasmania and the Straits Settlements. In Western Australia he had made his mark by his enthusiasm for travelling widely throughout the state, and by his support for the improvement of transport and communications. Yet he was felt to some extent to lack the common touch.
 39. Stannage, 1987, op. cit., p. 328, and Eunice Thio, 1969, *British Policy in the Malay Peninsula, 1880-1910*, p. 3.

40. Weld to Kimberley 4 October 1882, quoted by Thio, *ibid.*, p. 4.
41. Weld to Kimberley 10 August 1881, quoted by Thio, *ibid.*, p. 6.
42. See for instance Weld to Kimberley 17 January 1882, quoted by Thio, *ibid.*, p. 7.
43. CO 273/104:552 ff. Weld to CO, Confidential of 21 October 1880.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*
47. CO 273/104:569 ff. CO to Weld, 11 February 1881, in Weld to CO, Confidential, 21 October 1880.
48. SP 46/72, also produced in paper 4 of 9 March 1877 in *SSLCP*, 1877.
49. CO 273/90:377 ff. Gov. Straits to Sec. State, 60 of 6 March 1877 enclosed Swettenham's paper mentioned above.
50. SSF 47/77, quoted in *The Malay States 1877- 1895* by Philip Loh Fook Seng. OUP, 1969.
51. CO 273/91:493 ff. O/S Straits to Sec. State, 308 of 26 October 1877 enclosing Anson's initial report, CO 273/94:149 ff. Gov. Straits to Sec. State, 177 of 18 June 1878 for Swettenham's memorandum dated 8 May 1878. The full details are summarized in Gullick, 1986b.
52. HC 2410:13 ff. Anson to Hicks Beach, 6 March 1879.
53. HC 2410:13-9 covers his visit to Perak.
54. HC 2410:20-2 *festina lente*. Literally, 'hastening slowly.'
55. HC 2410:23-9 covers Selangor.
56. *SDT*, 10 February 1879.
57. SSF 129/78.
58. Isabella Bird, 1883, *op. cit.* has vivid accounts of visits to Douglas in Selangor whom she detested, and Low in Perak, whom she found able but eccentric. See also J.M. Gullick, 1979, 'Isabella Bird's Visit to Malaya,' *JMBRAS* 52 (2):117 ff.
59. CO 273/101:448 ff. Robinson to CO, 7 July 1879.
60. SSF 83/79.
61. SSF 85/79.
62. PPC 3095:22-32 Assistant Secretary for Native States to Colonial Secretary Singapore, 27 March 1880.
63. *Ibid.*
64. Gullick, 1975, *op. cit.*
65. HC 3095:22-32 Enclosure 1 in No.2, Weld to Kimberley of 19 June 1880.
66. Gullick, 1975, *op. cit.*
67. SSF CS 259/80 Swettenham to Douglas, 20 August 1880. See Chapter 16 for details of Weld's visit, accompanied by Swettenham.
68. SSF Mis. 188/80.
69. HC 3095:35 HBM's Resident, Selangor to Colonial Secretary, Straits Settlements, 24 May 1880.
70. HC 3095:22 Weld to Kimberley, 19 June 1880.
71. Douglas Diary, 21 November 1881. See Chapter 14.
72. CO 273/115:107 Weld to Kimberley, Confidential of 17 June 1882.
73. CO 273/114:231 ff. Weld to Kimberley, 3 May 1882, enclosing McCallum's report of 22 April 1882 and CO 273/115:107 ff. Weld to

- Kimberley, Confidential of 17 June 1882 mentioning Douglas' possible resignation.
74. Ibid.
 75. Gullick, 1953a, op. cit., p. 101.
 76. CO 273/116:73 Governor to CO, 327 of 6 September 1882 enclosing Raja Bidin to 'Mohamed Syed', 29 August 1882.
 77. J.M. Gullick kindly drew my attention to this episode, based on his detailed examination of the Douglas Diary.
 78. CO 273/115:459 ff. Weld to Kimberley, Confidential of 24 August 1882.
 79. The episode is a complicated one, and is dealt with in Gullick, 1975, op. cit., esp. p. 11 fn. 36 and Loh, 1969, op. cit., p. 117. The fact that Bidin's letter was dated later than that of Weld to Kimberley of 24 August suggests that information had reached Singapore earlier. Written confirmation was probably needed for Colonial Office files.
 80. See Chapter 30.
 81. CO 273/115: 397 Comments on cable Weld to CO, cable 23 August 1882.
 82. Ibid.
 83. CO 273/115:107 ff. Weld to Kimberley, Confidential, 17 June 1882. CO comment, and CO 273/115:397 Ibid.
 84. Kimberley to Weld (Private) 24 August 1882 from Kimberley papers quoted by Chew.
 85. CO 426/7:85 Letter of 27 September 1882.
 86. CO 273/116:249 Weld to Kimberley, 369 of 5 October 1882.
 87. CO 273/115:417 Weld to Kimberley, 306 of 23 August 1882.
 88. Ibid.
 89. Kimberley to Weld (Private) 12 December 1882, quoted from Chew Thesis, reference by courtesy of Dr E. Thio.
 90. CO 273/142:715 ff. Swettenham to Lucas at CO, 21 May 1886.
 91. J.H.M. Robson, *Records & Recollections*, p. 13.

Travels

Within six weeks of Weld's arrival, Swettenham was appointed to act temporarily as private secretary to replace de Lisle, who had left on sick-leave. The press reported approvingly that no better appointment could have been made, especially in view of Swettenham's knowledge and experience of the Native States.¹ As private secretary, it was therefore natural that Swettenham should be required to accompany Weld on his numerous tours through the Malay States. It was an activity which Weld greatly enjoyed, even though he was a man well on in his fifties, and not capable of walking far because of his gout.

Mr Weld enjoyed the free life and rough travel in primitive conditions, and though he was not up to much walking, he was quite at home on any kind of horse or pony; and walking or riding jungle paths was the only way of getting about in a roadless country. The Governor was subject to painful attacks of gout which made walking difficult, and when one day he was faced by a wide and rapid but shallow river, he asked me to carry him across pick-a-back, and I did; for while he was tall, he was slenderly built. He was greatly interested in all he saw, and made a point of meeting the Rulers and their Chiefs and talking to them about the affairs of their country and people.²

Comments on Weld's side were equally complimentary: 'Mr Swettenham is a very pleasant companion: he is fond of this kind of life and knows all about the country and the people, besides talking the language perfectly.'³

Weld's first visit, towards the end of June 1880 with his ADC, Lieutenant Cosmo Gordon, and Swettenham took him from Malacca, through Sungei Ujong. The Colonial Officials were a high-spirited crowd. Before Weld left on his first tour, a practical joker obtained some of the Colonial Secretary's notepaper and sent out a circular, giving details of the itinerary, and the confidential information that Weld was a teetotaller, but liked green coconut milk. On the Malacca-Sungei Ujong border they stayed with a

planter, whose hospitality was proverbial. By mistake the planter's own glass in which the coconut milk had been liberally laced with whiskey was handed to Weld. His eyes brightened as he tasted it: 'For two weeks,' he remarked plaintively, 'I have had nothing to drink but that thrice accursed coconut milk.'⁴ The account does not make it clear whether Swettenham's writing paper was used, but this seems likely, as he would have been in charge of all the arrangements. From Sungei Ujong, they went up the coast to Klang, to stay with Douglas and with him met Sultan Abdul Samad on 7 July. They found him magnificently arrayed with a sword given by Queen Victoria to commemorate his role in suppressing debt-slavery, a kind of hussar jacket, a rich sarong, slippers and some fine diamond rings.

Although the Sultan struck Weld as being in his dotage, Douglas assured him he was only nervous.⁵ That Sydney Swettenham was of the party during part of this trip is revealed by a comment that both the Swettenhams were present at a lunch in Sungei Ujong.⁶ From there they visited Kuala Lumpur, where they were extravagantly entertained by Yap Ah Loy. Swettenham, Douglas and Daly went shooting the next day. The bag of three jungle fowl was meagre. Weld in his comments remarked that tigers, which they had sought, but not found: 'seldom attack men, never a man on horseback; they have, however, a special fancy for Chinamen.'⁷ They travelled all over Perak, and eventually reached Penang, which formed a base for a foray into Kedah to meet Tunku Kudin, and by now joint-Regent of Kedah. It was not till six weeks later that they returned to Singapore, where Weld wrote a long and complacent dispatch to Kimberley: 'In all the townships and even in little villages in the Native States, the decorations were beautiful and the good feeling of all races and classes most evident and gratifying.'⁸

He gave more details in a diary covering the period. On 12 July he described a shooting party in the area of Batu Caves, accompanied by Douglas, Swettenham and others. They were unsuccessful in their search for *seladang*, but returned to lunch at the mouth of the main cave:

We then climbed up a steep path and at the height of about a hundred feet above the level ground we found ourselves at the mouth of a huge cave in which luncheon had been got ready.

I must describe it: picture to yourself a huge banqueting hall, with a dome shaped roof about 300 feet high and at least 150 feet long, with great apertures in the roof through which light streamed, softened into green and gold by the overhanging trees. The Malays have a legend that a fairy princess lives in the summit of this great crag - into which no

human foot has penetrated -- and that when she shows herself to a man she brings him good fortune. I can imagine no more appropriate spot for a fairy dwelling-place.

After changing, for they were wet:

Luncheon followed, which was a most picturesque affair, groups of Malays and Sakais in every kind of dress and undress, in marvellous variety of colour, some armed with parangs and other curiously shaped weapons, stood or squatted around us. It was like a scene in a play stage brigands and all complete.⁹

After lunch they explored the caves, then attempted, with no success, to fish in the nearby river. The Malays came to their help with *tuba* root, which, when thrown into the water, stupefies the fish. Two days later, they left Kuala Lumpur early for Klang, stopping 'to visit the gaol — a temporary one — and found the sentry, musket in hand, fast asleep in an easy-chair.'¹⁰ Before they left, they settled the site of the new Residency, about to be moved from Klang.

Leaving Klang, they travelled up the coast, via Perak, where they stayed with Low, to Penang. Here Weld stayed with the Ansons: Swettenham presumably found accommodation elsewhere. In early August they visited Kedah, and met the joint Regents one of whom was Tunku Kudin, recently retired from Selangor and the young Sultan, a man of about 18 years old. The second joint Regent, Tunku Yaakob, took them to spear carp in his fish-pond near his residence at Anak Bukit. Weld reported approvingly that Swettenham speared one through the head. On 8 August they took a canoe from Anak Bukit and paddled up a tiny, overhung stream: 'a kind of by-lane embedded in delicate ferns, orchids and palms, in short of vegetation such as one never sees out of the tropics. Fancy paddling up the orchids or palm house at Kew,' enthused Weld, in a letter to his wife. On a more sombre note, he added: 'It must be very galling to the reigning family here to be under subjection to Siam.'¹¹ After attending a ball in Penang, they returned to Singapore at the end of the first week of August.¹² The whole trip, which must have been arduous for Weld, took six weeks.

At the same time Swettenham was assiduously advising the Governor, new to the job, on the historical background of the states concerned. Thus in a memo of September 1880, he explained how debts due by Selangor to Singapore had arisen from the Arab defence force in 1875, at a time when an attack from Raja Mahdi was feared.¹³

Swettenham accompanied Weld on a further visit, this time to Sungei Ujong in March and April 1881. But before we follow them on this trip, it is necessary, if its full significance is to be

understood, to explain in brief outline something of the background of these states, and their relations with Johore. Up to Weld's arrival, relations between Johore and Singapore had been very close, the Maharaja Abu Bakar taking pains to ensure that his prompt compliance with the suggestions of the Governor left no opportunity for less welcome suggestions as to the appointment of Residents in Johore. Moreover the Maharaja as the most westernized of the Malay rulers, entertaining lavishly at Johore Bahru, played a leading part in the expatriate social life of Singapore, owned race horses and regularly ran them at the Singapore races.

Jervois, who had been strictly forbidden to embark on any other expansionist plans after the Perak débâcle, had found it convenient to use the Maharaja as a stalking horse for the Negeri Sembilan states. In some of these Abu Bakar considered he had inherited suzerain rights. Deliberations which took place in Singapore in November 1876 had resulted in an agreement by chiefs of the smaller states in the Negeri Sembilan district to refer disputes amongst themselves to the Maharaja. Similarly a succession problem in Muar at about the same time was resolved, with Anson's help, in favour of Abu Bakar. In these cases it was part of the agreement between Abu Bakar and the Straits government that where disputes arose, Abu Bakar should consult with, and be guided by the Governor's wishes in any solutions he might put forward to the disputants.¹⁴

Thus encouraged, and placed with British help as adviser to all the Negeri Sembilan states except Sungei Ujong, Abu Bakar in the summer of 1878 requested that he be acknowledged, not just as Maharaja, but Sultan of Johore. This was a delicate issue, for that branch of the Riau royal family which Raffles had chosen to acknowledge as rulers of Johore lacked the support and approval of certain other Sultans: the Trengganu ruler for instance had refused to sit down to dinner with him. The proposal was roundly rejected by the Governor, Robinson, acting on advice submitted by Swettenham in a long, able and scholarly memorandum, which, he subsequently disclosed, had involved him in two weeks' intensive research.¹⁵ Swettenham till this moment had apparently been well-disposed to Abu Bakar: 'by the Maharaja's exertions, his just rule and his careful preservation of life and property, his country has attained a foremost position amongst the Native States of the Peninsula.'¹⁶

Swettenham's memorandum of 1878 made it clear that he had little sympathy for Abu Bakar, or for the way in which his predecessors had, with British help, achieved their position earlier in the century. It is not easy to account for Swettenham's sudden

change of attitude. The suggestion that the hostility developed because Abu Bakar had sheltered Raja Mahdi in the early 1870s¹⁷ cannot be endorsed, for these events took place well before 1875; the date when Swettenham is believed to have written his article.

A further possibility is that Swettenham deeply resented Anson's accommodation with Abu Bakar over the Muar succession. We have seen that the two men disliked each other: here was a chance for Swettenham to show by his superior scholarship how misguided Anson had been. The memorandum proved to be a turning point in Abu Bakar's relations with the British. Back in London, it was noted that Robinson's dispatch was infused with 'the spirit of Mr Swettenham's memorandum,' and concern was expressed that Robinson should not adopt a hostile attitude towards the Maharaja.¹⁸

During Weld's 1881 visit, his party included Abu Bakar with Swettenham acting as interpreter. They travelled by boat from Singapore via Malacca. The object was, 'to endeavour to bring about a better understanding between the Yam Tuan, Tunku Antar of Sri Menanti and his people.'¹⁹ A number of minor headmen had appealed against the alleged arbitrary acts of Tunku Antar. On arrival at the residency at Sungei Ujong, Abu Bakar developed a fever and was unable to proceed. The Governor and the remainder of the party rode up to the Bukit Putus pass, where they were greeted with a guard of honour at the police post, and a large number of local chiefs headed by Tunku Antar.

'There was,' reported Weld, 'barely standing room on the narrow open ridge. Nothing could be more quiet, orderly, good tempered and respectful than the demeanour of the people, who were dressed in picturesque and many coloured holiday costumes, and all armed with krises, the hilts of which in many cases were most richly carved or encased with silver or gold.'²⁰

In the deliberations which followed, Tunku Antar spoke of addressing all communications to Weld through the Maharaja. Here Weld demurred: there were occasions, he maintained, when direct contact between the Governor and the chiefs was essential. After discussion of various other problems, the party broke up, and descended to the valley to enjoy a feast of roast buffalo. Abu Bakar had accurately assessed the mood of the Governor's party on the journey to Sungei Ujong, and his indisposition was, if not diplomatic, certainly providential. The fact of the matter was that with a Governor enthusiastic to expand British influence in the Peninsula, backed by people like Swettenham, the potential role for Abu Bakar was reduced. Here again Swettenham played an important role, especially when dealing with a governor new to the Colony.

Weld's colourful descriptions of his long visits to the Native States did not pass without comment. His idiosyncratic dispatch style was gleefully parodied.²¹ Well-disposed as he was to his chief, Swettenham was not oblivious of his weaknesses, and, together with the other Colonial officers in Singapore, enjoyed a little quiet leg-pulling.

The early 1880s were marked by a series of dispatches from Weld to Kimberley on affairs of the Protected Native States.²² They trace the gradual opening up of these states, and the steps taken to put them on a secure financial footing. Revenue in Perak rose from \$273,000 in 1876 when Low took over to \$609,000 (estimated) by the end of 1881. At the same time, Weld noted with satisfaction that by 1 January 1881, the debts of Selangor had dropped in the previous year from \$346,000 to \$318,000. Moreover planters from Ceylon were being encouraged to migrate to Malaya, on the prospect of planting coffee, and it was felt that if adequate Indian labour could be retained, such undertakings would prove profitable.²³ It is not difficult to detect in these crisp and concise despatches the work of the industrious Assistant Colonial Secretary. No longer was his brief confined to Native Affairs, for with effect from 1 June 1881 he was to be Assistant Colonial Secretary for the Straits Settlements and Clerk of the Councils. Indeed such was his obvious ability as an auditor that Weld considered appointing him Auditor-General, 'for which he is especially well fitted.'²⁴ Yet even though he might have been promoted to Assistant Colonial Secretary for the Straits Settlements, his expertise on the Native States would still be used: 'So long too as Mr Swettenham is in the Department he must remain the principal adviser of the Governor in such matters.'²⁵

One of the coffee planters who came over from Ceylon at this time is of particular importance for Swettenham's story. This was Martin Lister, second son of the third Baron Ribblesdale. Lister appears to have been the only colleague in the country with whom Swettenham developed any degree of real friendship beyond the call of official duties. It was perhaps not fortuitous that Swettenham should have befriended a member of the aristocracy, given the lifelong snobbery, which he had inherited from his father. However, it is clear from other contemporary accounts that Lister was an able and charming man. Their friendship seems to have developed rapidly, for Lister arrived no earlier than 1879, and by the end of October 1881 accompanied Swettenham on two months' leave to Japan and China. In addition to sightseeing, Swettenham was anxious to extend his collection of oriental porcelain, and to sample the mixed-game shooting around Shanghai, of which he had heard much. The vacation was perhaps one of the happiest

Swettenham spent in the course of his Malayan career, judging from the very full account he later gave of it.²⁶ He departed for Hong Kong with two retrievers, where he met Lister with three other friends. Over the two days in Hong Kong, he paid a visit on Sir John Pope-Hennessy, the Governor, and Lady Hennessy, who had staying with her, also on local leave, her father, Hugh Low.

In Japan, as might be expected, Swettenham vividly described the late autumn colours of the maples near Osaka. The experience stimulated Swettenham to form over the years, a substantial collection of Japanese prints.²⁷ He was one of the first serious western collectors of this art form, which he undoubtedly helped to popularize. The party was impressed by Nara and the temples of Kyoto, where Lister, who had given up the idea of shooting in China, left for Yokohama. The Shanghai part of the visit proved something of an anti-climax: 'a painful experience physically and mentally.' The weather was bitterly cold, long walks of twenty and twenty five miles a day produced serious blisters, and to cap it all, the game, by Swettenham's luxurious standards was bad: a mere forty pheasants and two woodcock, apart from what they had cooked. He noted with his customary macabre touch the predilection of the pheasants for Chinese graveyards, with their endless coffins, 'very aggravating. One is always stumbling over a skull or thigh-bone, and when the fragments get disconnected the sorrowing relatives put them in a jar: so one finds the skull outside and the leg bones standing half in and half out of the jar.'²⁸

He consoled himself with the thought that the princes Albert Victor and George, grandsons of Queen Victoria, who were shooting in the same area, with seven guns, bagged only seventy-five head in a similar period. He returned alone to Singapore on 17 December, broke: 'as the result of too persistent curio collecting. I had to borrow a dollar to get back home.'²⁹

Two years later, when there was trouble in Rembau, the Maharaja of Johore was all but excluded. Problems had arisen between Haji Sahil, a minor chief of Rembau, and Syed Hamid of Tampin. The former was a protégé of the Maharaja, the latter an intriguer, but, in the view of the colonial officials, decidedly a 'supporter of and loyal to the British Government.' There had previously been some fighting, but although this had now ceased, there was dissatisfaction in Rembau with Haji Sahil, on grounds of alleged corruption.³⁰

Weld had spotted signs of trouble in late 1882: 'The affairs of Rembau ... are in a very critical position, and afford the most conclusive possible evidence of the mistake that was committed in endeavouring to influence the independent states by the Maharaja, instead of by the action of the Government itself.'³¹

After receiving representations from both sides, and informing London that unless a show of force was made, another resort to arms was imminent, Weld received the Colonial Office's grudging approval for intervention. He thereupon summoned all the chiefs concerned to Malacca. He also informed the Maharaja that he proposed to settle the Rembau problem. The Maharaja, in reply, asked politely to be excused, thus leaving Weld with a free hand. Swettenham was summoned from Kuala Lumpur and was presumably further instructed to bring with him Tunku Panglima Raja, or a Malay of equivalent seniority, to represent Selangor. Cecil Ranking, the District Officer, was dispatched to approach Tunku Panglima Raja, but the latter professed to be too unwell to see him. At this, Swettenham descended on Kuala Langat by launch, and within an hour had picked up the more accommodating Raja Kahar. Ranking was left desperately attempting to obtain for Raja Kahar a letter of authorization imprinted with the Sultan's seal and dispatched by boat to Malacca in time for the conference. Swettenham was not one to waste time.³²

He and Hervey spent four days collecting information and taking evidence, at the end of which Weld summoned a plenary session of the chiefs and British officials. This was held at the Malacca Stadthuis, at 8:30 p.m. With Swettenham translating, deliberations lasted till 4:00 a.m. the following morning. The chiefs concerned left the solution of the problem to Weld, who then proposed that a new chief be elected. This was eventually done, the new chief and his associates forthwith signing an undertaking to refer all future problems to the Governor, and to follow his decision. Thus, in yet another instance, the Maharaja's influence was reduced. Perhaps more significantly, a system of indirect control was introduced, witnessed by various Malay chiefs from other states who were also signatories, and thus in theory bound to support the British in upholding the terms of the agreement.

Although at one stage Haji Sahil had offered to accept a British Resident, Weld turned down the offer, evidently in the belief that he would in all probability find himself with problems similar to those encountered by Jervois and Birch in Perak. The British administration had learnt its lesson, and now preferred to advance more cautiously.

Of the British officials present, Hervey and Swettenham had by far the most experience of Malay matters. Swettenham's advice, not to mention his ability in translation, ensured him the most weighty role behind the scenes.³³ It would however be a mistake to suppose that Swettenham had always managed to get a good press report in his handling of the affairs of the Native States. Back in Langat in 1874, Swettenham had been asked to participate in a

panel to determine whether Lukut should be treated as part of Selangor or Sungei Ujong. No decision was reached, and when Jervois left for Australia he instructed Anson to reinvestigate the matter. This was undertaken by Bloomfield Douglas and Murray in Sungei Ujong, and resulted in an agreement between Selangor and Sungei Ujong under which Lukut was transferred to Sungei Ujong, without consulting its ruler, Raja Bot.³⁴

Raja Bot not unnaturally was upset by such high handed behaviour, and hired a lawyer in Singapore to object in the press to such infringements on the rights of the Malay ruler. The objections were effective. The *Straits Times Weekly* fulminated:

And here it must be stated that HE Sir William Robinson has made his second blunder in his government of these settlements. His Excellency, it is said, has allowed himself to be led by the nose by the Secretary for Native States in considering any Native questions. Now it is generally rumoured that this Secretary is detested and distrusted by the Native Chiefs from Johore to Quedah; — and that there is not a Chief in the West Coast would have anything to say or do with him if he could help it. Yet this is the man the British Government persists in making the means of intercommunication with silent but sensitive Malay Chiefs.³⁵

The same report went on to record that the day before Raja Bot had had an interview with the Governor, and although he had no use for official interpreters, Swettenham was nonetheless present: 'The interview is said to have been altogether a lively one. The Raja is reported to have been lectured very angrily on his many sins of omission and commission — his want of faith and deference towards the Secretary for Native Affairs - his disobedience to his suzerain the Sultan of Salangore — his taking legal advice instead of confiding all his grievances into the friendly bosoms of the Hon. J. Douglas, CMG and Mr F.A. Swettenham, and, above all, of "writing to the papers" or rather of allowing "those newspaper fellows" to get a hold of his story.'³⁶

The problem festered on, with Raja Bot demanding various douceurs as compensation for his mistreatment. It was finally resolved at the end of July 1881 with Weld as witness to an agreement between Raja Bot and all the other chiefs involved. Swettenham was again present as interpreter, and doubtless, as adviser to Weld. Lukut went to Sungei Ujong, while Raja Bot, suitably compensated, took up residence in Selangor, where he held office in the State Council and Kuala Lumpur Sanitary Board. The cautious handling of this episode, after the high-handed approaches in Perak in the early and mid-1870s, illustrate that the British

government had well learnt the need for caution in its dealings with Malay chiefs.³⁷

NOTES

1. *STW*, 19 June 1880.
2. *Footprints*, p. 80.
3. A. Lovat, 1914, *The Life of Sir Frederick Weld*, p. 286. From a journal kept by Sir Frederick Weld during his first visit to the western Malay States, June-August 1880.
4. *MM*, 15 November 1898.
5. Lovat, 1914, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-6.
6. *Ibid*, p. 273.
7. *Ibid*, p. 286.
8. HC 3095:37 Weld to Kimberley, 20 August 1880.
9. Lovat, 1914, *op. cit.*, pp. 286-91.
10. Lovat, 1914, *op. cit.*, p. 289 ff.
11. *Ibid*, pp. 308-9. Swettenham, 'Some Account of the Independent States of the Malay Peninsula etc.' *JMBRAS*, 6:172, 1880.
12. *STW*, 14 August 1880.
13. CO 273/104:295 ff. Gov. to CO, 169 of 22 September 1880.
14. Thio, 1969, *op. cit.*, pp. xxvi ff.
15. CO 273/94:417ff. Robinson to CO, 194 of 5 July 1878 enclosing Swettenham's undated memorandum. See also *British Malaya*, pp. 84-101.
16. Swettenham, 1880, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-9. This was of course written in 1875. See Chapter 11.
17. Cowan, 1961, *op. cit.*, pp.102-3, fn. and Thio, 1969, *op. cit.*, pp. xxxii-xxxiii fn.
18. CO 273/94:417 ff. Robinson to CO, 194 of 5 July 1878.
19. CO 273/108:136 ff. Weld to Kimberley, 137 of 9 April 1881.
20. *Ibid*.
21. SP 106. Sadka thinks this somewhat heavy-handed parody was Swettenham's own work. The document is not in Swettenham's hand.
22. See HC 3095.
23. HC 3095:42 Weld to Kimberley, 31 May 1881.
24. CO 273/107:337 Gov. to CO, Confidential of 21 March 1881 filed with Weld to Meade (private) of 20 March 1881, CO 273/109:342 Gov. to CO, 268 of 26 July 1881.
25. CO 273/109:605 ff. Gov. to CO, 339 of 22 September 1881.
26. *Footprints*, pp. 74-9. Swettenham made an error in *Footprints* over the date of this visit. It occurred in fact in 1881: see the report of Swettenham's departure for Yokohama via Hong Kong on 20 October 1881: *STW*, 22 October 1881.
27. These were disposed of by Sothebys in 1912. See Chapter 45 below.
28. *Footprints*, p.79.
29. *Ibid*.
30. This episode is recounted fully in J.M. Gullick, 1976, 'The Tampin Succession,' *JMBRAS*, 49 (2):1-35.
31. CO 273/117:22 ff. Weld to Kimberley, Confidential of 14 December 1882.

32. From the diary of the District Officer, Kuala Langat, summarized by J.M. Gullick, pers. comm.
33. CO 273/119:200 ff. Weld to CO, 121 of 23 March 1883. CO 273/120:52 ff. Weld to CO, 149 of 7 April 1883, together with the account by Thio, op. cit., pp. 32-40 and *STD*, 26-31 March 1883.
34. CO 273/95:58 Gov. to CO, 226 of 2 August 1878.
35. *STW*, 3 August 1878.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Gullick, 1955, op. cit., p. 93 and 96. The Raja Bot controversy was covered in Swettenham's reports on 4 and 5 June 1878, in CO 273/95:148 ff. Gov. to CO, 248 of 13 August 1878. CO 273/101:432 Robinson to CO, 19 June 1879, with CO to Gov., 171 of 29 July 1879. CO 273/102:10 ff. OAG to CO, 5 of 8 January 1880, with telegram CO to OAG, 18 February 1880 and CO to OAG, 40 of 27 February 1880. CO 273/104:204 ff. Gov. to CO, 153 of 9 September 1880. CO 273/95:56 ff. Gov. to CO, 226 of 2 August 1878. Swettenham's assessment of Lukut in 1875 is in Chew Thesis, Appendix D.

1882-1904

1971-1972

Resident, Selangor

Although nominally Swettenham's period of service in Selangor lasted from 2 October 1882 to 31 May 1889, more than half of this period was spent elsewhere: as Straits Commissioner for the Calcutta Exhibition which absorbed four months at the end of 1883 and early 1884, acting in Perak during Low's leave for some twenty-one months between the end of March 1884 and 11 January 1886, and almost two years' leave from early February 1886 to early January 1888.¹

Swettenham accompanied by his wife arrived in Selangor to take up his new duties on 2 October 1882.² The administration was chaotic. This was not entirely surprising after Douglas' regime of incompetence. What is now Merdeka Square was a tapioca patch, while the site now occupied by the Bangunan Abdul Samad had on it flimsy shacks, liable to be blown away in any storm.³

On his arrival in Selangor there was only one man inherited from the Douglas regime that Swettenham felt he could trust. This was Syers, the Chief of Police, who had been promoted from the ranks in 1875, and was to play a major part in Kuala Lumpur life till his death in 1897. Swettenham had of course come across him in his earlier audit work in Selangor, and had formed a high opinion of the manner in which this quiet, efficient young man handled his irascible and incompetent superior Douglas.⁴ He had earlier expressed his admiration of Syers in his audit report of 6 March 1879: 'The Resident is very fortunate in his superintendent of police, Mr Syers.'⁵

Within a week of his arrival, Swettenham was joined by J.P. Rodger, an old Etonian with a legal training and some private means. He had done social work in the East End of London: 'Not a bad training for a man who is to look after natives,' commented the Colonial Office later.⁶ Subsequently he travelled in the East, and on arrival in the Peninsula, had spent a few days with W.E. Maxwell in Perak, before being recruited by Swettenham, apparently at very short notice.⁷ The two men rapidly established a rapport. This was to stand both in good stead over the next twenty years that Rodger

remained in the Malayan Civil Service. Rodger, officially Commissioner for Lands, invariably acted during Swettenham's frequent absences from Selangor, and his legal training well complemented Swettenham's practical expertise in surveying. He was less forceful than Swettenham, charming and a good linguist, speaking both Malay and Chinese, although 'rather amateurish as an administrator,' with 'a grand manner, officially, socially and intellectually ... this was a little over-powering at times.' His wife was described as a 'grande dame'.⁸ At the end of 1882, Rodger, Syers and Swettenham were the only Europeans in Selangor.⁹

Swettenham must have felt more than a little uncertain as he surveyed the chaos left by Douglas, and was conscious perhaps that there could still be undisclosed financial irregularities. Thus one of his first acts was to ask these two men whom he felt he could trust to check the September accounts of the State Treasury. This was done, and all found to be in order. He then made a swift visit of examination and audit of the districts.¹⁰

Nor was the accommodation in Kuala Lumpur attractive, as he lost no time in pointing out to Weld. The barn of a Residency which had been laboriously removed from Klang by Douglas on Swettenham's own instructions had a dining room, a drawing room, six bedrooms with verandahs and five bathrooms. The downstairs floors were of concrete, with no matting anywhere. Swettenham estimated \$1,500 would be needed for furniture, after which annual upkeep would run to \$100. A further \$500 was also required to furnish the rest-house for Rodger, expected that day. Weld agreed.¹¹

It is often said that new brooms sweep clean. Such was certainly the case with Swettenham. On 5 October he minuted to Jansz, the Ceylonese medical officer drafted in from Labuan: 'The present state of the town is not only a disgrace to the Govt. but I should think it is dangerous to health....' Jansz recommended a 'Local Board of Health & Improvements', but Swettenham retorted that the Governor did not think it was yet desirable to establish a municipality. Orders were therefore given to employ the necessary labour and hire carts to remove the ubiquitous refuse, which was taken to a new dump beyond the Pudu Road.¹²

The Police meantime were instructed to put an end to the filthy habits of the Kuala Lumpur residents. White, the acting head of the Public Works Department reported: 'The refuse of the drains is simply removed therefrom, and laid on the side of the road, the stench of which I consider sufficient to create all kinds of disease.'¹³ Swettenham told Syers to instruct the Police that people were not to be allowed to throw rubbish into drains: nor must roads or

verandahs be blocked by hawkers. Fire parade and drill was to take place for an hour, once a fortnight.¹⁴

Weld took an early opportunity of visiting Selangor, and in his report to Lord Kimberley gave a description of the local conditions.¹⁵ He met Swettenham at Jugra on 13 October, when together they visited the Sultan. They touched tentatively on Douglas' and Innes' misdemeanours in charging the Sultan for luxuries of no use to him. Abdul Samad was far too cautious and shrewd to be drawn into a condemnation of these two. Weld reported that he considered the Sultan not sorry to see the departure of Douglas, even though he had stood up for Innes. The following evening they reached Kuala Lumpur where they were met by a salute from the residency hill, and an answering salute from the Kapitan China's house.¹⁶ Weld was appalled by what he found: '... before breakfast next morning I visited the hospitals and some of the worst streets, which were pestilential, though Mr Swettenham who had been employing men and carts to cleanse the latter ever since his arrival, said that their present state would give me no idea of their condition a week previously.'¹⁷ Despite this, conditions in the Pauper Hospital were disgusting, chiefly because Jansz was drunk most of the time, and in Weld's view not capable of taking note of the stiff minute sent to him earlier by Swettenham. Weld therefore dismissed him on the spot. During the six days of Weld's visit, he went over the Kuala Lumpur administration with Swettenham in some considerable detail, being surprised at the rapid deterioration in conditions there since his last visit.

In a private letter to Kimberley, Weld noted that Swettenham's reports were, 'remarkably careful and clear,' and it was, 'such a relief to have him instead of Douglas.' Publicly he was more circumspect. Noting 'how well Mr Swettenham was taking the reins in his hands and energetically dealing with matters,' he was sure that he could on his next visit 'rely upon a very different state of things with the fullest confidence,' and passed on to Sungei Ujong. When Swettenham's appointment was confirmed in 1883, the Governor's high hopes were reiterated: 'His Lordship [Kimberley] adds that he feels confident that your energy and capacity for administration will enable the state to make more satisfactory progress than has recently been the case.'¹⁸

Nor was Rodger any better pleased when he took over as head of the state administration while Swettenham was in Jugra with Weld. He noted in his journal that the clerks came into the offices at 10:30 a.m. and the heads of department at 11:00 a.m. Government departments were in a hopeless muddle; he made proposals for a general improvement. However the Kapitan China was well-disposed: 'The Captain professes great confidence in you, and

seems anxious to meet your views, although he complains (perhaps with some justice) that hitherto he has done everything, and the Government nothing for the town.¹⁹

Swettenham's unfortunate experience with Dr Jansz, caused him to cast a jaundiced eye over the several other Ceylonese officers who had drifted into Selangor during the last year or two. He demanded a separate report from each of them on what they had been doing since they arrived, and issued sharp orders to them to get on with their work. Several were surveyors, and he pointed out that he wanted a trace of a new line between the seventh and the fourteenth milestone, with no gradient more than 1 in 30 or at the most 1 in 25. He clearly had the railway in mind.²⁰

That Swettenham was kept very fully occupied during his first two months in Selangor cannot be doubted. For proof we have his 1883 estimates, prepared over this period and submitted to the Colonial Secretary in Singapore at the end of November with a memorandum running to 115 pages in his own hand on blue government minute paper.²¹ The estimates were for the first time prepared following the well-known format of the Straits Settlements estimates. By adopting this format consistently, comparison was facilitated. These were problems with which, from his previous job, Swettenham was only too familiar. It seems in retrospect remarkable, and a further indictment of Douglas' incompetence, that some form of standardization was not introduced earlier.

The total estimated revenue amounted to \$383,752, an increase of \$148,525 over 1881, the previous completed year. Substantial increases were estimated for the revenue farms. When previously let at the end of 1881, they gave \$16,560 for the year while now they were estimated to relet for \$45,852 per year: a further criticism, if such was needed of Douglas' floundering administration. In fact they were relet for over \$62,000.²²

A number of minor, and in Swettenham's view, tiresome duties on forest products were abolished: he had complained of these impositions in Douglas' day, for he felt they were not economical to collect. Impounding areas were to be created in both Kuala Lumpur and Klang, for stray cattle which had become a nuisance. They could be redeemed at twenty-five cents per head per day impounded. This would raise \$3,500. Having dealt with income, Swettenham considered all the major expenditure headings, recommending a substantial number of new posts, and in many cases generous increases of salaries and allowances for those in existing posts.

However the most significant part of the estimates came under roads and buildings: what today we would call capital expenditure. Here it is possible to understand something of Swettenham's

confidence in and vision for the squalid, dirty town of Kuala Lumpur for which he had so recently assumed responsibility, and for the state of Selangor generally. For this purpose Swettenham had prepared by the Assistant Surveyor eight sheets of large-scale plans of the town of Kuala Lumpur and its neighbourhood, both the existing layout, and what he proposed for the future. The sites of most of the proposed new buildings had in fact been chosen by Weld on his visit to Kuala Lumpur in October 1882. The total estimated for works and buildings was \$40,354. Included in this was provision for a new General Hospital, a new ward for the Pauper Hospital, a new gaol and gaolers' quarters, a new police station and quarters, and new housing accommodation for various heads of departments. A substantial sum was earmarked for a jetty at Damansara, where the Klang river ceased to be navigable. Down at Klang itself, it was proposed to place a hulk in the river, at which river-going steamers could tie up, and transfer cargoes to and from storage within the hulk itself. A number of minor improvements in facilities were also proposed for the various collectors' posts within the state.²³

There was however a problem in these plans: houses jutting into the High Street which belonged to Yap Ah Loy, the Kapitan China, would need to be pulled down if the High Street was to be extended as Swettenham wished. There were also other problems, at that moment resolved or close to resolution, involving the layout of the new Kuala Lumpur, between the astute old Kapitan China, and his youthful Resident. These we shall come to shortly.

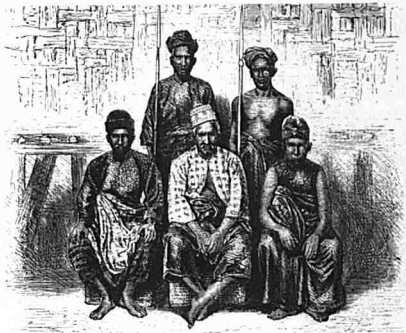
Swettenham concluded his lengthy essay on the estimates by stating that after paying back private creditors, those holding Selangor State Bonds, and sums due to the Straits Settlement Government, he hoped that at the end of 1883 the Selangor accounts would show a surplus of about \$50,000.²⁴ It has been suggested that Swettenham took credit for the plans which had originally been prepared by Douglas.²⁵ It is however clear that such modest plans as Douglas had were never implemented in his time.²⁶ Yet Daly and Douglas deserve credit for surveying and laying out the new official quarter on the west bank of the Klang River, even if they neglected the insalubrious old town across the river. It was to this that Swettenham gave his vigorous attention in 1882.

For 1883 we have a rough diary which Swettenham kept.²⁷ Often it is no more than a list of engagements, but it gives an idea of the sort of life which he was living. Most of the time when he was in Kuala Lumpur, at least half the day was spent on correspondence in the office. Like the other Residents, he was obliged to forward regularly to Singapore a journal of his activities.²⁸

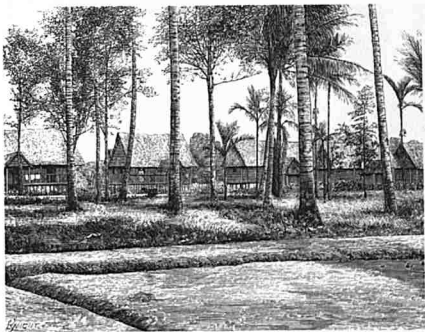
If most of the day was spent on correspondence and administration, the evening was invariably spent going out to view the various construction projects which were being undertaken: chiefly at that time the new hospital, the railway trace to Klang and the extension of the cart tracks round Kuala Lumpur. During 1883 cart tracks were being pushed through to the mining areas in Setapak, Batu Caves, and the Klang Gates. Nearer to home, streets were being laid out near the confluence of the Klang and Gombak Rivers, while the bridge over the river at Market Street, now Jalan Bandar, required careful planning. On the 10 April, he was instructing his draughtsman to prepare a drawing from the design sent by his brother, James Swettenham, in Ceylon. A month later, a bridge upstream was causing problems: 'I should like very much to divert the river at Java Street and move the bridge, but have no money.'²⁹

There were still major gaps among the administrative staff. In particular the post of head of the Public Works Department remained vacant, from the time when Dominic Daly, Douglas' nephew, had been sacked in the summer of 1882. As a result Swettenham in the first nine months handled most of this work himself: no mean feat when one considers the tasks he had set himself. But it must have been obvious from an early stage that it would be essential to recruit a professional engineer. Under normal circumstances, such an appointment would have been handled through Singapore. However Weld was sufficiently impressed by Swettenham's performance that he allowed him a free hand. For this purpose Swettenham drew on the assistance of his elder brother, W.N. Swettenham in UK. His brother recommended H.F. Bellamy.³⁰ Bellamy within a matter of months was recommending the appointment of A.C. Norman, as his assistant superintendent and chief draughtsman in the PWD. Again, W.N. Swettenham's assistance was invoked to check references.³¹ Meantime a brisk correspondence was maintained with James Swettenham in the Colonial Secretary's office in Colombo, on recruitment of staff for the railway, which he was by now actively planning.³²

In his negotiations with the Malays, Swettenham depended to a considerable degree on the services of Raja Laut, the Malay magistrate in Kuala Lumpur. Raja Laut, the son of Sultan Muhammad (1826-1857) of Selangor and half brother of Raja Mahmood, helped him in particular with Malay letters. In this context Raja Laut is described as 'very loyal and very useful.'³³ He seems to have operated as a cross between an unofficial chief clerk and a comprador. He was not without his weaknesses, for on 17 April we learn that Swettenham, 'Heard a charge of bribery against Raja Laut — he admitted it and repaid the bribe.'³⁴ The contrast



24. Raja Yusof and his two sons.



25. Original site of the graves of J.W.W. Birch and W. Innes at Kampong Gajah.



26. Sultan Abdul Samad of Selangor at Jugra and his supporters in the 1870s. Fourth from right, standing with his hand on his hip is Syed Mashor. The young boy on the Sultan's left is Suleiman, who later became Sultan.



27. Sultan Abdul Samad of Selangor.



28. Martin Lister, Resident, Negeri Sembilan, 1887 - 1897.
Photo dated 1886.

29. Hugh Clifford.



30. Templer
Tickell, 1885.



31. Sir Hugh Low's Residency in Kuala Kangsar, built in 1876, on the site of Che Mida's house, demolished 1904.



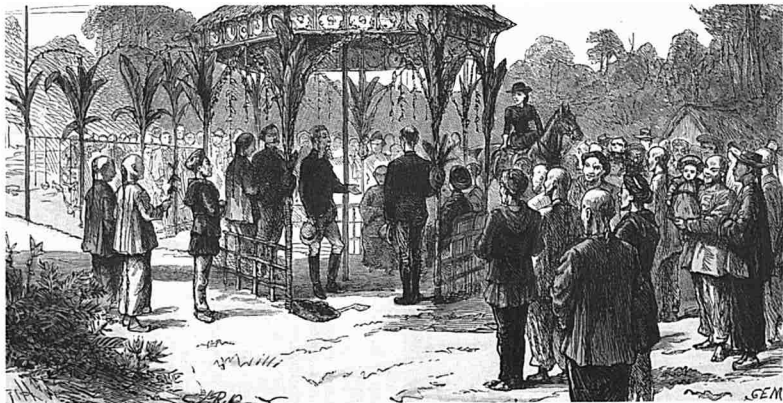
32. Sir Cecil Clementi Smith, Colonial Secretary, Singapore, then Administrator, 1884 - 1885, Governor, 1887 - 1893.



33. Sultan
Idris of Perak.



34. Sir Frederick Weld. Administrator / Governor,
1880 - 1887.



35. Ground breaking ceremony by Governor Weld for the railway to Klang, from the *The Graphic*, 3 November 1883. The lady mounted side-saddle is probably Sydney Swettenham.



36. Yap Ah Loy,
Kapitan China,
Kuala Lumpur.

37. King
Chulalongkorn
of Siam.



with the way Douglas had handled Tunku Panglima Raja five years earlier was striking. When necessary, Swettenham evidently was able to talk round potentially difficult situations with the Malays, in a way which Douglas with his overbearing attitude and loud voice found quite impossible.

Swettenham seems to have made a special effort to woo back to Selangor in the earlier days of his Residency various of the senior Malays. Syed Mashor came back from Perak, while Kudin, with his ever faithful Syed Zin took up 3,000 acres of land near Klang. Raja Mahmood and Raja Ibrahim, sons of the late Sultan, also returned, from Johore and Singapore respectively.³⁵ As far as the Chinese were concerned, Swettenham's attitude was one of wariness:

A thorough experience of the Malays will not qualify an official to deal with Chinese — a separate education is necessary for that, but it is a lesson more easy to learn. It is almost hopeless to expect to make friends with a Chinaman, and it is, for a Government officer, an object that is not very desirable to attain. [They] only realize two positions — the giving and the receiving of orders.³⁶

Relations with the Chinese community were conducted through the Kapitan China, Yap Ah Loy, an old acquaintance of twelve years' standing. Swettenham on occasions visited him at his house by the side of the river, and inspected the gambling booths next door, for which Yap held the 'farming' rights.³⁷ So long as they operated at a distance from each other, all was well. But Yap must have regarded the move of the British administration to Kuala Lumpur with some misgivings. In the old days, he had effectively ruled the district, dispensing, as Swettenham had observed on his first visit to the town, very rough justice, and the basic rudiments of what welfare was available to the immigrant Chinese miners, the protection of secret societies and a monopoly of gambling farms, the opium dens and the brothels. Swettenham had been enormously impressed: 'the greatest credit is due... for what he has done, unaided almost against great difficulties.'³⁸

Swettenham's enthusiasm for Yap was undiminished in early 1880: 'His perseverance alone, I believe, has kept the Chinese in the country... He has provided the sick with an asylum, administered justice to the satisfaction of his countrymen, opened a brick-field where he is doing excellent work, and planted a tapioca estate larger than any in the Colony.'³⁹ For the remainder of Bloomfield Douglas' tenure of office, the administration was too ineffective to cause Yap any serious concern, beyond the unease aroused by the decision to move the administrative capital to Kuala Lumpur.

Swettenham stepped straight into a problem with Yap Ah Loy on his arrival in Kuala Lumpur, for the issue of the gambling farms in Selangor was already under discussion. Before his arrival, it had been decided that tenders for these should not automatically be given to the Kapitan China, but offered to other groups from outside the state. Yap invoked the support of the Sultan, Abdul Samad, in his appeal against this decision to Weld. Swettenham however rapidly induced Abdul Samad to modify his support: the State should not sacrifice a large sum to benefit the Kapitan. Nothing daunted, Yap tried a different approach, in the form of an appeal from the *towkays* of Kuala Lumpur.⁴⁰ Yet all this was to no avail. The matter was raised in the Selangor State Council meeting held on 30 October 1882. Although discussion was allowed, Swettenham's view prevailed. It did however have the effect of increasing the revenue from the farms by 'so much as 330 per cent,' when the tenders were opened.⁴¹ Yap's ruffled dignity was doubtless smoothed to some extent by the discovery that the highest tender was one which included him as a partner.⁴²

A further clash occurred between Swettenham and Yap, when Swettenham wanted 'the Government to resume possession of the rectangular block of ground in which the Gambling Booth and a very insecure shed called a market now stand....'⁴³ Yap, who owned and managed both buildings appealed to the State Council on the grounds that shopkeepers would be ruined were the buildings removed. Swettenham maintained that the area had to be cleared, because it was in its existing condition immoral and unhygienic. Yap must have been a tenacious, stubborn man, for in January Swettenham noted in his diary: 'He stayed for over an hour, had to go over all the old ground again.'⁴⁴ The solution eventually achieved, with Weld's support was that the Kapitan China would hold the property till his death, at which time it would revert to the government, and his heirs would receive compensation for the new market building which Yap built as part of his compromise with Swettenham. Weld refused to listen to Yap's appeals.⁴⁵ The government valued it at \$1,500 and offered \$2,500. The dispute dragged on to 1893, thus delaying the improvement of this central part of Kuala Lumpur. The Old Market Square building was demolished meanwhile and replaced by the market building which still stands in Jalan Rodger/Silang as a tourist attraction.⁴⁶

In Swettenham's absence, Rodger was inclined to treat the Kapitan China kindly. In 1883 a further petition was prepared in respect of a number of houses owned by him. Rodger minuted that the Kapitan should keep the houses in perpetuity, as long as they were used only as houses, in recognition of what he had done for the town.⁴⁷ Although they may have had their differences in

private, Swettenham put a good face on his relations with Yap in public. In his annual report for 1882, he paid tribute to the Kapitan China, who 'has, as he never fails to do, thrown the whole weight of the authority on the side of the Government in any measure which it has been deemed advisable to carry out.'⁴⁸ Whatever may have been Swettenham's reservations about the Chinese community, they did not prevent him from adopting a policy of frequent and generous loans to Chinese traders and miners.⁴⁹

But Yap was growing feeble and when Swettenham went to see him on Chinese New Year in 1883, he found him looking ill: 'I feel sure it is dyspepsia.'⁵⁰ He died on 15 April 1885, aged only 45 while Swettenham was absent from Kuala Lumpur. None of his successors as Kapitan China achieved his eminence, and gradually the post of Kapitan was superseded by the activities of the government-run Protectorate of Chinese.⁵¹

Apart from senior administrative officials in Kuala Lumpur, European government employees elsewhere in the state were few: the four Collectors, who also served as magistrates in each of the four districts of the state. The same could be said of the Europeans in Selangor at the time who were not in government. Pre-eminent were T. Heslop Hill and A.B. Rathborne, among the earliest planters who had moved from Ceylon to plant coffee. Hill was opening up an estate on Weld Hill, and they were both ready to do any other contract work that was required. Hill in particular was a frequent visitor to Swettenham's house: he employed, but apparently only very briefly, one of Sydney's brothers in his firm. This must have been at Swettenham's request.⁵²

Hill undoubtedly had inside knowledge of Swettenham's plans for Kuala Lumpur. In 1883 he offered to fill in the swampy land below the Rest House, in exchange for land to be sold to him at a modest price.⁵³ A little later in the same year he requested ten acres of land to build a brickworks and steam sawmill.⁵⁴ He had evidently anticipated, and stood to benefit from one of Swettenham's earlier directives in 1884 that in order to minimize the risk of appalling fires which periodically swept through the Chinese quarter, all buildings should in future be constructed of brick.⁵⁵ For a two-year monopoly on the sale of all bricks to the Selangor government, Hill was to supply bricks at \$90 per laksa (10,000 bricks), a deal which Swettenham felt would produce considerable savings in the Kuala Lumpur construction costs.⁵⁶ That Hill's good relations with Swettenham caused a little jealousy we may infer from an incident when he complained to Swettenham about delays in payment by the Treasury. The officials concerned were told to ensure that there were no future delays, and perhaps in order to be

seen to be evenhanded, Hill was asked to ensure his accounts were regularly submitted by the 28th of each month.⁵⁷

Another European much in evidence was a rolling stone called W. Cameron, brother of the former proprietor of the *Straits Times* in Singapore. He undertook survey work, arriving in February 1883⁵⁸ travelling all over the State, and on occasions into Pahang. He stayed with Swettenham in Kuala Lumpur on at least one occasion when he was suffering from fever. Thus on 2 May, Swettenham records: 'Had a long talk with Mr Cameron. He is quite out of his mind at times and it is a little difficult to look after him.'⁵⁹ Cameron was an impractical man, quite unable to control the costs of his expeditions: a source of acrimony between him and the thrifty Resident.⁶⁰ However he did undertake the first major exploration of the hills behind Kuala Lumpur, from Ulu Langat north to what is now known as Bunga Buah, naming one of the peaks after Swettenham.⁶¹ Later, he was the first European to find the high table-land between Perak and Pahang, now named after him. Eventually he died in Singapore of a fever picked up on one of these expeditions.⁶²

Martin Lister, though still based on his unsuccessful coffee estate in Sungei Ujong, was a not infrequent visitor. On the 9 April Swettenham drove out down the road at 6:00 p.m. to meet him, but he did not arrive till 11:30 p.m., in a bullock cart.⁶³ He was also looking for further land to open up, for by 22 May Swettenham was sending his application for land to the Sultan for sealing.

Inevitably much of Swettenham's time was spent on visits outside Kuala Lumpur, although on one occasion there is a pained note to the effect that if he leaves Kuala Lumpur, all the work slows down.⁶⁴ These visits involved general inspections, an audit of the accounts, examination and discussion of the monthly reports with the Collectors, and the explanation of policy directives, whether emanating from Singapore, or, as was more frequently the case, from Swettenham himself. Thus from 16 to 18 January 1883, Swettenham undertook a second audit tour of the districts.⁶⁵ The trip from Klang to Kuala Lumpur was still difficult, and in early 1883 took the best part of a day by boat and then cart track. Coming up from Klang on 27 January, he remarked: 'Left [Klang] at 8:30 a.m. Rudder carried away again.— Twice had to anchor and arrived Damansara 12:40 p.m. Left Damansara 12:55 p.m. arrived K.L. 3:12 p.m. 2 hours 17 minutes over 16 miles.'⁶⁶ There were also trips to the Klang Gates, up into the hills towards Genting Bidei, where Hill and Rathborne had opened a tea estate, and in April, a weekend down to Malacca, leaving Kuala Lumpur at 6:20 a.m. and reaching Malacca at 11:00 p.m. that night.⁶⁷ At the end of

May, Swettenham and Syers spent five days to the south of Kuala Lumpur, visiting Ulu Langat, Cheras, Kajang and Semenyih.⁶⁸

By the time of Weld's next visit in March 1883, he was able to report a marked improvement in the condition of the town, and the gradual replacement of some of the less satisfactory buildings by more permanent ones. More ominously he took with him W.E. Maxwell, now back from Australia with the Torrens system of land registration at his fingertips, to discuss the way in which the land registry should be established in Selangor.⁶⁹ Professional rivalries between Maxwell and Swettenham must have been sharpened at this time: a foretaste of worse to come. Yet overall Weld was well satisfied with his energetic young protégé: 'Selangor shows at once what an immediate influence a good administrator exerts upon all around him. His Highness the Sultan has written to express his pleasure at the confirmation of Mr Swettenham's appointment.'⁷⁰

Despite Swettenham's undoubted energy and ability, there were still critics in Singapore. An anonymous correspondent, commenting on Swettenham's 1882 Selangor Report noted: 'The report is a poor production, and if Mr Swettenham does not do better next year, the public will begin to lose faith in our cadet service in general, and Mr Swettenham in particular.' The comment was hardly a fair one, for Swettenham had only spent the last three months of the year in Selangor. Swettenham replied in a brief letter a few days later.⁷¹

By the time of his visit in July 1883 Weld recorded in his dispatch to Derby, 'I can report most favourably on the success of Mr Swettenham's administration.' He went on to record in addition, the construction of new hospitals and other quarters, the setting up of brick kilns, to enable the existing fire-prone buildings to be replaced, and the development of sanitary facilities. Moreover the debt due to the Colony was now completely extinguished.⁷² This was a long visit. Swettenham drove the Welds round Kuala Lumpur, and took them to visit Mr Hill's estate. There were two overnight trips, one with Hill and Syers, via Ampang over the bridle track to Ulu Langat, where all the people, 'Malays, Chinese and Sakeis,' gathered to meet the Governor and, in the evening, entertained him 'with songs and dances of very varied descriptions.' On their return the following night they dined with the Kapitan China, before setting off the day after for another overnight visit to Klang Gates.⁷³ The whole visit had taken the better part of a fortnight. Yet the indefatigable Weld was back at Beranang, south of Semenyih, on 6 August, to be met and escorted on to Kuala Lumpur on 8 August. Do we detect an inward groan as Swettenham notes, 'He decided to stay till 11th'?⁷⁴

Swettenham's work on the 1884 estimates was almost as voluminous as that for the 1883 figures, his comments alone running to eighty-five pages. Once again the figures showed increases over the previous year: his 1883 estimated revenue was \$383,352, of which over \$304,000 had been achieved by 31st August, and he was confident of \$450,000 by the year-end. However in the light of possible vagaries in the price, and thus duty raised on tin export, he had cautiously only allowed for revenue of \$463,000 for 1884. Estimated expenditure was also up by some \$200,000.⁷⁵

Swettenham's comments in this long report on future prospects cast an interesting light on his views and attitudes. He had not had a private secretary since his arrival, because no-one could be found of the necessary calibre prepared to come and live in Kuala Lumpur for \$1,200 a year. The town, like all mining towns was expensive, the more so due to lack of adequate communications with the coast. He now proposed a salary of \$1,500 for such a man. The memorandum contained a number of reminders to the Colonial Secretary that certain ideas had already been discussed with His Excellency the Governor, and approved, at least in principle. Works and buildings were still substantial: new government offices were to be built on the site of the police barracks, on Bluff Road to cost a total of \$20,000, of which \$12,000 would be needed in 1884. The goal in total would cost \$25,000 of which \$5,000 was in the current year's estimates.

Swettenham's performance in Selangor had indeed been impressive; so much so that when the 1883 Annual Reports were forwarded to London by Smith in 1884, he commented, 'The great abilities and energy of the Resident (Mr F.A. Swettenham) who took up his appointment in September 1882 have found ample scope in doing all that was possible, with less means at his command than the Resident of Perak, to foster the rapid development of the State....'⁷⁶

Swettenham's involvement with Selangor and Kuala Lumpur in the formative years of the 1880s ensured for him a crucial role in the development of a number of landmarks, whose history it is here convenient to trace through to the end of the decade. That favourite landmark of today's city centre, the Royal Selangor Club, was prominent among Swettenham's concerns. He provided for its foundation in the notes to his 1884 estimates:

I have also to request His Excellency's sanction to the expenditure of \$2,500 for the erection and furnishing of a Reading Room to be built facing the Parade Ground at the foot of the Hill on which I propose to place the new Govt. offices. I ask for this building as I believe it will prove of advantage to

the Govt. service here by affording reasonable recreation to Govt. officers who can find but little healthy amusement here.

The sum I propose will cover the cost of the building, a tracing of which I enclose and also of a billiard table to be placed in the Centre Room. The building would also serve as a Pavilion for Cricket and Lawn Tennis and would be supported by the subscriptions of all who had the privilege of using it.⁷⁷

The club was duly opened by Rodger in October 1884, and supplied with a billiard table from Maynard & Co., originally destined for a hotel in Penang. The cost was \$752.44, but it was later decided that it would be given free to the club.⁷⁸

Changes to the layout of the club were approved by Rodger in 1885, and at about the same time, Venning, by then Honorary Secretary, also obtained Rodger's agreement for the government to bear the cost of metalling the road outside the club.⁷⁹ There are signs that the members preferred having Rodger rather than Swettenham as president of the Selangor Club. Hence it was provided in the original constitution that, although the Resident was ex-officio President, the Commissioner of Lands (Rodger) was to be Vice-President.⁸⁰

Troubles developed in 1888, when it was reported to Swettenham that one J. de Sylva, clerk to Thambusamy Pillai, honorary treasurer to the club, had defaulted with \$578.46, and absconded to Singapore. A warrant of extradition was issued. Yet despite this setback, the club flourished, for later in the year A.W. Harper, the club's secretary, wrote to Swettenham asking for \$3,000 from the government for a new club, on condition that the members should contribute an equal sum. Swettenham responded cautiously, saying that \$3,000 was a high figure, and that he wanted plans and some idea of the site of the new building.⁸¹

Swettenham was evidently satisfied by the club's reply, for in his introduction to the 1889 estimates, he stated that the club had been erected with government help five years ago. Now, either extensive repairs or a new club-house were required. 'This Club is an institution of great value, and one that deserves all the support the Govt. can afford to it. The subscription is as modest as possible, Europeans, Eurasians, Chinese and Tamils are members....' If the government agreed to support the new club, 'The Old Club, New Club and Rest House would then occupy the North end of the Parade Ground, all of them facing South and adding to the appearance of this fine open space.' If this proposal was approved, the old club could, he suggested, be used as a museum.⁸²

The proposal was duly approved towards the end of 1888, but with certain provisos. The Resident and Chief Magistrate were to be

ex-officio members of the Club Committee. In reply to a further letter from Harper enquiring whether the government would, in addition to the new club, pay for repairs to the old one, Swettenham's answer was a firm no.⁸³ Finally, during Swettenham's stint as Resident, A.R. Venning, as the club's secretary, wrote to Swettenham on 15 April 1889 on behalf of the original members asking for a loan of \$1,500, presumably to help make up the \$3,000 which the members themselves were to subscribe. This was also approved by the Governor, no doubt in the euphoria of farewells which overtook Kuala Lumpur at the time of the Governor's final visit, just before Swettenham's departure.⁸⁴

The presence of non-Europeans in the Selangor Club's membership of the early years is significant, not so much because they played an active role in the social life; with notable exceptions, like Thambusamy Pillai, they did not. Their presence does however indicate that in Kuala Lumpur's early years, under Swettenham, some attempt was made to encourage social interaction at least between the senior representatives of the different racial groups. Yet as Kuala Lumpur expanded in the late 1880s and 1890s, the atmosphere began to change. The dynamic, if rough and ready frontier town became more stable and more stuffy, aided by the arrival of increasing numbers of English wives of government officials. The event was marked, just before Swettenham left the town for Perak, by a letter also dated 15 April from Venning, the State Treasurer, ironically written on Selangor Club notepaper, requesting two acres of land in the recently developed Botanic Gardens (later the Lake Gardens and now Taman Perdana), for a new club. This was apparently Venning's own idea: the club was to be for senior Europeans only. Smith, the Governor, also approved the proposal, and in so approving the origins of the Lake Club marked the beginning of a less relaxed era in Kuala Lumpur social affairs.⁸⁵

Mention of Venning leads on to the establishment of what is now known as the Lake Gardens. The first proposal for 'public, economic and ornamental gardens' in Kuala Lumpur occurred in 1888, when Venning was put in charge of the layout, using convict labour with a budget of \$2,500: 'There is a very excellent site for such a garden on the old Damansara Road, about one mile from Kuala Lumpur....' A further sum of \$500 was approved later in the year. The money was well spent, for in the notes to the 1889 estimates, Swettenham proposed a further \$3,000 for the year: 'Mr Venning has already done excellent work with the money granted this year.'⁸⁶

The gardens were officially declared open in May 1889 in the presence of the Governor. Sydney Swettenham cut the ribbon

opening the road round the lake, which was named after her, and planted a tree to commemorate the occasion. Everything, Swettenham noted in a subsequent minute, was excellent, except the weather. It poured with rain, obliging the assembled company to huddle under umbrellas and mackintoshes throughout the proceedings.⁸⁷

The repairs carried out on the Residency by Swettenham on his arrival in Kuala Lumpur in 1882 had not proved adequate. Complaints were made about it in 1886, and plans were put up in September that year. By 1888 Swettenham was pressing hard for the new building, which had been approved in his absence, to be completed. Swettenham had prepared the original plans while he was standing in for Low in Perak, at a time when he was staying in Kuala Kangsar. The grounds and site for the building were cleared, using convict labour in 1888, and on two occasions in 1889 there were attempted escapes by convicts on the working parties. In each case shots were fired, one proving fatal. Nor were costs controlled particularly well. The 1888 estimate for \$15,000 was overspent by \$6,000, for reasons unspecified. Swettenham was determined that the new building should be palatial, with fittings imported from UK. The total cost was some \$36,000: no mean sum in those days. Unfortunately for Swettenham, he was never to live in this house, for by the time it was complete, he was transferred to Perak. On his return as Resident-General he lived elsewhere.⁸⁸

The foundation stones for the new public offices, on the hill behind the *padang*, and for the new gaol were laid by Swettenham in early 1884, just before he left for Perak, in collaboration with Bellamy, by then head of the Public Works Department.⁸⁹ Among other features of Kuala Lumpur constructed under Swettenham's watchful eye, mention may be made of the *istana*, constructed on a plan chosen by Sultan Abdul Samad.⁹⁰

On 22 November 1888 the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China opened its first office. It was initially accommodated in 'some old shophouses,' roughly on the old GPO site.⁹¹ Then in 1890 the bank built its own premises on the south side of the *padang*.⁹² It was said that the choice of this site was influenced by a desire to be close to the police headquarters in Bluff Road, and of course it was midway between the government offices, in that area, and the route to the town by the Market Street bridge. The centre of Kuala Lumpur was beginning to take shape. The final distinctive features of the area surrounding the *padang* were St Mary's Church, constructed while Swettenham was in Perak, and the Secretariat Buildings, which will be considered later.⁹³

Outside Kuala Lumpur, Swettenham also imposed his mark, although less permanently. In early 1889 he refused to allow Batu

Caves to be turned into a place of worship. A month or two later he refused to allow a Chinese request for permission to erect a joss-house at the foot of the caves. Shortly thereafter he refused an application to burn lime there.⁹⁴

Once again, signs of Sydney Swettenham are few. We know that she was present in 1883 from occasional references by Swettenham in his diary to 'us,' when referring to his household.⁹⁵ Once she seems to be mentioned by initial only, in an account of a visit to Klang and Jugra: 'Left KL at 7 AM with S. and Mr Hawley....'⁹⁶ Later in the year the tone becomes chilly: 'Left for Klang at 6.00 a.m. with my wife and Mr Hill....'⁹⁷ From the diary of the Collector at Langat, one J.A.G. Campbell, we get a fleeting glimpse on 11 May 1883, when Swettenham arrived at Kuala Langat with his wife. There is no indication of how she spent her time while Swettenham was away visiting the Sultan.⁹⁸ Finally amongst the Selangor Secretariat files there is a copy in Swettenham's hand of an official letter, written on private notepaper bearing simply a florid monogram of her initials, CSS, indicating that at times at least she aspired to a modest social life.⁹⁹

At some stage after 1 September 1883, Sydney Swettenham left Selangor and returned to England. While there is no direct evidence on the reasons for this return, a number of surmises can be made. First, at about this time we know that Swettenham was angling for the job of Straits Settlements representative at the Colonial Exhibition to be held in Calcutta at the end of the year. Weld's approval for Swettenham to act in this capacity must have been obtained by the end of August, as a result of private discussions between the two men, for Swettenham was obliged to write officially to the Colonial Secretary in Singapore advising him of the Governor's agreement.¹⁰⁰ Despite this, the press reported as late as 14 September, that W.E. Maxwell was acting as secretary for the Straits contribution to the exhibition, and potential exhibitors were encouraged to forward their entries to him.¹⁰¹ This suggests that once again there was competition for the post: on this occasion Swettenham prevailed. He was to combine the visit with leave, and he no doubt dwelt at some length to Sydney on the privations and inconveniences which she might expect if she opted to join him in Calcutta. It may also have suited him to have her out of the state for more personal reasons. For as we shall see later, it seems likely that he was at this time behaving in a manner which was subsequently to expose him to blackmail.

The Colonial Exhibition was organized by an enterprising Frenchman, Mr Joubert who was something of a rolling stone, and had previously run a successful exhibition in Sydney.¹⁰² Swettenham departed by sea for Calcutta via Penang on 22 October,

arriving on the 30th with a modest and disparate collection of exhibits.¹⁰³ On board ship he had made the acquaintance of an amusing elderly Jewish antique dealer called Kuhn, accompanied by what he claimed, 'was the finest collection of Japanese art-work that had ever left Japan.'¹⁰⁴ He had nowhere to exhibit this, so Swettenham thankfully invited him to help fill some of the excess space allotted to the Straits Settlements. Among Kuhn's exhibits was what he claimed to be the finest piece of carving ever to come out of Japan, a small figure of a wild animal with short horns and a hairy skin, which Kuhn referred to as 'The Missing Link.'

Swettenham was kept busy setting up the display and the decorations for about three weeks after his arrival. This did not prevent his playing cricket over at least one weekend, for Calcutta in a match against Ballyganj.¹⁰⁵ He had his stand adequately prepared with two weeks to spare before the official opening. As a result he was able to leave Calcutta for just over a week, for Darjeeling, travelling by train and taking a keen interest in the way in which the Indian railways operated.¹⁰⁶ His scanty diary references for the period indicate that once up in the hills he spent most of his time walking and riding.

Back in Calcutta on 28 November for the final preparations for the opening, he found the British population in a state of high excitement over the Ilbert Bill, a controversial piece of legislation proposing that Indian magistrates should have powers to sentence Europeans, if only for minor criminal cases.¹⁰⁷ A satirical skit, 'A Glance in Advance' which Swettenham saw had been produced by an outraged European community.¹⁰⁸ The bill was so unpopular that the Viceroy, Lord Ripon, was hissed and booed on his arrival in Calcutta, and on one occasion at least, when his toast was proposed, the assembled European company emptied the contents of their glasses on the floor. The exhibition was opened on 4 December, by Ripon, in the presence of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught. Electric light was being used for the first time on a large scale, so there was considerable consternation when it failed at the opening ceremony, plunging the whole hall into darkness. It was later discovered that someone had intentionally cut the power lines.¹⁰⁹

Swettenham's account of the occasion was lively, if somewhat irreverent:

The opening ceremony was held in the quadrangle of the Museum, and here a throne had been erected for the Viceroy and Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Connaught. The quadrangle had no roof, and a covering of tricolored cotton had been put up, which would have remained very effective had the weather remained fine: but unfortunately rain began in the night of the 3rd, and continued without

interruption till the 5th. The result was that the opening ceremony was a painful fiasco. The floor of the quadrangle was covered with chairs, and as they were wet through, no-one would sit in them, and rain coming through the cotton roof, umbrellas were in general use everywhere the Bishop of Calcutta immediately proceeded to read a very long paper. This was a trying ordeal, as it was necessary to put down umbrellas and take hats off.

Then a combined choir of instruments performed a very long cantata, the occasional strains of "God Save the Queen", which had been introduced at different places by the composer again disconcerting the audience by making them get up from time to time and let the rain wet the chairs they had carefully dried.

The Vice-President of the Executive Committee next read a terribly long address, and the Viceroy proceeded to answer it in an equally long speech — but by this time the rain was pouring down in torrents, and darkness was settling over the hill, the admirable arrangements for lighting the place having entirely failed: and very shortly the darkness was such that the Viceroy was invisible outside a radius of 10 yards from the steps of the throne, and the audience, being rather tired, talked incessantly, so that His Excellency was quite inaudible, in spite of praiseworthy attempts to make himself heard....The Exhibition cannot be said to have proved an unqualified success.¹¹⁰

After the exhibition had been opened, Kuhn only allowed very restricted access to The Missing Link. It was, he mentioned, not for sale, and only to be seen once a week, for two hours. Having greatly aroused public interest in the curio, Kuhn eventually confided to Swettenham that he had sold it for 10,000 rupees worth of jewels. Later he wrote to Swettenham from Delhi that he had heard the weather had become so hot that the carving had begun to melt. It was after all made of wax, and Kuhn admitted he had paid only fifty cents for it.

Although the Exhibition continued into 1884, by 29 December Swettenham felt that his services were no longer essential. After delegating his duties as Straits Commissioner to the unscrupulous Kuhn, he departed by train for a tour of India, which lasted some three weeks. He visited Benares, Lucknow, Cawnpore, Delhi, Jaipur and Bombay, returning via Allahabad and Howrah. His diary gives little idea of what he did, although he never omitted to mention the names of the great and the good upon whom he called, or with whom he dined. The large number of pieces which he subsequently wrote, drawing on his experiences in India, testify to

the profound influence which this brief stay in the country exercised on him.¹¹¹

He also kept a note of those to whom he wrote at this time, from which it would appear that he was writing regularly to Sydney. This is the only period in his career where it is possible to find any more than very sporadic, casual references to her, and raises the possibility that at this time at least he was making a real and determined effort to ensure that the marriage should work.

The Indian interlude came to an end on 17 January 1884, and by the end of January he was back in Singapore.¹¹² He spent ten days there, during which time plans were laid for various impending leaves. Weld was to go at the end of March, leaving Smith to act in his absence. Low was also overdue for leave, after seven years in Perak, and Swettenham learned with considerable satisfaction that he was to act for Low in Perak.

NOTES

1. For precise dates see Chew Thesis, p. 189.
2. Ibid, p. 187 and STW, 6 October 1882.
3. STD, 13 November 1903. Rodger's farewell speech.
4. J.M. Gullick, 1978, 'Syers and the Selangor Police, 1875-1897.' JMBRAS, 51(2). MBRAS Reprint No. 5, 1978.
5. PPC 2410: See Chapter 15 above.
6. CO 273/157:540 Comment by Lucas on Rodger's leave application, 18 July 1888.
7. STD, 13 November 1903. Rodger's farewell speech.
8. Robson, 1934, op. cit., p. 38.
9. SSF Try 522/82, being the *Straits Directory* proofs for 1883.
10. Audit Report by Rodger and Syers dd. October 1882, SSF 603/82. Collectors' Journals for October 1882, SSF Klang 600/82, K. Selangor 592/82 and 608/82.
11. SSF 76/82. Douglas in his diary described with some pride how he built the rambling Residency in Klang. Isabella Bird who had stayed in it in 1879 described it in *The Golden Chersonese*, pp. 217 and 222.
12. SSF 484/82.
13. Ibid.
14. SSF 729/82.
15. CO 273/116:328 ff. Weld to Kimberley, 390 of 27 October 1882.
16. SSF 361/82.
17. Weld to Kimberley as above.
18. Weld to Kimberley (Private) 18 December 1882, Kimberley Papers, quoted in Chew Thesis, p. 248. SSF 78/83, Colonial Secretary to FAS 16 January 1883. The appointment was confirmed in CO 273/116:217 ff. Sec. State to Gov. 6 December 1882 in Gov. to CO, 369 of 5 October 1882. It was announced in SSGG of 19 January 1883, notice No. 37.
19. Rodger's journal in SSF 530/82.
20. SSF 503/82, of 10 October 1882.

21. SSF 88/82.
22. HC 4192 SAR 1882, p. 29.
23. SSF 88/82.
24. For Swettenham's detailed comments, see SSF 88/82. A set of 1883 estimates is to be found in SSF 215/83.
25. J.C. Jackson, 1963, 'Kuala Lumpur in the 1880's' *JSEAH*, 4(2):117-27. Loh, 1969, op. cit., p. 114 ff.
26. Loh, 1969, op. cit., p. 116.
27. See quotations from this diary in Sadka, 1968, op. cit., pp. 201-2 and Pat Barr, 1977, *Taming the Jungle*, pp. 67-72.
28. These unfortunately have not survived.
29. SD, 27 May 1883.
30. SSF 475/83. H.F. Bellamy, a portrait of whom appears in J.M. Gullick, 1955, op. cit., p. 43, made his name as Commandant of the Kuala Lumpur Fire Brigade. He did good work on the roads and bridges in the 1880s and 1890s. His brother, G.C. Bellamy, was appointed in Perak in 1884 and came to Selangor later.
31. SSF 1252/83.
32. SSF 351/83, 594/83 and SSF 1261/83, and Chapter 19 below.
33. SD, 5 February 1883.
34. Ibid, 17 April 1883.
35. HC 4192, SAR 1882, p. 59. See also Gullick, 1987b, op. cit., p. 82.
36. Swettenham's talk to Royal Colonial Institute, 31 March 1896, in Kratoska (ed.), 1983, p. 180. Swettenham repeated this paragraph verbatim in *The Real Malay*, pp. 38-9.
37. SD, 8 February 1883.
38. Swettenham's report of 8 April 1875 PPC 1320:97 ff. Also Chew, 1984, 'Frank Swettenham and Yap Ah Loy: The Increase of British Political Influence in Kuala Lumpur, 1871 - 1885.' *JMBRAS*, 57(1):70-87.
39. HC 3095:30 Swettenham's Special Audit Report on Selangor, 27 March 1880.
40. SSF 641/82.
41. SSF KL 78/82, quoted by Chew, 1984.
42. Minutes of Selangor State Council Meeting, 30 and 31 October 1882 and SSF 227/82 and 477/82.
43. SSF 260/82.
44. SD, 12 January 1883.
45. See SSF 48/83 and 661/83.
46. HC 5884:63 SAR 1888. The building had originally cost \$42,780, the land on which it stood, \$5,000.
47. SSF 644/83.
48. HC 4192:59 SAR 1882.
49. See for example SSF KL 7/83, 14b/83, 39/83, 40/83, 41/83, 54/83, 65/83, 110/83, 775/83, 1489/83 and 1884 estimates, para 10 in 1330/83.
50. SD, 8 February 1883.
51. Middlebrook, 1951, op. cit.

52. The brother was C.D. Holmes, listed in *Straits Times Directory* for 1886. The other two brothers for whom Swettenham found employment were H.C. Holmes and M.E. Holmes.
53. SSF 599/83.
54. SSF 716/83.
55. Gullick, 1955 op. cit., p. 39.
56. SSF 718/83.
57. SSF 1117/83.
58. SSF 152/83.
59. SD, 2 May 1883.
60. SSF Misc. 1319/83.
61. SSF 1395/83.
62. *Footprints*, pp. 94-5.
63. SD, 9 April 1883.
64. SD, 26 June 1883.
65. SD, 16 to 18 January 1883.
66. SD, 27 January 1883.
67. SD, 20 April 1883.
68. SD, 30 May to 4 June 1883.
69. CO 273/119:394 Weld to Derby, 90 of 12 March 1883, SD, 6 March 1883.
70. HC 4192: 7-8 Weld to Derby, 12 March 1883.
71. Z. in *STD*, 17 April 1883 and Swettenham's reply of 23 April 1883.
72. CO 273/121:524 ff. Weld to Derby, 309 of 19 July 1883.
73. *Ibid.* and SD, 18 and 20-21 July 1883.
74. SD, 8 August 1883.
75. SSF 1330/83.
76. HC 4192:40-1 OAG to Derby, 4 April 1884.
77. SSF 1330/83.
78. For a report on the opening by Rodger see *STD*, 16 Oct. 1884, SSF KL 1819/84, Misc. 1955/84 and SSF PWD 758/85.
79. SSF Misc. 1819 and Misc. 2044/85.
80. *SJ*, 4:262.
81. SSF Courts 841/88, Misc. 2032/88.
82. SSF 2867/88, being the estimates for 1889.
83. SSF 3372/88 and Misc. 3586/88.
84. SSF Misc. 1283/89.
85. John G. Butcher, 1979, *The British in Malaya, 1880-1941*, OUP, Kuala Lumpur and SSF Lands 1305/89.
86. SSF KL 593/88, Tr. 2924/88, 2867/88 and K.L. 313/89.
87. SSF Misc. 1515/89, *STD*, 21 May 1889, *SFP*, 16 May 1889. See also A.R. Venning's account, under Thesaurus, *SJ*, 2, No. 1, 22 September 1893.
88. The following SSF files concern the new residency. The two most important are KL 870/89, containing Swettenham's account of the design, and PWD 1516/89, giving the costs. Others which refer to this building are KL 191/86, PWD 1839/86, KL 2190/88, KL 2773/88, KL 2774/88, KL 2804/88, KL 2987/88, PWD 3253/88, KL 182/89, Prisons 201/89, PWD 237/89, PWD 247/89, Police 609/89, KL 870/89, Misc. 916/89, PWD

1053/89, KL 1123/89, Prisons 1185/89 and PWD 1516/89 - costs. The text of KL 870/89 is given in H.S. Barlow, 1992, 'The Early History of the Residency, Kuala Lumpur,' *JMBRAS*, 65 (2):25-34.

89. For an account of this event on 28 February 1884, see *STD*, 10 March 1884.

90. HC 5884:63 SAR 1888.

91. Robson, 1934, op. cit., p. 4.

92. Sanitary Board minutes, 9 October 1890.

93. SSF Misc. 3258/88, *STD*, 15 January 1894, 13 February 1894 for St Mary's Church, and Chapter 31.

94. SSF 686/89, Misc. 1022/89, Misc. 1245/89.

95. See for example SD, 23 February 1883.

96. SD, 16 January 1883.

97. SD, 1 September 1883.

98. This reference comes from a typed copy of the official diary of the Collector, Kuala Langat, 1882-5, details provided by J.M. Gullick.

99. SSF 1329/83.

100. SSF 1265/83 of 31 August 1883.

101. *STD*, 14 September 1883.

102. See *The Englishman* (Calcutta), 27 October 1883 for details of his career.

103. *Footprints*, pp. 84-5 and SD, 1883. SSF 1967/84 indicates that Rodger acted for him in Selangor from 4 October 1883 to 4 February 1884.

104. *Footprints*, p. 84.

105. *The Englishman*, 12 November 1883.

106. SD, 20 November 1883.

107. It was officially known as The Criminal Code Procedure Amendment Bill.

108. SP 108 and SD, 13 December 1883.

109. *The Englishman*, 5 December 1883.

110. Swettenham's account in *STD*, 31 January 1884.

111. It was from his Indian experience that he drew material for the following sketches in his *Unaddressed Letters* of 1898: 'A Clever Mongoose,' 'The Jingling Coin,' 'The Devi,' 'The Death Chain' and 'Scandal & Bangles.' 'The Hill of Solitude' and 'An Illumination' probably also derive from his Indian experiences.

112. *STD*, 25 January 1884.

Communications, Development and Methods of Control

Swettenham had realized, long before he took up his post as Resident in Selangor, the important connection between adequate communications and development. 'The most important questions in the country are means of easy and cheap communication between the Ports of the State and centres of industry, and an equitable arrangement between employers of labour and their workmen.'¹ In addition to the need to export tin swiftly and efficiently, he might also have added the need to bring in adequate labour, a subject to be considered in a later chapter.² He lost no time in setting right what he saw as deficiencies in the position.

When he arrived in Selangor in 1882 there were 145 miles of roads. When he left in 1889 there were 338 miles, and 22 miles of railways, yielding an annual profit of almost \$200,000.³ The position was set out fully in Swettenham's 1883 Selangor Annual Report: 'The Government of Selangor has been very anxious to improve or rather to make communications between the various stations, to bring the mines within reach of the bases of supply and to induce immigrants to come into the country and plant, giving them good roads to market.' Meantime expenditure on roads jumped from under \$20,000 in 1882 to approximately \$135,000 in 1883.⁴

Weld fully supported this policy: 'The extension right along the Peninsula of bridle paths, roads and railways, ultimately to be all railways is part of my fixed policy.'⁵ In Selangor, Swettenham was lucky to have Weld's support. The road between Kuala Lumpur and Damansara, the only link to the outside world, was badly laid out, and expensive to maintain. It would cost, in Weld's view, £30,000 or \$120,000 to put in order, so he stressed the importance of a railway: '...and I think I see my way to this without financial risk.'⁶

Swettenham's earliest blueprint for the roads in Selangor is to be found in his lengthy essay introducing the Selangor estimates

for 1883. Roads, streets and bridges called for a massive vote of \$92,154. In his introduction to this section of the estimates, Swettenham made it clear that his concern had been only to ensure that estimated expenditure was matched by revenue. The roads element involved the preparation of a trace to the Genting Bidei pass on the Pahang border, and construction of some five miles of this road, the work to be undertaken by Heslop Hill, the only man who would be able to do it. Another road was planned to link Kuala Langat and Jugra, while \$5,000 was allowed for upkeep and metalling the Ampang, Pudu and Petaling Roads. The construction of a railway from Klang to Kuala Lumpur was taken for granted in the estimates, even though the most provisional plans had scarcely been started; costings were not included.⁷

The estimates also included a minimal sum for the upkeep of the Damansara Road, simply to maintain it in passable condition, 'In the belief that only a Railway can provide satisfactory communication between the Port of Klang and this Town, and that His Excellency is so thoroughly alive to the importance and urgency of the undertaking that no unreasonable delay will be allowed to hinder the carrying out of the project.' These were strong words from a junior Resident to the Governor. They may also have reflected Swettenham's determination to ensure that his plans should not be side-tracked by jealous or hostile junior officials in Singapore. An aspect of road development in which Swettenham and Bellamy were less successful was the maintenance of the road surface which was rapidly cut into ruts by the narrow, iron wheels of the bullock carts. After Swettenham's departure for Perak, unfavourable comments were passed on the poor standard of road maintenance. C.E. Spooner, brought in from Ceylon by Maxwell over the head of Bellamy gave up Bellamy's policy of attempting to patch the roads with laterite, and adopted the 'Ceylon system,' using broken stone. In fairness to Swettenham, the Spooner system would have been prohibitively expensive in Swettenham's time.⁸

Three bridges were estimated for Kuala Lumpur: a main iron bridge, to cost \$4,000, and replace a flimsy temporary structure, a bridge at Cross Street of rough timber for some \$600, and one at High Street. The main streets of Kuala Lumpur were to have the luxury of brick drains for \$17,500, some 3,500 yards at \$5 per running yard. Another \$17,250 was to be spent raising and metalling the streets of the town. New tracks in the interior of the state were to cost some \$3,500.⁹

Since there was a shortage of labour in the state, Swettenham used the good offices of his elder brother, J.A. Swettenham, then in the Colonial Secretary's office in Colombo, to arrange for a detachment of the Ceylon Pioneer Corps to be sent over to the

Peninsula to work on the roads.¹⁰ Road works not undertaken by the PWD or the Pioneer Corps were handled by European contractors. T. Heslop Hill and A.B. Rathborne were the two leaders in this field. They generally worked in partnership on road-building contracts, and were thus crucial to Swettenham, in his overwhelming desire to open up the state as quickly as possible. The files contain frequent references to the activities of these two men. Some were in discussion of payments for new roads: the cart track from Kuala Lumpur to Genting Bidei on the Pahang border, which Swettenham spent two days going over at the end of January 1883, and a road to Batu, in April 1883.¹¹ By the time of his visit to Kuala Lumpur in July 1883, Weld was able to record that about ninety miles of road in various directions from Kuala Lumpur would be made by the end of the year.¹²

The 1884 estimates saw further expansion on roads: the roads, streets and bridges estimate was increased to \$123,140. Swettenham prefaced his requests for votes amounting to this sum with a restatement of policy, again one suspects for the benefit of sceptics in the Colonial Secretariat: 'His Excellency is aware that I believe the prosperity and advancement of the State depend on good communications, capital and population, with a fair administration.' He tactfully attributed the successful results to date to Weld's personal knowledge and interest, and Heslop Hill's energy and ability in carrying out the work. The main item that year was to be a first-class bridle road from Kuala Lumpur north some forty-five miles to Ulu Bernam. South of Kuala Lumpur there was to be a path from Ulu Langat to Ulu Semenyih and on to Reko: some twenty four miles for \$21,000. One end was to join the Ampang Road by bridle road over Bukit Blachang, while the Semenyih road was to be continued to Beranang. The stretch from Ricko to Kajang and Cheras was being made using convict labour. As a result, for the first time the northern and southern boundaries of the state would be linked by road, with Kuala Lumpur, thence by rail to Klang, acting as a terminus in the centre.¹³

By the end of the decade when Swettenham returned to Selangor for his final stint as Resident, the focus of development and expansion in the state had shifted, to the north and east of Kuala Lumpur. The first regular path up to the Pahang border had been constructed to give access to Hill and Rathborne's Genting Bidei estate.¹⁴ Here were planted initially small acreages of *Arabica* coffee and cinchona; tea was to come later. By 1888 efforts were being made to find an alternative route over the main range to Bentong. Mr Klyne of the PWD was sent to explore the Gombak Valley in that year. He reported that the Genting Sempah Pass was preferable to Genting Bidei, as it shortened the journey down the other side to

Bentong by a mile or two. However no action seems to have been taken on this, perhaps because money had already been spent on the Genting Bidei track.¹⁵

Very much more interest was shown in the possibility of a road, or even a railway across the central range, but further to the north, over what is now known as the Gap Pass, to Raub. Once again the reasoning was strictly financial. 1888 had seen a rash of mining applications in the Ulu Selangor district to the north of Kuala Lumpur, and at the same time a substantial increase in activity by recently quoted mining companies in Pahang, especially in the Raub area, where gold had been found in small quantities. Swettenham had visions of capturing for Selangor the business generated from Pahang mining activities, and shipping the ore out of the country at Klang.¹⁶ Even if no money could be found to extend the railway line into Pahang, it was essential that a bridle road be constructed over the Gap Pass to Raub, and, for reasons no longer clear to us, quickly, too.¹⁷ In fact such a railway was never constructed, because the Pahang government had no money at the time, and no private backers could be found. A year or two later, there was a crash in Pahang mining company shares, and enthusiasm for opening up west Pahang decreased markedly.

Swettenham lost no time in turning his attention to roads when he was posted to Perak in 1884. As he remarked in his annual report for that year, he planned a road from Kuala Kangsar to Ulu Bernam, to link up with the Selangor road system. This would provide for a continuous road link from Province Wellesley to Malacca, even though parts of it were no more than bridle road or cart track. Work was to be done by contract, and by the end of 1885 he hoped to have 224 miles of roads complete within Perak. Meantime the Ceylon Pioneers under the supervision of H.S. Ward were completing a new road through the Gap Pass.

When he returned to Perak, he was able to report in 1889 that a total of 374 miles of road were maintained, while 41 miles of cart road and thirteen miles of bridle road had been constructed. Moreover 24 miles of cart road had been metalled. Metalling work was in progress on the Kuala Kangsar to Ipoh road, while a road system now extended from Selama in the north of the state to Tanjong Malim in the south.¹⁸ He had indeed made his name, as the *Singapore Free Press* put it, in an excruciating pun, as the Colossus of Roads.¹⁹

By the end of Swettenham's tenure in Perak, roads, like all else, had become fair play in the bitter battle with W.E. Maxwell. The 1893 Perak Annual Report, taking up again the question of connecting the Perak and Selangor road systems, remarked sarcastically that there was little point in completing this connection

when the road on the Selangor side had deteriorated so much recently. Swettenham recollected that six years ago, he had covered the distance in a day. Two years previously it had taken two days.²⁰ Maxwell hit back in the Selangor Annual Report for the same year, admitting that the road was in a poor state. This he added was because it had been constructed on such a bad trace, hinting that Swettenham had originally been responsible.²¹

In his final report on Perak, for 1894, Swettenham drew comparisons between conditions in the state in 1890 and 1894, concluding:

The lesson to be learnt from these facts and figures is, I think, a very plain one. It is, that in the administration of a Malay State, revenue and prosperity follow the liberal but prudently directed expenditure of public funds, especially when they are invested in high class roads, in railways, telegraphs and waterworks, and everything likely to encourage trade and private enterprise....²²

There was however more to running a Malay state than taking care of the revenue and communications. The representative of a Colonial government had to be sure of controlling a populace, whose friendship could not be taken for granted. We have seen in Chapter 15 how Swettenham's advice on the development of a civilian administration for the Native States was taken up by Jervis and accepted by the Colonial Office. In his role as Assistant Colonial Secretary for Native Affairs, Swettenham had some opportunity of steering certain Residents in what he felt were the right directions, even if Sir Hugh Low was too senior and competent for such treatment. In any case his views very largely coincided with those of Swettenham. The bumbling and irascible incompetence of Bloomfield Douglas in Selangor prevented much progress in that direction. It was therefore not until Swettenham assumed his post as Resident of Selangor in 1882 that he had the opportunity to put his own ideas into practice.

At point of law, as we have seen, the Resident's role was merely to advise, but the grim example of Perak ensured that in practice the Resident was monarch of all he surveyed within his state. In 1885, a special correspondent writing for the *Straits Times* was able to report: '...de facto the ruler is the British Resident, who governs the state as if it were a British possession.' He added, to emphasize the Sultan's lack of power, that the seal of the Sultan was affixed in the British Resident's office in Kuala Lumpur.²³ Considerable emphasis was laid on the need to give the Sultan face, and encourage him to feel he was more than nominally head of the administration, although practice belied the claim.²⁴ As already noted, arguments in the late 1870s had considered the possibilities

of annexation.²⁵ From London's viewpoint such a course was unattractive, since it would have meant assuming financial responsibilities for states whose economic potential was then by no means fully proven.

It seems unlikely that in the 1870s Swettenham fully appreciated the advantages, from the viewpoint of the Residents, of the course of Residential rule which he recommended. In his 1875 memorandum, for instance, Swettenham had favoured annexation of the states.²⁶ But certainly within a short time of taking up his post in Selangor, he must have realized that the advantages of independence were considerable. The Resident was by then nominally answerable to the State Council. Yet this body, particularly during Swettenham's early years in Selangor, was no more than a constitutional fig-leaf. It was headed by the Sultan, who knew better than to attempt to oppose the Resident, and its members were senior Malays and Chinese, all of whom were appointed by the Sultan on the Resident's recommendation, approved by the Governor. It met infrequently, generally after the events had occurred, to provide a rubber-stamp approval for the Resident's actions. Thus during 1883, Swettenham's first full year as Resident in Selangor, it met on only one occasion.²⁷

As an example of the Sultan's passive attitude towards decision making, we may take the case of the Krakatoa explosion in 1883. The states, it was suggested, might wish to contribute to relief funds. Swettenham recommended that the Sultan be asked for his views, suggesting in a memo to Campbell, the Collector of Land Revenue at Langat, that the amount be not less than \$1,000 and not more than \$5,000. The Sultan told Campbell to decide for him, whatever he thought was right, and Campbell decided on \$2,500.²⁸

One of the chief items on the agenda for the only State Council meeting of 1883 was the approval of lists of Penghulus. Nominations had been called for by Swettenham, from his Collectors in early November 1882, and it is in itself a comment on the importance attached to the State Council, that it was only asked to ratify these proposals some nine months later.²⁹

The Council was rarely, if ever asked to consider the very major decisions which were being made, chiefly by Swettenham himself on the laying out of Kuala Lumpur; still less did it consider plans for the development of the administration and infrastructural facilities elsewhere in the State. There were indeed no plans as such, other than the proposals set out in Swettenham's voluminous comments on the annual estimates, although these were generally discussed in advance with the Governor. These proposals were never formally considered by the Council. They were however sometimes tabled for information. A modern administrator might

well view with horror the largely single-handed and haphazard means by which decisions were taken. Yet by and large the decisions made were good, and the opening up of the state was matched by dramatic improvements in its financial position. This was a further key to the Resident's power. For so long as the state did not request financial assistance from the Straits Settlements, neither the Governor nor the Straits Councils were likely to object to the Resident's plans. This was the chief advantage of the Residential system: there was no direct scrutiny of the Resident's activities from either the Singapore Legislative or Executive Council.

During his periods as Resident in Perak, the State Council met rather more frequently, often seven or eight times a year. The reports of proceedings suggest that the meetings were increasingly asked only to consider and approve matters of administrative detail.³⁰ Against this, it can be argued that as the Residential system developed and matured, successful Residents like Low and Swettenham treated the approval of the State Council as the culmination of earlier private discussions on the advisability of the measures put before the Council. Acrimonious disagreement at the Council was at all costs to be avoided, and this could only be achieved by careful preparatory groundwork.³¹ Another ploy was to issue an administrative instruction in the first instance, to test popular reaction. If reaction was favourable, the matter would be brought to the Council for ratification.³²

In such cases, the record of Council proceedings was more significant than the mere record of matters discussed might disclose. Swettenham's comment, 'Fortunately a great safety valve was discovered in the constitution of a State Council...' was more apposite than might appear.³³ While Swettenham lacked the tact, patience and charisma of Low, he had 'a strong sense of justice tempered with humour, [making him] an ideal Resident.'³⁴

We have seen earlier that in general the attitude in Singapore towards the States was initially one of ignorance. While individual businessmen like J.G. Davidson and W.H. Read might have financial interests up-country and therefore some personal knowledge, there was no way in which a British subject in Singapore could be informed officially of what was happening there, or indeed influence events other than through private lobbying. There were of course occasional articles in the press, but these at least until the mid-1880s were generally confined to discussions of the latest annual report, or breathless accounts of the Governor's most recent official visit.

In the late 1880s and early 1890s, the newspaper reports became more frequent and better informed. A leading article on 'The Native States' in 1890 summed up the position:

The States are nominally under the sway of Malay Chiefs who are supposed to rule under the advice of British Residents at their Courts. By a fiction, now out of date, the latter are merely advisers, but in fact they are the absolute rulers of the land, and the Native Chiefs have to make the best of the new order of things, which indeed took that shape from an irresistible stress of circumstances.... the Resident had to have an authoritative say to admit of any progress.³⁵

On the only occasion that Swettenham was obliged to request financial assistance from the Straits,³⁶ personal rivalries within the administration prevented more than very modest funds becoming available. Swettenham took care never to repeat the experience. It was London's policy not to interfere with Governors whom it trusted; it certainly had confidence in Weld and Smith, who in turn trusted Swettenham to do a good job. In general terms, such confidence was well placed. We shall come to Swettenham's personal speculations later. Once Anson and Robinson had left the Straits, there were few problems in his relations with Government House.

With his immediate European subordinates, Swettenham generally enjoyed good relations. Rodger and Templer Tickell, to mention but two, were in later years unstinting in praise of their Resident. Swettenham's sharp minutes on the voluminous Selangor Secretariat papers of the period indicate that he did not gladly suffer fools, incompetents or scoundrels. Hugh Clifford was only one of several to attest to his sarcasm: 'He [Swettenham] was at that time reputed to have the most useful and the most pointed tongue in Asia, and he certainly kept its edge keen by vitriolic comments upon my ways and works.' Yet he was a fair if exacting taskmaster.³⁷ Other European colleagues were less charitable. Hubert Berkeley joined the Perak service while Swettenham was Resident, and continued to serve in Upper Perak for many years after Swettenham's retirement. When asked why he retained a picture of Swettenham on the inside of the door of the double-seated thunderbox in his garden, he replied that it facilitated the workings of the bowels.³⁸

Nor, generally speaking were there problems with the Chinese. The Chinese community was very largely self-policed under its headmen, who doubled as the leaders, unacknowledged by the British, of the outlawed secret societies. They were represented on the State Council and attended its meetings when matters of concern to their community were on the agenda. Otherwise, the Resident made it his business to encourage their mining concerns, from which the bulk of state revenue was derived, and for the most part made little attempt to interfere in the community's affairs.

Swettenham's chief claim to fame in his development of the Residential system lay in his use of the Penghulus or village headmen. Swettenham had noted the problem in its starkest terms in 1874, when in his diaries he commented on Tunku Kudin's exasperation with two Selangor chiefs: 'Tunku Kudin did not know what to do with them as they received pay but would not work and said they were *waris negeri* and intended to assert their claims!'³⁹ In developing the system, Swettenham had the active support of Weld, who in April 1882 issued a memorandum on country district administration. This was in all probability largely prepared by Swettenham himself from the office of the Colonial Secretary in Singapore. It pointed out that in collecting revenues and repressing crime, inadequate use had so far been made of district institutions and village chiefs. They should, Weld concluded, be organized to a much greater extent than was currently the case. He went on to ask for replies and comments on a series of questions designed to ascertain what was being done at present, and what might be done in future.⁴⁰

Swettenham took up these points in his 1883 estimates, which were prepared and submitted in November 1882. He listed in these the names of those whom he wished to appoint, and provided for a further sum of \$2,000 to be set aside for unforeseen and casual allowances, 'in the hope that in 1883 I may be able to introduce a system of village government through Native Headmen.' Moreover he proposed to offer them one-tenth of the revenues raised by their own exertions in addition to their salaries. These Penghulus were to be given letters of appointment by the Sultan, and approved by the State Council.⁴¹

At the end of May 1883, Swettenham drew up a paper on Country District Administration, which considered this problem in further detail. In this paper Swettenham referred back to his two earlier papers of October 1876, and saw little to modify in them. The state of Selangor was to be divided into six districts, three coastal and three up-country. All but Kuala Lumpur itself were to have a European Collector and Magistrate, responsible to the Resident in Kuala Lumpur. Police stations were to be established in each district, the principal station in each district to be the base for the Collector and Magistrate. The Penghulus were to undertake district administration, on terms set out in an attached appendix. This appendix was drawn largely from a sample obtained from Low in Perak, to which Swettenham added a number of extra administrative items. The letters of appointment, he added, had been seen by almost all members of the State Council, and approved. As a result Swettenham was confident that if the Penghulus performed their duties, they would be of very great use

to the State government. 'I do not say that I am always satisfied with the energy and discretion of these officers, but I am satisfied of their loyalty and desire to learn the wishes of the Government, and to carry them out.'⁴²

The decentralized nature of their responsibilities was stressed. Their payment included an element of commission, in the form of ten per cent of any new revenue paid in. Each was to have land for a house free of rent as long as he held office. They were appointed, and if necessary removed by the State Council, in effect the Resident. Control was exercised through inspections by district magistrates and other visiting government officers, the police, and the good opinion of the local people. The paper was considered by the Straits Settlements Legislative Council the following month, but significantly was not tabled at the Selangor State Council till September. On 4 July 1883, Swettenham issued a further circular to all collectors, requesting reports on villages needing Penghulus, and nominations.⁴³ The list of the penghulus appointed read like a roll-call of the great, and mostly good amongst the leading lights of the Selangor Malays.⁴⁴

A comparison between the list of Penghulus provided by Swettenham in mid-1883, and that provided by Douglas in June 1882, revealed that a further ten appointments had been made, to a total of twenty five. Douglas had been less than enthusiastic about the performance of the Penghulus. His letter conveys a sense of exasperation, provoked in part by the over-enthusiasm of the Assistant Colonial Secretary.⁴⁵ Swettenham later described it as, 'the best method to secure the friendship and active cooperation of the people themselves in a form of rule which was to meet their wishes and control their lives, while giving them security, justice and fair dealing, with some measure of ease and happiness.'⁴⁶ His personal knowledge of many of these men and his desire to bring them into government as natural leaders of their communities were crucial to the survival of the Malay aristocracy and its eventual transformation into a political elite. Raja Bot, who had been involved in the troubles at Lukut, south of Selangor, and fallen out with Douglas, who urged he be banned from Selangor, was a good example. During Swettenham's tenure of that Residency, he was made Penghulu of Sungei Buloh.⁴⁷

Nor were the Malays allowed to turn down invitations to become Penghulus. Raja Hassan of Klang, son of Raja Abdullah was a case in point. Although his name was on the list of those selected for such a job by the Selangor State Council in early September 1883, he tried to wriggle out of it, as Swettenham noted in his diary: '...arranged a letter to Raja Hassan of Klang who had returned his Kuasa as Penghulu, begging to be excused. He gets

\$70 a month and I suppose does not like the responsibility. I begged him to accept the appointment and told him if he refused, the Sultan might think he ought not to receive any allowance.' The intercession was for a time apparently successful, for in June 1884 when Swettenham was safely away in Perak he submitted his resignation. His allowance was duly reduced, despite his objections that it was paid to him for acting as a member of the State Council. Within a month, he had withdrawn his resignation. The combination of money and local authority was a powerful incentive.⁴⁸

It was also a convenient method of pensioning off old warriors, who might otherwise become restive. Thus when the Sultan asked for work and an allowance for their mutual friend, the sinister Syed Mashor, Swettenham in a minute queried whether a suitable place could be found for him as Penghulu, and this was indeed done.⁴⁹ In his 1888 Selangor Annual Report, Swettenham recorded with pride the Ulu Selangor magistrate's favourable comments on Syed Mashor, concluding:

As His Excellency knows, the Selangor government has (often against what seemed good advice) given honourable employment to everyone of its mauvais sujets, who before British intervention lived by plunder on land or sea, and it is perhaps as high satisfaction to show the civilizing effect of British protection as to be able to point to a full treasury and an increasing revenue.⁵⁰

Swettenham subsequently wrote a fine description of Syed Mashor, who had once so nearly killed him, eking out his days as Penghulu in Kerling.⁵¹

In his notes on the 1884 estimates, Swettenham was able to report that Penghulus had been appointed to all villages in newly opened areas in Kajang and Ulu Selangor, while also noting that such an arrangement was of great assistance to the government and 'gives congenial employment to men who by birth and services have some claim on the State.'⁵² Allowances were listed, and regulations were prepared for them. Their duties consisted mainly, 'in keeping the peace, arresting offenders and sending them to the nearest police station; reporting accidents and the outbreak of infectious disease, collecting land and other revenues, settling small disputes and dealing with minor offences within their very limited power as magistrates.'⁵³ Thus in 1884, Smith reported to Derby: 'Much has been done to strengthen the system under which Malays are employed as headmen of districts, and these local officers are reported to be doing excellent work throughout the State [Selangor].'⁵⁴

By appointing a senior and respected Malay in each district to liaise with the Collectors of Land Revenue, the forerunners of the district officers, Swettenham achieved two important objectives. First, by these appointments he allied with the government senior and influential Malays throughout the state, thus avoiding the need for more than a minimal police presence. This was a point on which he had argued strongly in 1876, in the case of Perak.⁵⁵ At the same time the payment of monthly allowances to such Penghulus, the amounts depending on their influence and efficiency, ensured that they would not readily oppose the system. The amounts they received were small, often less than \$50 per month.⁵⁶ They were in fact brought onto the same basis, though at a lower level, as the traditional chiefs, from the Sultan downwards, who all received regular, if modest payments.

In 1883 it was proposed that deposits in the Chartered Mercantile Bank were to be withdrawn and used as loans with advances against good security, 'to trustworthy Natives in the State.' Swettenham continued that \$52,000 had been advanced in this way in the previous year, with beneficial results. And woe betide any inexperienced or unsympathetic Collector who forgot the ground rules or failed to take into account the Malay approach. In early 1888 Swettenham authorized an advance of \$100 to one of the Malay chiefs. The Collector at Langat objected that the man was a wastrel and a gambler: no use could come of it. He was sharply reminded, in a minute by Swettenham: 'Yes, but that does not alter the fact that after the Sultan he is the only principal Malay chief in the country, and the policy of Govt. is to recognize those whose position before our advent entitled them to consideration.'⁵⁷

The following month an even more revealing incident occurred: a query had arisen, involving deductions in respect of an allowance made to Tunku Panglima Raja. The Collector at Kuala Langat concluded, no doubt correctly, that this meant Raja Mahmood, his son, must have complained to Swettenham without the Collector's knowledge, and after Mahmood had verbally agreed to these deductions in the presence of the Collector. Swettenham's first minute, showing loyalty to his old ally, is understandable: 'You hardly seem to understand that this State belongs to the Malays and that R. Mahmood is one of the chiefs of them, to be courteously and considerately treated, and not abused. — The Govt. is under great obligations to R. Mahmood.' Not content with this rebuff, the Collector complained in a further minute that Raja Mahmood had acted dishonestly in going behind his back. Swettenham retorted with a swingeing rebuke: 'That only shows that you have still a great deal to learn as to the habits and modes of thought of the people amongst whom you live.'⁵⁸

Swettenham's approach, in his dealing with the Penghulus was one which showed a greater sensitivity than was evident in any other European, with the exception of Low, and later, Clifford. Indeed the contrast between Swettenham's handling of these men on the ground and the condescension with which he so frequently referred to them in his writings is extraordinary. His tact also reflected a depth of experience and understanding of Malay society which the others lacked. This understanding, deepened by experiences in Selangor and Perak in the 1870s, was to stand him in good stead as an administrator of the 1880s. It also ensured that there was no shortage of influential Malays who, as Penghulus, had reason to be grateful to Swettenham for an appointment which agreeably combined the maintenance of face in the local community, with an acceptable monthly retainer.

Swettenham did not envisage any major role for the police in maintaining law and order after the Perak War.⁵⁹ In his 1876 memoranda Swettenham had argued that the police in Perak should not be dispersed and employed as a civil force. They were on the contrary to be stationed at Customs houses, mines and Residencies. They were to be ready to accompany the Resident when so required, or at his orders to offer assistance to headmen. This effectively meant that they should be trained and armed as para-militaries, concentrated at strategic points and held in reserve as a striking force. Thus in Perak three-quarters of them were stationed at three major mining centres, while in the sensitive Malay districts between Teluk Anson and Kuala Kangsar there was no police station at all.⁶⁰

The position under Syers in Selangor was very different. Here small bodies of police were stationed in the interior of the country, on the argument that their presence alone would tend to check crime. Syers kept no more than one third of his force as a reserve, and even that proportion was perhaps on the high side in his view, to humour Douglas. It was the price to be paid for Douglas' approval to station the remainder of the force in local village police stations. In his audit visits of 1878 and 1879, Swettenham came face to face with Syers' differing interpretation of the role of the police.

When reporting on these visits, Swettenham was conscious of the precarious financial position of Selangor. Much of the expenditure was incurred on the police force, which Swettenham therefore subjected to careful scrutiny. He noted that the number of men in the reserve force was large, even though further disturbances were unlikely. In so doing, he tacitly accepted Syers' argument about police deployment. Nor did Swettenham believe that the predominantly Malay and Indian police force could be relied on for military purposes. He therefore recommended that the reserve force

should be halved by gradually eliminating 'some of the less effective members.' The result was to leave approximately one-quarter in strategic reserve, and three-quarters on deployment, proportions which were roughly maintained till Federation in 1896.

When Swettenham returned for his next report in 1879, he endeavoured to persuade Syers to employ more Sikhs, as was the case in Perak. He was unsuccessful: 'I will only say here that Mr Syers is of the opinion that Sikhs might be employed with advantage but he still has confidence that there is no absolute necessity for a change.' Syers in fact successfully resisted calls for the introduction of a Sikh element till 1884.

The episode marks the matching of two very able men, of strong character. Both Swettenham and Syers were agreed that the police should be recruited from Malays outside the state in which they served. But while Syers in Selangor thought that detachments of police in remote villages would encourage sufferers of petty exactions to lodge their complaints at the police station, Swettenham thought such police would themselves exact petty exactions on the villagers, and thus forfeit their co-operation. Swettenham's second objection was that the use of police would take the administration out of the hands of the people, a key plank, as we have seen, in his policy. The police would have to be under the Penghulu, whom they would not respect. Far better that the Penghulu should handle minor problems himself, and only in the case of difficulty should he refer, through higher, European authority to the police for support.

Despite this very clear difference of opinion between the two men, Swettenham in fact accepted Syers' view in Selangor. This may well have been because he recognized from experience that Selangor, a state of immigrants, lacked the strong and close-knit traditional structures of the Malay community in Perak. The Selangor community had been described as 'clannish and jealous' by Davidson in 1875. This was no society in which to build a system of law and order based on communication and co-operation at high levels amongst the Malays. Swettenham himself had personal experience, as the increasing frustration of his Selangor Journal in 1875 showed. Syers solved the problem, in his quiet way, and Swettenham was sufficiently pragmatic to accept the solution.

If Raja Mahmood was one of the old guard who accepted the new order with difficulty, Wan Muhammed Saleh, the son of a major chief in North Perak, was an example of one whose youth made acceptance of the new system more easy. His father had been a territorial magnate in North Perak, and had lost his life in the Perak War in opposition to the British. He himself by contrast threw in his lot with the British, and was later described by Swettenham as

'the ablest Malay in the Peninsula.' He subsequently rose to positions of distinction in the administration, succeeding to his father's title of Seri Adika Raja in 1891, and becoming a member of the Perak State Council in 1894. He was perhaps the prime example of a local chieftain successfully made *penghulu* and more, for in his case he was put in charge of a group of *mukim* in Upper Perak, with the title of Superintendent of the *Penghulus*.⁶¹ We shall meet him again accompanying Swettenham overland to Pahang.

Swettenham also took care to ensure that the Malays benefited from the extra prosperity which the state was enjoying. Thus in his essay on the 1889 estimates he wrote: 'I am sure His Excellency will approve the proposals to give the Chiefs and Headmen who work for the State a share in the prosperity to which their efforts have contributed.' Starting with the Sultan, all allowances were to be increased. The scheme to pay *Penghulus* a commission of a tenth on new revenue brought in, had proved impracticable, so the idea had to be scrapped in favour of an attractive salary to recruit good men. In the case of pensions, Swettenham showed a wish to ensure that no-one felt he had been harshly treated.⁶² The effect of this scheme was to involve the Malay populace fully in the process of administration. Village headmen were given status in the eyes of the people by being given positions of trust and responsibility in the government. Moreover the collecting of taxes and dues was rendered very much more economical. When he forwarded Swettenham's final report on Selangor, for 1888, Smith remarked to Lord Knutsford:

The Malays, the natives of the State, have had in him [Swettenham] a specially sympathetic friend who has not only helped those who were ready to help themselves but who has lost no opportunity of putting their headmen into or retaining them in posts under Government to which their rank and position entitled them.⁶³

By 1890, the system of using *Penghulus* had become well established. Smith, again writing to Lord Knutsford with the 1889 Annual Reports of the States recorded:

Part of the secret of the marked success which has attended the development of the system under which the Native States are administered lies in the judicious employment of the leading natives....[such individuals] who might be given to intrigue and to plotting against us if merely pensioned and left alone are thus profitably occupied and made to feel that they form part of the Government and are earning their shares in the public revenues.⁶⁴

Lord Knutsford replied: 'I cordially concur in your view that the successful development of the Native States has been in great measure due to the judicious employment of the leading natives.'⁶⁵

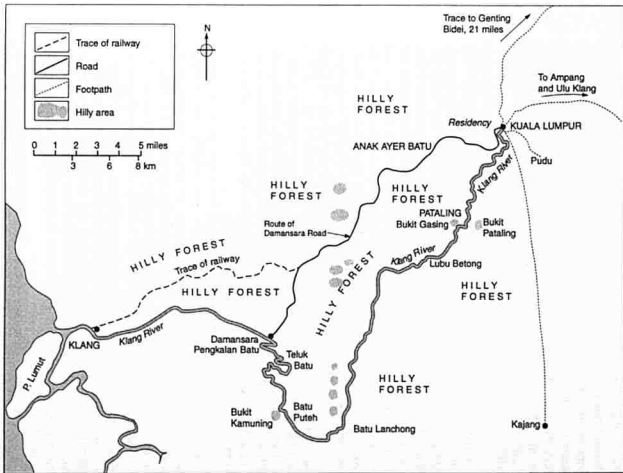
Perhaps because Low had paid less attention to Penghulus in Perak, Swettenham found the position there less satisfactory. 'The work of the Malay officers in Government is unequal,' he remarked guardedly, and looked forward to the retirement of the old and unteachable, who were to be replaced by able, younger men. Remuneration was to be increased, to make the best people anxious to retain their posts. The following year, he was 'satisfied that their services are of much value to the Government, especially in the preservation of peace in villages where police are hardly ever seen.'⁶⁶

Yet Swettenham was not without his critics, even within his own administration, as can be seen from a revealing passage in the same report for 1890, in which he criticizes those who:

will be inclined to show scant consideration for the rights of the Malays and think that the Native officer, who, tried by an English standard, is found wanting, should be improved out of the way without regard to other claims of which his critic knows and can judge nothing. Even now there are able and zealous officers in Perak, who, for what they believe to be the good of the state, would like to see nearly all the Malay headmen relegated to private life, and leave the Government to reckon with 40 or 50 disappointed, embittered and impoverished men with the pre-Residential traditions and plenty of time on their hands to consider how they can best use their influence so as to obtain a fair settlement of scores between them and the Government.

In Swettenham's view, the continued peace and prosperity of Perak was dependant on wise methods of government. Steeped as he was in the recent history of the state, Swettenham could not for one moment forget the lessons of the Perak War: the attitude of the remaining senior Malay chiefs was still not to be taken for granted, fifteen years later.⁶⁷

By the end of his period as Resident in Perak, even he had discarded the fig-leaf of advice. In a speech in early 1894 on the occasion of the official opening of the Ipoh section of the Kinta Valley Railway, Swettenham stated: 'The Residents were sent to the Native States as advisers, and though a great deal of control has by force of circumstances been put into their hands, I can speak for my distinguished predecessor Sir Hugh Low and myself when I say that



Map 8. Selangor showing roads and footpaths, 1883, redrawn from map prepared by W.E. Maxwell, Honorary Secretary, Straits Branch of Royal Asiatic Society, from a map sent by Swettenham in March 1883. The railway, when it reached the Damansara Road, was roughly to follow the road to Kuala Lumpur.

control has been exercised as far as possible in consultation with the Sultan and Chiefs of Perak.' The Sultan, in attendance, dutifully agreed that he was properly consulted.⁶⁸

Swettenham himself in his account of the system of Residential Government, many years later, claimed: '...what was done by British officers in Malaya, in the years from 1874 to 1900 was a new departure, the principle of which was that, to deal with a very difficult situation and a peculiar race, the best method was to secure the friendship and active cooperation of the people themselves....' Swettenham became one of the more skilled practitioners of the art.⁶⁹

Swettenham's period as Resident in Selangor also witnessed extensive improvements in the medical and health facilities. His early concern with the sanitation in Kuala Lumpur was sustained. At the time of his appointment as Resident, there was one 'hospital' in the town, capable of holding approximately thirty patients. This was little more than a traditional Chinese death-house, where the incurably ill were brought to die. It was run by Yap Ah Loy, and financed by a tax of \$1 on every pig slaughtered on the mines.⁷⁰ In 1883, both a General Hospital and a Pauper Hospital were built, adjacent to each other, each with forty beds, probably somewhere near the present General Hospital. They served the whole of Kuala Lumpur till Maxwell took over in 1889 and replaced them with a new General Hospital on the old site, and a Pauper Hospital nearby. Yet even the hospitals built in 1883 were woefully inadequate. While the admissions of Malays never exceeded 400 in these years, Chinese annual admission figures fluctuated from slightly over 5,000 to almost 6,200 in the same period.

Swettenham repeatedly deplored the high mortality rates: '...the death returns of the hospitals are swelled by a large proportion of patients who die within 24 hours of admission, crawling or being carried to the hospitals when literally in *extremis*.'⁷¹ The hospital death-rate was 19.9 per cent. The following year, he remarked on the terrible overcrowding in the hospitals, and spelt out some of the problems: '...the Government [is] labouring to improve sanitation in the dwellings of an apathetic people, who do not yet understand the value of the simplest precautions, and regard death and disease with the views of fatalists, making for the hospitals only when they are beyond the reach of medical skills.'⁷²

The main diseases were beri-beri, dysentery, malaria, cholera and smallpox. The hospital death-rate for beri-beri in Selangor during Swettenham's years as Resident fluctuated between 12-51 per cent. While the causes of beri-beri and malaria were not then understood, that of smallpox was. Vaccination campaigns

were introduced, with some success among the Chinese community, and much less among the conservative Malays, who regarded the practice as alien to Islam.

A further, and primarily Chinese problem was syphilis, promoted by the total lack of sanitary measures and precautions in the brothels of Kuala Lumpur, which catered to the needs of an overwhelmingly male Chinese immigrant population. The operation of the brothels was initially in the hands of Yap Ah Loy, and it was only in 1885, after his death, that conditions were investigated. The results were so appalling, and conditions so vile that the old buildings were closed and the women moved to more sanitary premises. At the same time medical inspections and registration with the police were instituted.⁷³

While medical and social facilities advanced very much more swiftly under Swettenham's successor, Maxwell, the groundwork for a system of social services was laid during Swettenham's years as Resident in Selangor.

NOTES

1. Unnumbered SSF file dated 16 December 1882. Resident to Governor, quoted in 'Selangor under Swettenham: History of the State, 1882-1889.' P. Thiagarajan, BA thesis, Singapore, 1953.
2. See Chapter 21.
3. CO 273/158:394 ff. Gov. to Sec. of State, 89 of 20 February 1889.
4. HC 4192:41 ff. SAR 1883.
5. SSF 425/83 of 9 April 1883, quoted by Thiagarajan, *op. cit.*
6. CO 273/116:328 ff. Weld to Kimberley, 390 of 27 October 1882.
7. SSF 88/82. See Chapter 19.
8. HC 7228, SAR, 1892, App. J, in which E.W. Birch quotes at length from Spooner's report on PWD.
9. SSF 88/82.
10. SSF 351/83, 594/83 and 1261/83.
11. SSF 155/83, 538/83 and 1478/83.
12. CO 273/121:524 ff. Weld to Derby, 309 of 19 July 1883.
13. SSF 1330/83.
14. First noted in the *Straits Directory* for 1887.
15. SSF PWD 2545/88, KL 3747/88 and *STD*, 6 November 1888.
16. See *Annual Report for Land Department, Selangor, 1888* in SSF series.
17. SSF 1394/89, SSF KL 1425/89 and SSF Ry 1538/89.
18. HC 6222:17, PAR 1889.
19. *SFP*, 27 June 1889.
20. HC 7546, PAR 1893 para. 58.
21. *Ibid*, SAR 1893, para. 50.
22. HC 7877:21, PAR 1894.
23. *STD*, 13 May 1885.
24. See Chapter 26, fn. 23.
25. See Chapter 15

26. SP item 83.
27. E. Sadka, 1968, op. cit., p.182, and SCM, UM Microfilm 95. The function of State Councils as rubber-stamping bodies became even more pronounced in later years, and widely accepted as such. See *MM*, 27 September 1897.
28. SSF 1497/83.
29. SSF 597/82, and SCM, 2 September 1883, quoted by Sadka, 1962, op. cit., in Tregonning (ed.), p. 108 fn. 50.
30. See for example HC 6222, PAR 1889:12 which details the Council's activities in 1889.
31. J.M. Gullick, pers. comm. See also Sadka, 1968, op. cit., p. 189 for an instance of opposition to Low by Raja Yusof.
32. See for example Wilkinson, 1971, op. cit., p. 230 on the carrying of weapons into the jungle.
33. *British Malaya*, p. 226.
34. Robson, 1934, op. cit., p. 13.
35. *STD*, 19 August 1890.
36. Chapter 19 on Railways.
37. Article by Clifford in *Mainly About People*, 22 December 1900.
38. G.C. Madoc, pers. comm.
39. *Sw.D.*, 19 November 1874. *Waris negeri* means 'state chiefs'.
40. SSF 186/82. Memo by Weld of 14 April 1882.
41. SSF 88/82. Estimates for 1883 submitted on 30 November 1882. See also *SD*, 16 March 1883.
42. CO 273/120:360 ff FAS on country administration encl. in Weld to Secretary of State, 261 of 23 June 1883. The memorandum was apparently prepared in early June and handed to the Governor in Malacca on 6 June 1883. *SD*, 6 June 1883.
43. SSF 945/83.
44. SSF 760/83 and 945/83 *SSLCP*, 1883 Paper 23, CO 273/120:360-7, Weld to CO, 261 of 23 June 1883; SCM, 2 September 1883. The paper is also given in full in Chew Thesis, App. F. Appendices to Weld's dispatch include a copy of his letter of 14 April 1882.
45. For Douglas' letter of 12 June 1882 see CO 273/120:360-7, in Gov. to CO, 261 of 23 June 1883.
46. *Footprints*, p. 81.
47. Chew Thesis, p. 242 and 'Raja Bot bin Raja Amin,' by Mohd Amin Hassan, 1967, *JMBRAS*, 40 (2):68-93.
48. *SD*, 24 September 1883, SCM, 2 September 1883, 14 June, 27 September and 18 October 1884.
49. SSF 1002/83.
50. HC 5884:54, SAR 1888, p. 54.
51. *The Real Malay*: 'A Silhouette,' pp. 224-31.
52. SSF 1330/83 Estimates for 1884.
53. SSF 1510/83, SSF 1520/83 and *British Malaya*, p. 228.
54. HC 4192:42 Smith to Derby, 4 April 1884.
55. See Chapter 15.
56. See for example SSF 649/82.

57. SSF KL541/88.
58. SSF 741/88.
59. Chapter 15.
60. This section is based on Gullick, 1978, op. cit.
61. See Gullick, 1987b, op. cit. Wan Muhamed Saleh's annual reports, in English translation, appear in *PGG* of 1890s. See also Sadka, 1968, op. cit., pp. 289-90.
62. SSF 2867/88.
63. HC 5884 Smith to Knutsford, 11 June 1889, forwarding SAR 1888:7-8.
64. HC 5884:10 Smith to Knutsford, 10 July 1890.
65. *STD*, 29 October 1890, quoting dispatch of 16 September 1890.
66. HC 6222, PAR 1889:13 and HC 6576:8, PAR 1890.
67. HC 6576:25-6, PAR 1890.
68. *STD*, 14 February 1894.
69. *Footprints*, p. 81. See Chapter 48 for a discussion of the historical accuracy of this claim.
70. Gullick, 1955, op. cit., p. 90.
71. Swettenham reporting in 1897, quoted by Gullick, 1955, op. cit., p. 92.
72. HC 5884, SAR 1888, quoted in Gullick, 1955, op. cit., p. 92.
73. Gullick, 1955, op. cit., pp. 90-5.

Railways in Selangor

Weld and Swettenham were in the forefront of those who recognized that if the country was to be set on its feet economically, it was essential that railways should be built at once to reduce the costs of transporting produce, chiefly tin, to the ports for export. Usually, roads came first in the opening of a state, and as the traffic increased, making them difficult, or at times impassable in wet weather, pressure built up for the construction of railways.¹

The possibility of a railway was mentioned in the 1883 estimates, but the first concrete proposal took the form of an application by a Chinese group, backed by a European in Singapore to build a line from Pengkalan Batu to Kuala Lumpur.² In exchange they wanted a guarantee from the government that they would have exclusive rights to transport mail, and a monopoly for fifteen years on any future railway concessions. Swettenham was asked for his views, and with the support of the Malay members of the Selangor State Council which had met a few days before, advised strongly in favour of retaining the railways under government control.³ Moreover he felt the railway would pay for itself rapidly, and greatly contribute to the opening up of Selangor. He therefore asked that the Governor should provide the Selangor government with funds, failing which, he reported that the state government was unanimously in favour of proceeding with a privately financed line.⁴

Weld minuted: 'The first thing to be done is to get a survey and estimate, and I have given Mr Swettenham authority to take steps to do so: I think that the cheapest and best way is for the state to construct the railway, and certainly it is likely to be a source of large revenue hereafter....'⁵

Swettenham, as we have seen, had been giving thought to a railway connecting Klang and Kuala Lumpur while preparing his estimates for 1883, in the autumn of the previous year and had been collecting data.⁶ His proposals were put forward in early 1883, and drew extensively on the advice of his brother J.A. Swettenham, who made a semi-official visit from Ceylon at this time, staying in Kuala Lumpur from 4 to 16 January. F.A. Swettenham in a long

memorandum dated 15 January 1883 mentioned discussions between Smith and J.A. Swettenham, who assisted in the recruitment of Spence-Moss, the railway engineer, and put forward the name of Rutherford for railway survey work. It is possible that the visit was also connected with plans for J.A. Swettenham's transfer to the Straits Civil Service.⁷

The first proposal reached London in April 1883. Weld had forwarded memoranda from Low in Perak, and Swettenham in Kuala Lumpur: they had been in touch with each other.⁸ Low's letter of 26 February enclosed with the dispatch was general. Swettenham however submitted two memoranda. The first, dated 20 February, was very specific, summarizing the data collated in 1882. Klang and Kuala Lumpur were to be connected by a single line of rail: the course and the terrain through which it would pass were discussed in some detail. It included detailed measurements of the Klang River at different points up to Kuala Lumpur. A section on traffic gave details of passengers and freight transported over the previous two years by steamer, with the estimate that in two and a half years' time, when it was hoped the line would be complete, the traffic would be doubled. An extension from Kuala Lumpur to Ulu Selangor 'and perhaps further' was envisaged. Trains would run three times a day in each direction: all the land involved, both at the terminals, and along the proposed course of the line belonged to the government. Swettenham's second memorandum of 22 February, drafted presumably after consultation with Low, recommended that a Mr Charles Hutton Gregory be appointed as consulting engineer for Selangor, in addition to a similar post in Perak, as recommended by Low.⁹

So enthused was Swettenham that he enclosed in this letter a draft letter of appointment to Mr Gregory, at £400 per year, together with plans and a memorandum for him. He even suggested that eventually the Selangor and Perak railways might be joined up, and it was therefore essential at this stage to agree on a common gauge. Derby in his reply showed some concern that yet again the Governor was taking matters too much into his own hands:

With regard to large Public Works in the Native States, I would observe generally that when we first heard of the Perak Railway it would have been then the more appropriate time apparently to assert our intention to assume a more extended control over the Governor and his Residents.

But Perak is rich, and Mr Low old and prudent; Mr Swettenham we know to be young; go-ahead; and inclined to be independent, he is nevertheless clever and an able administrator: Salangore is not rich but in a fairly prosperous condition.

So perhaps we are right as the question has arisen in connection with the latter state, to make a new departure in Native affairs, but we must break the news gently to Sir F. Weld and his co-adjutors or otherwise surprise will be succeeded by a sensation of snubbing.¹⁰

Herbert commented sharply and significantly:

I fear I hardly agree that we can properly or safely allow our officers to do what they like in these States, to the extent of embarking on large public works which may be ill-judged or too onerous — and imagine that we are escaping responsibility. I would expressly instruct the Governor that no public works involving more than a very limited outlay shall be undertaken in the Protected States without sanction from home. It is of no use to pretend that our officers do not govern these States, and we shall be in danger of being involved in the consequences of their acts if we do not look after them.

Derby's eventual reply on 10 May while agreeing that Rutherford should not be engaged, concluded significantly:

I have no desire to interfere in the minor details of the administration of the Native States by their Rajahs, who are advised by British Residents, and I have no doubt that you exercise sufficiently close supervision over their proceedings, but it is desirable that before steps are taken committing any of these states to heavy public works involving a serious immediate and prospective liability, I should be made acquainted with what is proposed to be done.¹¹

Matters had moved more quickly in the east. By the end of February, Spence-Moss, who had been contacted direct in Ceylon, had accepted an appointment as 'Engineer in Chief charge' of the proposed railway. He arrived in Singapore by 22 March and, with his wife, stayed as a house-guest with the Swettenhams up till mid-April.¹² Meantime the Crown Agents were instructed to enlist Gregory's services as adviser, but pointed out that an engineer, Spence-Moss, 'had already been engaged to superintend the preliminary arrangements in Selangor.'¹³ Against this somewhat acrimonious background, the first sod for the new railway was cut by the Governor in July 1883. He was commemorated by a sketch, probably done by one of the colonial wives, which was published by *The Graphic* in UK in November that year. The sketch is remarkable, for amongst the byestanders is a young lady on horseback, mounted side-saddle. It seems very probable that this is Sydney Swettenham.¹⁴

This episode reveals a number of points. First, it would appear that Spence-Moss was appointed largely on Swettenham's and his brother's own initiative. Secondly, and more importantly, it shows that the Colonial Office now admitted to themselves that the Residents governed the states, even though they still clung to the fiction of advice in official correspondence. Finally, this dispatch and its associated documents gives a clear indication of the way in which Swettenham with his enthusiasm for the railway managed to sweep along with him Low, the Governor, and ultimately a somewhat hesitant Colonial Office.

In May that year, Weld provided London with more details. The Perak line was to be short: two and a half miles connecting Taiping to Port Weld, to be opened in about eight months, and paid for out of current revenue. Calculations on the Selangor line 'shew that the line when made will, if not at once, (as is anticipated) at least almost immediately, be remunerative, and very soon highly so, even allowing for much reduced rate of freight and passage.' In financial terms, the Selangor railway was to be justified partly in savings on road upkeep. Indeed, it seemed so good a proposition that Weld felt that some of the Straits Settlements' surplus funds should be devoted to a loan to Selangor to finance it.¹⁵

Swettenham continued to negotiate with Rutherford in Ceylon. On 1 February, he recorded, 'Rutherford is making an offer to survey the railway, but it has not arrived yet.'¹⁶ Eventually Rutherford refused Swettenham's offer of the post of assistant engineer to the Selangor government because the fees were too low. On 15 March Swettenham, through a Mr Mackay in Ceylon made a second offer.¹⁷ This was accepted by Rutherford, even though he was by then aware that the Colonial Office in London were replying to Weld's dispatch of 12 March mentioned above, overruling Swettenham.

There was a further problem: Rutherford was known to be connected financially with Messrs Reid and Mackay, who were by way of tendering for the work. In this connection it was pointed out that if Rutherford was to be employed by the Selangor government, or the building work undertaken by the government itself, all objections to his appointment as an Assistant Engineer on the project would cease.¹⁸ Swettenham had recognized the same point in his diary two months earlier: 'He [Spence-Moss] and I both think the Govt. can do the line cheaper and quicker than a contractor, but it won't do to even hint at such a thing until Rutherford has done his work.'¹⁹

Weld's reaction on receipt of Derby's reply, which had indeed snubbed him, was anger. He pointed out that Rutherford had effectively been appointed, it had never been understood that the

arrangement required the Secretary of State's approval, and that by his action Lord Derby had overruled the Governor, the Sultan, the Resident and the State Council. If this was the way the Colonial Office wished to behave, Weld continued, they should publicly announce a change of policy in favour of annexation: for that was what such a ruling implied. The dispatch was accompanied by a strong letter of protest from Rutherford to Swettenham.²⁰ A wag in the Colonial Office wrote in, over the names of the Sultan, the Council and the Chiefs in Selangor, who were so outraged, the name of Swettenham.

Fairfield of the Colonial Office was similarly caustic:

The slight change in administrative detail which is deprecated so far from making the English government in any degree more oppressive, would simply have the effect of mitigating at some points the personal rule and direct influence of the Resident and the Governor.

With regard to what is said about the State Council of Native Chiefs and the Sultan of Salangore resenting Lord Derby's temerity in checking expenditure, and cancelling their appointments, I will merely recall the fact that it was to be gathered from remarks in the papers on Mr Douglas' removal (late Resident) and in Reports of Sir F. Weld's tours in the states that the Sultan of Salangore is an indolent, jovial, courteous old Malay gentleman who has constantly stated that he left all these matters of detail in Govt. to the Resident. All the fine writing at the end of this dispatch means therefore that Mr Swettenham is aggrieved, and that Sir F. Weld sympathizes with him, and thinks both have cause of complaint at our conduct.²¹

Lord Derby's reply of 30 August was a masterly put-down. While agreeing that Rutherford was a first-class engineer, he pointed to his involvement with Reid and Mackay: 'It is obviously for the advantage of the Salangore Govt. therefore that Mr Reid should be free to tender for the Selangor Railway should it be determined to construct it by contract.' He declined therefore to alter his decision on the appointment of Rutherford so long as there was any chance of Reid and Mackay subsequently tendering for the work. The solution, as he had previously intimated by cable, was for the Selangor railway to be built 'departmentally, by the Selangor government,' aided if necessary by officers temporarily drawn from Ceylon, 'and if this should prove to be the case you will probably shortly telegraph to me on the subject, when steps shall be taken to send out Mr Rutherford in accordance with your wishes'.²² All the same, Swettenham's position was not easy. He had tried and failed to get Rutherford in, probably with encouragement from Spence-

Moss, who in due course turned on him. For when Swettenham asked him to recommend another engineer, Spence-Moss was not prepared to do so 'first without some guarantee (*sic*) that he would not be subjected to the treatment Mr Rutherford appears to have experienced,' an impertinence for which he had to be reprimanded by the Resident.²³ Spence-Moss was perhaps annoyed that an application he had made a few days earlier for land in his wife's name in the centre of town had been turned down by Swettenham.²⁴ The refusal casts an interesting light on Swettenham's and Spence-Moss's joint speculations in land later in the decade.²⁵ Gregory's appointment, which of course had been initiated by Swettenham and Low was approved by London in August.²⁶

Spence-Moss started survey work at the end of March, submitting regular weekly reports on his progress to Swettenham, who took a keen interest in the technical details, and not infrequently went over the ground with him.²⁷ On the ground, work was proceeding apace. Weld cabled on 8 September that the trace was nearly complete, and had proved unexpectedly easy. The Kuala Lumpur to Klang trace was completed by early October 1883.²⁸ Rutherford was now too late to assist and Swettenham proposed the line be constructed by the state government.²⁹ Derby wrote back on 13 September 1883 indicating his approval, and urging that if anyone should be employed, it should be Rutherford in diminution of any claim he might have against the government, in respect of the earlier cancellation of his contract.

By 8 October 1883, Weld again wrote to Derby, enclosing a letter from Rutherford to Swettenham, requesting compensation, and one from Swettenham to Weld, supporting his proposal. The Colonial Office had got them into the muddle over Rutherford: let the Colonial Office now get them out. Lord Derby dodged the issue and asked the Crown Agents to handle it.³⁰ Before leaving for Calcutta, Swettenham instructed Spence-Moss to prepare the tenders for earthworks. Copies of all drawings were to be sent to UK and to Singapore, to await his return, together with the opened tenders and Spence-Moss's report on them.³¹

There then arose a curious debate over the weight of the rail to be used. Here Swettenham, who had earlier concurred with Gregory's recommendation on gauge, disagreed over the weight of the rail, preferring a lighter one to that which Gregory recommended. This followed advice he had received from Spence-Moss,³² who was particularly anxious that work be commenced as soon as possible, more especially as Swettenham was to be away from Selangor, in Calcutta till February 1884. He was also anxious that the firm of Hill and Rathborne, who for this purpose were

effectively regarded as an offshoot of the Selangor PWD, should be given the job.

By the end of December however, Weld had to report that Swettenham's trip to India had convinced the young Resident that his earlier proposal to use iron rails was unsuitable, and he would now recommend steel rails as proposed by Gregory. Swettenham expanded on this point on his return, having consulted experts on the railways in India, who all advised a heavy steel rail where a substantial increase in traffic was anticipated.³³

It was now necessary to face up to the problem of finance. Swettenham had first officially broached this problem in September 1883. The state could at a pinch provide \$150,000. Could the Straits government find some \$300,000 as a loan to carry interest and the capital to be secured on the line, or if necessary on the Selangor state revenues? The annual surplus was so well assured that it would not take long to pay off.³⁴ By March 1884, Weld was able to report that the full estimate had been prepared. The whole project was to cost \$714,740, as he had indicated in October. The Straits government was to advance to the Selangor Government a total of \$330,000: \$100,000 in 1884 and \$230,000 in 1885. Swettenham was confident that the balance could be provided from current revenue and balances over the next two years. The loan itself, which was to carry five per cent interest, would, Swettenham was convinced, be repaid within five years from 1 January 1886, the date by which the line would first be opened.³⁵

This however was by no means the end of the story. Early in 1885, the Selangor government was informed that the Straits government could not advance more than \$192,000, being the cost of equipment ordered from UK. This was due to unexpected claims on the Straits government which had arisen in respect of imperial fortifications. By then Rodger was Acting Resident of Selangor, while Swettenham was acting in Perak. With commendable alacrity it was announced that \$100,000 of the sum required would be raised by a short-term loan from Perak. The problems were then compounded by a peremptory demand from the Colonial Treasury in Singapore that the Selangor government should pay \$115,000 said to be due to the Crown Agents. Once again the Perak government obligingly lent the funds, while the Straits government concluded, by asking unhelpfully 'how the Selangor govt. proposes to obtain the necessary funds for the completion of the Railway now that this govt. is unable to advance any further sums?'³⁶

It then became clear, that there had been a series of errors in the Straits Treasury, in particular over an amount of \$12,000 that had not been credited to Selangor on the due date. Perak had lent \$200,000 instead of the Straits, which had only lent \$100,000, and

Selangor 'has been obliged to stop or postpone indefinitely many most necessary works.'³⁷

While acting as Resident in Perak, Swettenham had been obliged to keep Perak interests in mind. However on Low's return from leave, Swettenham resumed, for a month, in January 1886 his role as substantive Resident in Selangor. He was now in a position to make his case with some force to the Governor. He did so with alacrity and in detail, spelling out in particular the uncooperative attitudes encountered in Singapore, not to mention what he regarded as incompetence over the accounting procedures. His minute ended with a request that the Straits Settlements government be asked to pay interest on sums unpaid, and that the Governor should prevail on Perak State Government, with which Swettenham was no longer involved, to defer the first tranche of loan repayments from 1886 to 1887. This would allow important work to be continued on various cart tracks and bridle paths in Selangor, for which otherwise no money would be available. From the tone of the memorandum, it was clear that Swettenham was very angry about what had happened.³⁸ The loan was eventually paid off by a final instalment of \$100,000 in early 1889, with a tribute to Perak's assistance, '...for without your friendly help, the Govt. of Selangor might have been put to very serious inconvenience.'³⁹

Low and Weld both agreed with Swettenham's proposals to defer the loan repayments, and Dickson, the Acting Colonial Secretary wrote a sharp minute to the Colonial Treasury to enquire what had gone wrong on the accounting. The reply received was that the \$12,000 'misplaced' had in fact been paid into a second Selangor State Government account with the same bank at Swettenham's express request. This revelation put Swettenham in a poor light: trying to discredit his colleagues when he knew that discredit on this ground at least was unjustified. It was left to Venning in Kuala Lumpur to retrieve his Resident's position; the Colonial Treasury had complete control over the Selangor government accounts in the Chartered Bank, and it was not the Treasury's custom to advise the Selangor government of any transactions in that account. Interest, to the princely tune of \$12.91, was therefore recoverable from the Straits government.⁴⁰

A perusal of the records makes it clear that there was almost certainly more than met the eye in the hurried appointment of Spence-Moss and certainly the attempted appointment of Rutherford. Swettenham still had enemies in Singapore who were keen to cause his downfall, although whether they were aware of the irregularities is unclear. His position was saved by his close liaison with Rodger, and his appointment to act in Perak, which enabled him to raise from there the funds needed by Selangor to complete the

railway. The final spat between Swettenham and the Colonial Treasury in Singapore was all too clearly a storm in a teacup: petty personal rivalries had come close to stalling, if not aborting the Selangor railway, and Swettenham, who normally had a reputation for being an astute operator in internal squabbles, was so keen to humiliate his tormentors in Singapore that he nearly brought considerable embarrassment on himself.

Back from leave in 1888, Swettenham once again threw himself with enthusiasm into the development of the railways. During his absence from Selangor the railway line had been opened, with appropriate tributes from Rodger as Acting Resident, to Swettenham's vision and enthusiasm. Rodger, in his speech which marked the opening, spelt out many of the physical problems which had been encountered. He also stated that as construction had been started in 1883 before adequate finance was available, it had been planned that if the railway could not be built, the track would be used as a road in place of 'the famous or infamous Damansara road.'⁴¹ The railway was opened for light traffic on 15 September 1886, but it was only on 1 January 1887 that full service commenced.⁴²

Swettenham was not slow to take credit for this, for little more than twelve months after the full opening of the line, he recorded:

The financial success of the railway I never doubted, or I should not have so earnestly impressed upon His Excellency the late Governor the desirability of undertaking such an important work when the resources of the state were insignificant; but I did not anticipate then either the large earnings of the line, so early in its life, or the extent of the railway's beneficent influence on the state, an influence naturally most marked in Kuala Lumpur, but hardly less apparent in distant places connected to Kuala Lumpur by road.⁴³

Meade at the Colonial Office endorsed Swettenham's view: 'The Selangor Railway result is simply marvellous....'⁴⁴

As early as 1884, Swettenham had expressed in strong terms his support for Spence-Moss's suggestion that the railway be taken over the Klang River, at a further cost of \$60,000. The following year the question was raised again, on the basis of extending the line from Bukit Kuda, just east of Klang, over the river, and then down to the coast. In early 1885, Spence-Moss had begun to look at both sides of the Klang River downstream from Klang itself, but had come to no firm conclusion.⁴⁵ One month later, he submitted his report. Rodger, the Acting Resident, advised that it had been commissioned, 'for the purpose of ascertaining whether the Bridge

across the River Klang could be dispensed with, by the substitution of a line of Railway to the coast on the North side of the River.'

The advice of Spence-Moss was ambiguous: the northern course, to Kuala Sungei Dua, was longer by some nine miles, but would give a better port, in the area of what is now the North Port. However there was said to be no water, nor any hills nearby where soil could be obtained for land reclamation. The second course, crossing the Klang River at Klang, was shorter and swampy, being only five miles but led to Kuala Klang, which was landlocked, thus making a poor port. It was concluded that the terminal should for the moment remain at Klang, leaving open the question of the future development of the railway. However a bridge was to be built at Klang.⁴⁶

Work proceeded throughout 1885, till Rodger received in September a brusque note from the Acting Colonial Secretary, on Smith's instructions, saying that all work beyond Bukit Kuda was to be stopped, because inadequate research had gone into the course of the railway beyond Bukit Kuda to the coast. Rodger wrote at the same time: 'I have had the opportunity of speaking to Mr Swettenham on the subject, and I believe he is in favour of the railway extension to the coast in preference to the Klang Bridge scheme, if it can be shown there is no excessive difference in the cost of the undertakings.'⁴⁷ This may have been ingenuous on Rodger's part, for it was unlikely that nine miles of railway over swampy country would have cost less than five miles, plus the cost of the bridge over the Klang River.

Weld kept an open mind on the problem, in his report to Colonel Stanley at the Colonial Office, and meantime deferred expenditure on the bridge.⁴⁸ In 1886 Rodger asked for further costings on the two options. Spence-Moss replied, concluding, 'Both Klang schemes however share the disadvantage of leading to a port incapable of expansion, confined in space and 10 miles up a tortuous river.'⁴⁹

By early the following year, the Klang traders were petitioning Rodger, urging that the railway should be allowed to run on the southern side of the river, because they had been promised by Swettenham that this course would be chosen. Turney, the Collector of Land Revenue at Klang, confirmed this. He added that in his view the south side was far preferable, for it would be cheaper to construct a bridge over the river, as originally decided, and fix the terminus of the railway on the south side.⁵⁰ In the face of all this, the Colonial Secretary in Singapore advised that the Governor had decided that the terminus should be on the southern side of the river, and work should proceed with the bridge. A reply was sent to the Klang shopkeepers, on the southern side of the river, who were no

doubt delighted that their properties would become so much more valuable.⁵¹ The decision to build three miles of line on the south bank of the river, 'caused a very keen competition for town and suburban sites and tripled the value of land in the town,' reported Swettenham.⁵²

There were rumours at the time that Swettenham himself had benefitted from this decision, and the surge in land values. It was alleged that 'powerful interests forced the deviation across what is now Connaught Bridge.' In a note dated 1981, the author, the late G.L. Peet added: 'What could not be written in 1931, when Sir Frank Swettenham was still living in England, may be revealed now. I was told by J.H.M. Robson, one of the oldest residents of Kuala Lumpur, and a former member of the Federal Council, that it was Sir Frank Swettenham who ordered the deviation across the Connaught Bridge at Klang.... Furthermore it was generally believed that he had extensive investments in land around Klang on the south side of the river ...'⁵³ Despite the discussion and enthusiasm, it was not till 1901 that the port was completed.⁵⁴

There is now no longer any direct evidence available on which to assess the accuracy of these charges. Almost all the Europeans in Selangor at this time had private landholdings. Amongst those who held land at Klang was J.G. Davidson, formerly the Resident. Turney, the Collector of Land Revenue, was offered the Klang Hotel for \$3,000 by Syed Zin, and from Swettenham's question, 'Can you find out what I could buy the Klang Hotel for?' we may assume not only that Swettenham was considering the purchase of it, but had no compunction about discussing this on a government file. It was eventually agreed the hotel should be purchased by the government for the same amount, although this deal subsequently fell through.⁵⁵

Swettenham set out in the Selangor Annual Report for 1887 the further needs of the state: an extension of the railway line to Ulu Selangor, a state note issue to finance further development, and better accommodation on vessels trading to the ports of Selangor. He added unfavourable remarks about 'unsavoury goods of all kinds, and unsavoury natives of various nationalities.'⁵⁶ Travel up the coast was still rough. There was no proper accommodation on the steamers, 'especially for Europeans.' On one occasion, in a scratchy minute requisitioning a launch for Jugra, Swettenham added, 'and see that she is properly cleaned and as many cockroaches swept out as possible.'⁵⁷ He could be highly prejudiced and intolerant. Complaining about inefficiencies in the running of the railway in early 1888 he minuted '... I should like to know if some parts of the platform could not be reserved for Europeans, instead of their being jostled by a number of half-naked

malodorous natives....' It was left to the engineer to explain that it was not usual to have special parts of the train or platform reserved for Europeans.⁵⁸ Drunkenness amongst the engine drivers was also a problem. Just before he left Selangor, Swettenham wrote to the Crown Agents, to recruit such a man: '...and it would be a great advantage if the service of a total abstainer could be procured.'⁵⁹

Meantime in early 1888, Swettenham received an offer from the Singapore opium farmer to extend his operations to running the new railway, at the not inconsiderable rate of \$12,000 per month.⁶⁰ Doubt was expressed as to whether an opium farmer from Singapore was the right person to lease the Selangor railway operations. Not wishing to be left behind, the Kapitan China offered \$25,000 per month. Swettenham was not slow to point out that this would give a net return after expenses of 28.5 per cent on an outlay of some \$800,000. Moreover, by leasing the collection of railway receipts to the Kapitan China, he and the Chinese community in Kuala Lumpur would be given a considerable incentive to boost business and open up the country. The Chinese would receive their goods in better condition in Kuala Lumpur, and existing railway staff, who were difficult to recruit, would be available to assist with railway extension work in Klang. Government administrative costs on the railway would be cut to \$6,000 per month. However the direction of the operations was to remain with the existing staff. The Governor, supported somewhat hesitantly by the Colonial Secretary, who feared that the non-Chinese would be squeezed, endorsed the idea, and Swettenham drew up an agreement.⁶¹ The arrangement was particularly attractive to Swettenham, who had found on his return from leave various defalcations and inadequacies in the railway administration.⁶²

The lessees of the railway concession subsequently discovered that they had lost \$37,000 on the deal, having failed to take into account portorage and clerical expenses. They appealed to Swettenham for this sum to be refunded to them, and he agreed. Nevertheless, the railway lease made a substantial contribution to Selangor revenues between 1888-1889. The episode illustrates Swettenham's flexibility, and his shrewd assessment of a profitable deal. In a later comment, Smith said that the lessees of the Selangor railway knew how to satisfy the 'requirements of the Chinese' (consignors of goods) and 'got it into excellent working order.'⁶³

At the same time, work was proceeding on the Connaught Bridge at Klang, and thought was given to a further extension of the railway. Interest in mining activities was by now turning to the area north of Kuala Lumpur, in Ulu Selangor and around Kuala Kubu. The Selangor Land Department Annual Report for 1888 noted that

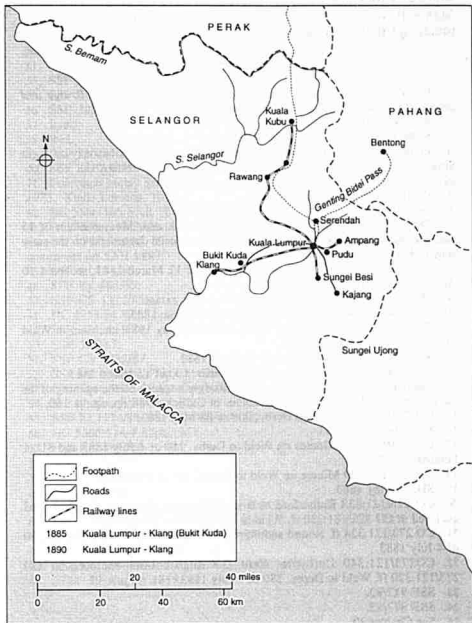
no less than 222 licenses for mining in Ulu Selangor had been awarded during that year. The only other way in which tin could be taken out to the coast from this area was either by a network of bridle tracks and cart roads, which Swettenham was busy improving, or by the Selangor River, which could not be used for part of the year, either because of flooding or silting. Moreover the intense speculation which was taking place over mining concessions in the west of Pahang raised the possibility of drawing that business as well into the Selangor orbit, by extension of a road or railway line through the Gap Pass, near what is now Frasers Hill.⁶⁴

Spence-Moss was therefore instructed to prepare a report on a possible railway extension to Kuala Kubu. This was duly submitted on 31 December 1888. The report indicated that if the Pahang mines proved as profitable as was forecast, that business, together with the existing mining activity in the area should ensure a favourable return on the new railway. To this Swettenham added his own masterly report, pointing out that his advice on the Klang railway in 1882 and 1883 had proved reliable, that Selangor now had sufficient funds to undertake the project without assistance, 'and the money could not be better invested.' In his 1888 Selangor Report, Swettenham also drew attention, by quoting the figures, to the way in which the Straits Settlements benefited from the increase in financial figures reported for the Protected States. As a result, his proposals were agreed.⁶⁵

Tenders for the construction of the extension having been awarded, one of W.E. Maxwell's first functions on assuming the Selangor Residency in the late summer of 1889 was to preside over the ceremony, held on the *padang*, to commemorate the beginning of the undertaking. Mrs Swettenham, who had participated in a tennis tournament in Singapore early in the month, was present and formed part of the jovial and slightly drunken party which came by boat from Singapore to witness the event. Swettenham himself was busy in Perak.

Spence-Moss, whose relations with Maxwell were less than cordial, for reasons which we shall soon consider, replied to one of the toasts, regretting that Mr Swettenham could not be present, as the initiator of the scheme. 'From these regrets it is a pleasure we all feel in welcoming here today our ex-Queen, Mrs Swettenham. I think I may eliminate X, a letter very little used, and about the last to be applied here, for her Kingdom (if I may rise to Irish) is one

Railways in Selangor



Map 9. Selangor showing roads, footpaths and railway, 1889

which no change or promotion can affect.' The tone of the report suggests a touch of whiskey, but it must have tasted like vinegar to Maxwell, to be reminded thus of his bitter rival. It was also a touching tribute to Sydney's popularity.⁶⁶

NOTES

1. For a general discussion of railways in colonial Malaya, see *Bridge and Barrier*, by Amarjit Kaur, OUP, Singapore, 1985.
2. SSF 605/1883.
3. SCM, 4 December 1882, SSF 103/82.
4. In this account of the Selangor Railways, I have drawn extensively on Jagjit Singh Sidhu, 1965, 'Railways in Selangor, 1882-1886,' *JMBRAS*, 38 (1):6-22.
5. Weld on SSF 103/82 quoted above.
6. See Chapter 18.
7. SSF 68/83 containing letter of 6 January 1883, and Memorandum of 15 January 1883. These are F.A. Swettenham's two crucial documents on the early stages of railway development.
8. CO 273/119:430 ff. Weld to Derby, 100 of 12 March 1883, received 10 April. See also SD, 22 January 1883.
9. The latter two are now unfortunately no longer extant.
10. CO 273/119:444 Derby to Weld, 100 of 12 March 1883.
11. CO 273/119:440-3 Derby to Weld, 116 of 10 May 1883, enclosed in Weld to Derby, 100 of 12 March 1883.
12. SSF 424/83, SD, 22 March and 14 April 1883.
13. CO 273/119:444 included in Weld to Derby, 100 of 12 March 1883.
14. See reproduction of sketch, pl. 35 and Rodger's speech on the opening of the railway, p. 282. Plate reproduced in colour in Gullick, 1988 op. cit., p. 160.
15. CO 273/120:383 Weld to Derby, 209 of 28 May 1883.
16. SD, 1 February 1883.
17. CO 273/121:331 Minutes on Weld to Derby, 280 of 4 July 1883 and SD, 4 February 1883.
18. CO 273/121:329 Minute on Weld to Derby, 280 of 4 July 1883.
19. SD, 20 May 1883.
20. CO 273/121:338 Rutherford to British Resident, Selangor, 29 May 1883 enclosed in CO 273/121:320 ff. Weld to Derby, 280 of 4 July 1883.
21. CO 273/121:324 ff. Round and Fairfield in minutes on Weld to Derby, 280 of 4 July 1883.
22. CO 273/121:340 Derby to Weld, 30 August 1883 enclosed in CO 273/121:320 ff. Weld to Derby, 280 of 4 July 1883.
23. SSF 917/83.
24. SSF 877/83.
25. See Chapter 30.
26. CO 273/121:514 Weld to Derby, 301 of 17 July 1883.
27. See for example SSF 386, 387, 395 and 396/83 for Spence-Moss's appointment, and 549, 615 and 787/83 for samples of his weekly reports.
28. SSF 1584/83 Swettenham to Col. Sec. on 4 October 1883.
29. CO 273/122:104 Weld to Derby, cable of 8 September 1883.

30. CO 273/122:357 Weld to Derby, 413 of 8 October 1883, with Derby to Weld, 6 February 1884.
31. SSF 1504/83.
32. SSF 1761/83 and enclosure, and CO 273/123:172 Weld to Derby, 465 of 6 November 1883.
33. SSF 317/84. CO 273/123:440 Weld to Derby, 529 of 29 December 1883.
34. SSF 1330/83.
35. SSF 317/84.
36. SSF 202/86.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. SSF 217/89.
40. SSF KL 202/86A.
41. Federated Malay States Railways, *Fifty Years of Railways in Malaya, 1885-1935*, Kuala Lumpur, 1935.
42. HC 5566:106 SAR 1886 and HC 4958:122.
43. HC 5566: 114 SAR 1887.
44. CO 273/153:201 Gov. to CO, 248 of 5 July 1888 enclosing Meade's comments on SAR 1887.
45. SSF KL171/85.
46. SSF Ry 448/85.
47. SSF CS 1372/85.
48. HC 4958:64 Weld to Stanley, 15 March 1886.
49. SSF KL 1818/86.
50. SSF 598/87.
51. SSF CS 1032/87.
52. SSF KL 932/88, *STD*, 23 June 1888. See also HC 5566:98 SAR 1886.
53. G.L. Peet, 1983, *A Journal in the Federal Capital*, pp. 44 and 46.
54. See Chapter 35.
55. SSF KL1174/88, KL 2737/88 and KL 2757/88.
56. HC 5566:114-5 SAR 1887.
57. SSF KL 839/89.
58. SSF KL 244/88.
59. SSF KL 903/89.
60. SSF KL 220/88.
61. SSF Kl 456/88 and KL 699/88 and HC 5566:115 ff. SAR 1887.
62. SSF 534/88 and KL 1574/88. See also HC 5566:115 SAR 1887.
63. SSF KL 1784/89 and SSF 13 July 1891.
64. HC 5884:75 SAR 1888.
65. SSF KL 3540/88 and HC 5884:75 SAR 1888.
66. *STD*, 29 August 1889.

Agriculture and Mining

The causes closest to Swettenham's heart during his years as Resident, apart from the extension of roads and railways, were agriculture and mining. For what use was it to open up the country if there were no exports to pay for the roads and railways which he so assiduously encouraged? Swettenham had in earlier years shown an interest in agricultural development. In his audit report of 1879 on Selangor, he had remarked on the failure of two estates started by Europeans at Damansara: 'owing I cannot but think, to the inexperience of those entrusted with their management.'¹

The Douglas diary for 1878-9 provides some details of these two tobacco estates which Swettenham saw as he passed over the Damansara Road in the course of preparing his audit report. One, near Damansara village, was established by a Dutchman named Limberg whose efficiency made a favourable impression on Douglas. But he seems to have misjudged the climatic conditions since much of his plantings were destroyed by drought. He relied on aborigine labour, which must have been precarious. The other estate was promoted by the Singapore businessman and shipowner, Syed Mohamed Alsagoff. It was originally under the charge of a German called Limke or Zimke but later the position went to a cousin of Alsagoff.² Weld, who was well aware of the problems, had written to the Colonial Office in 1881: 'We must look to the development of the great resources of the Peninsula for the extension of our trade.'³

Yet these resources were not to be confined to mining. Low recognized the danger of relying on one export in the late 1870s, and took steps to encourage investors to take up land for agriculture.⁴ Underlying the problems of promoting agriculture lay the vexed question of land law and title registration: a complex subject, and in Swettenham's case inextricably entwined during his later years as Resident with his long-running feud with W.E. Maxwell. It will be considered separately later.⁵

It has also been suggested that the policy adopted towards agricultural development by Low and Swettenham in particular was

designed to ensure that substantial European influence was maintained through land concessions in Perak and Selangor. They aimed 'to preserve the Malay State as an entity removed from the direct control of Singapore, a Crown Colony.' Such a policy enhanced the influence and authority of the Resident, and by encouraging Malay smallholdings, not only preserved Malay identity, but 'sustained the pre-eminent position of the Resident, as legal guardian, intercessor and protector.'⁶

It is not difficult to detect such attitudes in Swettenham's account 'Agriculture and the Rise of the Townships' in *About Perak*. He paints an idyllic scene of Kuala Kangsar:

Here the Malay lives under his sireh-vine and durian tree: from his door he looks out on the river which supplies him with fish, his dug-out is, or used to be his carriage; and where his orchard ends, his rice-field begins. The sale of his fruit supplies him with money, and, if he is ambitious, he either opens a plantation of pepper or coffee or acquires a block of mining land and lets it out to Chinese on tribute.⁷

In the early 1880s, when Swettenham took over the Selangor Residency, there were few estates. A number of planters from Ceylon were coming over, to try their luck at planting in the Peninsula, but by the end of 1882, little had been achieved. Land revenue in Selangor stood at \$1,810 for the year. The following year however, it rose to \$25,738.⁸ This increase of course reflects substantially improved efficiency in land revenue collection procedures, as well as an expansion in the areas of land under cultivation. The crops grown were chiefly coffee, tapioca, pepper and sago, all on limited acreages. Cantley, of the Singapore Botanic Gardens hopefully sent twenty-five rubber seeds in the autumn of 1882, but nothing further was heard of these.⁹

Although Swettenham was normally well-disposed towards approving grants of land to smallholders, and applications were numerous, it was evident that he put less faith in that sector as a means of boosting exports than he did in the estate sector. One of the more substantial applications for land for agricultural purposes was made by Syed Zin, Tunku Kudin's colleague. Early in 1883, Syed Zin applied for 6,000 acres of land to be opened up for sago. The comments and correspondence which this generated illustrate the attitudes of both Swettenham and Weld to such problems. On receipt of Syed Zin's application, Swettenham wrote in support of this to the Colonial Secretary in Singapore. The revenue from even half this area of sago, he argued, would give a massive boost to state revenue from export duties alone, not to mention the overall effects of such investment on the economy. Moreover 'Mr Syed Zin is one of the most intelligent natives I know,' being highly respected with

rich Arab friends in Singapore. The lease, he recommended should be at a premium of \$1 per acre, free of quit rent, with export duty not to exceed two and a half per cent *ad valorem*. Survey fees also payable by Syed Zin for this marshy, uninhabited area at the back of Klang and Bandar Langat would amount to twenty cents an acre. Weld supported the idea, and eventually it was approved, with the full premium of \$6,000 payable over three years, subject to a bona fide commencement being made in the first year, and at least half the land being brought into cultivation within eight years.¹⁰

Unfortunately Syed Zin's and Swettenham's expectations were not to be realized, for in 1888, the undertaking which was known by then as the Selangor Sago and Padi Company Ltd went into liquidation. It had boasted some distinguished directors, including Syers, the Selangor Chief of Police, and the Kapitan China, Yap Ah Shak. The whole enterprise was sold to a Chinese businessman for \$5,800, leaving a surplus after payment of debts of slightly less than \$1,000 for the shareholders. It is not entirely clear what caused the demise of the company, but shortage of labour played a part.¹¹

When Rodger took over in Selangor as Acting Resident in 1884, a number of measures were adopted: gambier and pepper were allowed to be cultivated free of premium and quit rent for the first three years. Other easements of quit rent were given, and the state refrained from imposing export duties on coffee and other agricultural produce for five years.¹² Moreover terms imposed on granting leases, providing for agricultural development within a specified period, were not normally enforced at least in the early years. Terms under which land was leased were generally very favourable; Selangor for example, in Douglas' day, imposing one dollar per acre premium and quit rent of ten cents per acre for a lease of 999 years.¹³

The pattern of land development in Selangor during these years was one where Europeans, frequently friends of the Resident, applied for large concessions, of which only a very modest fraction was ultimately cultivated.¹⁴ The result of this was to produce a rash of land speculation in the state. W.W. Bailey, a Ceylon coffee planter who came to Selangor around this time made two applications for land in 1884, one in 1885 and no less than seven in 1886. Swettenham of course was out of Selangor for much of this period, but several of these applications were granted, and subsequently taken back from Bailey in the late 1880s, when terms came to be tightened up. Other planters and contractors fared similarly. Thus Hill and Rathborne acquired 8,000 acres of land in Selangor.¹⁵

Yet the proportion of developed land to that alienated remained small, and agricultural production was not outstanding. Swettenham worked hard at it, even becoming involved while on leave in London in 1886 and 1887 in correspondence with a London coffee-dealer on facilities for handling coffee in parchment from Selangor.¹⁶ Towards the end of the 1880s, new crops came to notice; tea was planted at the Genting Bidei Pass into Pahang, owned by Hill and Rathborne, on an area which had previously been devoted to coffee and cinchona. The total grant was 2,500 acres, yet by 1887 only five acres had been planted to coffee and cinchona. The estate was abandoned shortly afterwards.¹⁷ Once again rubber seeds arrived in Selangor, to be consigned to oblivion.¹⁸

In 1888, the Selangor Government decided to attempt to promote the growing of tobacco, with the assistance of one F.A. Toynbee. In that year Toynbee also received a loan of \$20,000 against security for a coffee and pepper project within the state.¹⁹ 1888 also saw the beginnings of a move to tighten up on those who acquired land and then made no effort to develop it. An attempt for instance was made during the year to forfeit land granted to Jardine Matheson for this purpose. Swettenham himself was cautious, pointing out that it would be unwise to single out individual organizations, and concluding that it would not be desirable to act for the moment.²⁰

Hill and Rathborne were less lucky, later that year, when it was decided that ten acres of land out of a 300-acre concession granted to them on Batu Road, about two miles from the town centre, and never cultivated, should be taken back from them for a hospital site.²¹ Yap Ah Loy's widow was also threatened with having her land on Ampang Road confiscated, for not cultivating it. She lodged a spirited appeal against this proposal, prompting Belfield to minute, in exasperation: 'The obstinacy and want of enterprise of this woman and her relations is a serious hindrance to land development in and around Kuala Lumpur.' It was agreed, between him and Swettenham that if she did not cultivate the land, steps should be taken by the government to resume it.²²

The Selangor Annual Report for 1888 showed Swettenham deploring the lack of industry of the Malay rice-farmers in Klang, which resulted in diminishing rice cultivation. He indicated that he would welcome Chinese rice-farming families being brought in, with government assistance for a year or two, to help ensure production was maintained. Although the suggestion was encouraged by London, no action was taken, doubtless because by then Swettenham had moved on to Perak. Later however a similar proposal was implemented in Perak.²³

As the end of Swettenham's stint in Selangor approached, there were signs of hurried attempts to restore order in the state accounts, particularly in the loans department. Here, over the years, Swettenham had granted loans in a generous manner to Malay smallholders, and in extension of his policy of keeping the chiefs and penghulus happy, to them in particular. A statement of the position at the beginning of 1889 indicated that some \$35,000 was outstanding: \$4,000 of this was to Hill and Rathborne, the balance, in sums seldom exceeding \$400 to Malay smallholders and penghulus. Not surprisingly, there were some difficulties in reclaiming these monies.²⁴

At the same time, there were signs of attempts by colleagues and friends to get urgent business completed before Swettenham's transfer. Syed Zin, despite the failure of his Sago and Padi Company wrote to Swettenham an impassioned appeal for haste in granting him a further concession, on the grounds that Syers had been given his grant. He pointed out that if he waited till Swettenham was in Perak, he would never get the grant.²⁵ Paterson Simons on the other hand adopted an altogether more aggressive approach: their initial application for land, in Klang, dated 2 February 1889, was for 30,000 acres. Swettenham cut it down to 10,000 acres, on the grounds that such a large concession was undesirable near the railway and principal port. They retorted by explaining that they wanted to plant chiefly tobacco, and if the terms were not improved, they would move to British North Borneo. Swettenham stood firm, saying changes could not now be made to rules already applied to other applicants.²⁶ The haste was not without reason, for Maxwell, on his arrival in Selangor, immediately instituted a review of the Selangor lands alienated as estates by Swettenham.²⁷ Moreover he wrote bleakly of the large concessions given by Swettenham in earlier years: 'I am not able to give a very encouraging report of progress.'²⁸

During the period when Swettenham acted for Low in Perak, the major development in land matters was the passing and implementation of a revised code of land regulations, at Low's express request.²⁹ For the remainder of the time it would appear that Swettenham was too busy with the construction of buildings, roads and railways to pay very much attention to agricultural matters. He did however in 1885 attempt to encourage new settlers in Perak by waiving all land rent for one to three years. As a result some 1,500 Malays from Kedah moved across to Perak to settle.³⁰

By the time he returned to Perak in 1889 as substantive Resident, Swettenham was taking a much closer interest in agriculture. One of his earlier expeditions on arrival in Perak was a visit in November 1889 to Kedah to negotiate with the Sultan, Abdul

Hamid, for a water supply for the Krian district. The visit took just under a week, including a day's snipe shooting with the Sultan. Swettenham's report, besides dealing with the water question, which was satisfactorily resolved, also showed a sharp eye for the line of possible future railways. He had in mind in particular a twenty-mile canal bringing water from Kedah Peak to Alor Star. The soil, conveniently piled on one bank throughout the length of the straight canal, would, he felt make an ideal course for the line.³¹

By then tea had been grown successfully at The Hermitage in the hills above Taiping, and seven acres of this was leased to a Chinese operator.³² In his report for 1889, Swettenham commented favourably on the prospects for pepper, coffee and silkworms. The breeding of silkworms was feasible because mulberry grew freely in the state. Elsewhere in the same report he claimed that the government had now done all that it could to develop agriculture: it remained only to bring in more cheap labour.³³ Others however felt differently, and a press article in October 1890 cited leases and quit rents as major factors inhibiting land development in the state. It also mentioned the requirement that all legal documents be executed in the state as a further drawback, in addition to the impossibility of charging Perak land as security for money raised overseas. The article concluded by an oblique reference to the lack of legal appeal procedures from the Protected States to the Straits Settlements: 'The law in the Native States is the caprice of the Resident, checked by fear of the caprice of the Governor of the Straits Settlements.'³⁴ It was a complaint which was to be raised time and again over the next five years.

Smith was very conscious of this problem. The question of land settlement was an important one in all the states. Perak had distinguished itself in 1890 by increasing the area of rice production: 'The Natives however, as well as the European planters will require that they are not over regulated. The great object of the Government should be to get land taken up on almost any terms, for agriculture alone will bring about a settled and thriving population.'³⁵ Lucas in London reflected the official view when he remarked that London did not wish to dictate land systems '...to these nominally independent states.'³⁶

In pursuit of this objective, steps had already been taken to irrigate the Krian area of Perak. Noel Denison, district magistrate at Krian from 1877 to 1881, had done much to improve drainage and attract immigrants from Penang, Borneo and Kelantan. By the end of the 1880s it became evident that without large-scale water control, rice cultivation could not succeed in the area. Welman, the acting magistrate made two calls for large-scale irrigation in 1889. However departmental disputes, assisted by the leaden hands of

successive colonial secretaries, Sir Frederick Dickson in 1891, and W.E. Maxwell later, prevented material progress. Such efforts as were possible were piecemeal. A proposal made by Swettenham in an earlier Selangor Annual Report to introduce Chinese rice-growing families, was undertaken in the Krian district with Tamil families: a similar scheme at Teluk Anson proved to be too small for success. Swettenham still looked forward to using Chinese families, who were at that moment being brought in. Two years later he was able to report further progress with both the scheme at Krian, and a new one at Sitiawan, as well as a Catholic Tamil scheme in Taiping, under the direction of the Catholic priest.³⁷

By the middle of 1892, Swettenham was convinced of the importance of irrigation, but, in an interesting display of his priorities, unwilling to proceed with such an expensive undertaking until he had got behind him the enormous costs of developing the railways.³⁸ By 1892 there were 37,000 acres under rice and 23,000 acres under sugar in the Krian area, thanks to the increased activity of European and local officers.³⁹ But irrigation was needed, and plans to implement a scheme to irrigate 50,000 acres for rice were mentioned in the 1893 report. The following year a cost of \$350,000 for such a scheme was reported.⁴⁰

Eventually in 1895, with Maxwell and Dickson safely out of the way, Swettenham paid a visit to the area and observed for himself that some system of water-control was essential. His successor as Resident, E.W. Birch, son of J.W.W. Birch, wrote that the immigrant colonists were 'in no sense settlers, and they never will be until they can be assured of regular crops and of a supply of potable water.' Meantime Swettenham had recommended that expert advice be sought from India, as a result of which Claude Vincent of the Indian Works Department was brought in to write a report on irrigation in Krian.⁴¹

Swettenham continued to take an interest in the scheme, even when the estimated costs rose from \$300,000 to \$400,000.⁴² The scheme was delayed by shortages of labour, and disease, chiefly malaria, prevalent in the swampy areas.⁴³ In the same year, Swettenham was reported as bringing three Lombardy rice-growers into the country to instruct the Malay padi planters.⁴⁴ It seems unlikely that they arrived, for no more was heard of the scheme. By 1900 a further irrigation scheme was planned, to cost \$900,000.⁴⁵ The Krian irrigation scheme was an expensive one, and it produced very mixed results.⁴⁶ Yet in spite of all this, Swettenham's reports continue to record his dissatisfaction at the failure of Europeans to take up land. In 1892 he admitted he could give no reason for this, except perhaps the labour shortage.⁴⁷ By 1894, in the light of the failure of European mining interests, he was even more categorical on

the values of plantations. 'I feel very strongly that the Government cannot pursue a wiser policy than the encouragement of the planter.'⁴⁸

A lively debate was maintained in the newspapers, particularly those in Ceylon, on the question of planting in the Protected Malay States. These articles were usually reproduced in the *Straits Times*, and provide an interesting independent view of agriculture at the time. Thus in November 1893 there was reproduced an article from *The Times of Ceylon* which was extremely complimentary on the state of agriculture in Perak, alleging that those who maintained the contrary view were simply after timber concessions: 'Planters who are not concession-mongers will find every help in Perak.'⁴⁹ Swettenham remained consistent in his support for liberal land concessions for agriculture after he became Resident-General.⁵⁰

Swettenham's active discouragement of the rubber industry in its early days will be considered later.⁵¹ The European sectors of agricultural and mining development may not have been outstandingly successful, yet there can be little doubt that Swettenham's years as Resident, in both Selangor and Perak, saw remarkable advances by Malays and Chinese. Chinese progress was fuelled by sweated immigrant labour from South China, while Malay progress received a substantial boost from immigration to the western states from Kelantan in the north-east. Kelantan was hit by a series of natural disasters in the 1880s, and the political stability of the west coast, combined with settlement grants, had a powerful effect in bringing in settlers.⁵²

In concluding these comments on Swettenham's contribution to agricultural development, it is perhaps worth considering why, despite all the government's attempts to encourage estate agriculture, so little was achieved, at least up to the beginning of the rubber-boom period. The reasons often cited at the time were shortage of labour, problems over land titles, and to a certain extent lack of means of communication with ports. The third problem was greatly diminished thanks to Swettenham's own determination and vigour. In the years immediately before Federation there was also some anxiety as to whether a dissatisfied litigant in the Protected States could obtain adequate redress at law. This was certainly widely mentioned as a reason for hesitation over investment. That there was also a lack of professionalism in the early days, there can be no doubt. Yet experience after 1896 suggests that ultimately none of these factors was pre-eminent in preventing agricultural investment. Once adequate, and indeed high prices were available on international markets for rubber, all hesitations disappeared. The country embarked on an unprecedented level of agricultural spending which, as it turned out, proved justified.

So far as mining was concerned, one of the recommendations of the Commission appointed under the Pangkor Engagement, in which Swettenham participated, was that written titles be introduced, clearly defining the boundaries of mining land. Swettenham was therefore at an early stage in his career aware of the importance and complexities of the mining industry.⁵³ Moreover it was revenue from tin mining, more than from any other source, which would provide the funds required to develop the states of Perak and Selangor. Of the proconsuls of the time, Swettenham wrote later: 'While their first object was to benefit the Malays and make their lives easier and happier, they recognized that they must look to the Chinese as the workers and revenue producers.'⁵⁴

The tin price had collapsed in the late 1870s, and the government was anxious to encourage the spread of Western mining techniques and machinery into what was regarded as a backward industry. Special concessions were therefore offered to Western capitalists on condition that they used modern machinery with Western management techniques.⁵⁵ One of Swettenham's first administrative measures after he assumed the Selangor Residency was to draw up a code of mining regulations, which dealt with the relations between mining *towkays* or *advancers*, and their coolies. The proposals were approved by Weld in Singapore, who sanctioned their proclamation once Pickering, of the Chinese Protectorate, had had a chance to explain them to the Chinese community. By the end of November 1882, Swettenham was able to report, in his lengthy essay on the 1883 estimates that a code of land and mining regulations had been approved and was being published.⁵⁶

At this time the Chinese mining community under the Kapitan, Yap Ah Loy, was as has been shown very largely self-governing; the Selangor government did little to control the Chinese community directly. However, if they could not be controlled, they could at least be offered incentives, and played off against each other. Hence in part at least the justification for opening up the Selangor revenue farms to Chinese bidders from Penang, which, as we have seen, ruffled Yap Ah Loy's feathers.⁵⁷ Subsequent Selangor Annual Reports claimed that this had indeed brought in more capital from Penang, and affected the speed at which the country was opened up.⁵⁸

Additionally, the effect of Swettenham's firm hand on the state of Selangor was to encourage a number of hopeful European tin-mining organizations to apply for land. Among the more familiar names at this time, we may note Hill and Rathborne, Martin Lister and one Herbert Mühlinghaus. Mühlinghaus was given the exclusive right to export all tin ore except that obtained from European mines

in the state. The variations in the terms granted within a short space of time to these applicants indicates that there must have been a great deal of individual negotiation. The pattern of mining concessions in Selangor was thus similar to those for estate agriculture: favourable terms over large acreages for old friends.⁵⁹

Shanghai was at this time a popular base for mining companies, and in early 1883 Swettenham's diary records the arrival of one W.V. Drummond, of the Straits Trading and Mining Company, recently floated in Shanghai. As a potentially valuable investor, Swettenham gave him favoured treatment, taking him shooting at Setapak, where they got four couple of snipe. On 18 February, Drummond was asking for a 'smelting site here and at Klang, next to Govt. reserve, and a site for lease here.' There is no indication that he got what he asked for, but he did get a large concession over 1,000 acres on favourable terms. Subsequently he received a similar concession in Perak.⁶⁰

In the meantime Swettenham's activities in replanning and building the town of Kuala Lumpur were creating a substantial demand for bricks. In 1883 Hill applied for land to set up brick kilns in what is now the Brickfields area of Kuala Lumpur, with a two-year monopoly at a fixed price.⁶¹ The prospects were no doubt lucrative, sufficiently so to tempt Swettenham to invest personally in 1883 in a brick-making company, with Weld's personal permission, the shares to be registered in Mrs Swettenham's name.⁶² Nor was Swettenham the only individual using a front, for in that same year we find the ubiquitous Hill acting as a front for a Malay applying to set up a slaughter-house in Kuala Lumpur, preferably downstream from the town, as Swettenham minuted.⁶³

In his efforts to develop the mining industry in Selangor, Swettenham was helped by two factors: his ability, in his capacity as Resident to establish transport facilities in areas of the state which would otherwise have been inaccessible, and the favourable price of tin in the early 1880s.⁶⁴ Yet despite these favourable factors, the results of the European-backed enterprises were abysmal. Of the hopeful concessionaires of 1882-1884, only one survived to the end of the decade, the Rawang Tin Mining Company. Even that ended in liquidation very shortly afterwards. There were a number of reasons for this. The first was the shortage of labour, exacerbated by the attitude of the heads of the Chinese communities who doubled as heads of the illegal secret societies making it difficult for Western enterprises to obtain labour.⁶⁵ Furthermore the Western-inspired enterprises employed expensive European personnel, and put far more money into capital equipment, often without adequately surveying beforehand the areas to be mined. These reasons were well understood, and given some publicity, both

in the press and the annual reports. Swettenham for example commented on this in his Perak Annual Report for 1884, in which he urged a policy of 'hastening slowly,' entrepreneurs should reduce risks as far as possible both on expenditure of capital, and in attempting to mine areas which had been inadequately surveyed.⁶⁶

Perhaps the most significant reason for the failure of European mining interests was that such mines were not able, unlike the Chinese, to control the associated and lucrative revenue farms, in particular gambling and opium. It was profits from these farms which tided the average Chinese miner over a bad period, as Swettenham and his associates well realized. Moreover, a Chinese who had paid well for a revenue farm had considerable incentive to maximize the profits during his limited tenure of this franchise by bringing in as many workers as possible. If he also controlled the mines, he thus had two sources of profit, the mines themselves and the closely associated revenue farms.⁶⁷

The fate of the Rawang Tin Mining Company was significant in a number of ways. First, it was by 1889 the only major European mining company to survive in Selangor. That the company had survived so long may have been because of J.G. Davidson's involvement as chairman, combined with the over-optimistic forecasts of the manager, one John Muir. Both, it should be noted were friends of Swettenham. Thanks to Muir's forecasts, shares which in March 1889 were selling at \$130 each, were unsaleable by August, by which time Muir had departed on leave.⁶⁸

It is not difficult to correlate the swift demise of the company with the arrival in Selangor of W.E. Maxwell as Resident. The position was further aggravated by the fact that Maxwell moved to seize all the assets of the company and sell them to settle only the debts due by the company to residents of Selangor. This highly inequitable proceeding produced a major outcry. Moreover it served to highlight, at a time when thought was first being given to Federation, the inequities of the legal system in the Protected Malay States. The technicalities were complicated, but in summary Maxwell's high-handed action provoked a review by the Straits Supreme Court. This court concluded that the Selangor Court proceedings under which the preferential sequestration of assets was approved was so irregular that the Singapore Court could grant no validity to them. Therefore the bank which had initiated the appeal was refused leave to make a claim in Singapore to have the inequity redressed. The conclusion drawn was that money invested in the Protected Malay States was subject to the arbitrary and unpredictable fiat of British officials, often with no specialized knowledge of law, without any right of appeal to a senior Court. A long article in the press on the subject concluded thus: 'The present state of matters

tends to prevent the investment of English money, and thus hinders the progress of Malaysia.⁶⁹

The end of the 1880s witnessed the enormous speculative boom in Pahang mining. Swettenham of course was not directly involved in this, being otherwise occupied in Selangor and Perak. However it did produce an interesting clash with the disreputable William Fraser who disparaged Swettenham's Pahang activities.⁷⁰ In early 1888, Swettenham wrote from Selangor to the *Singapore Free Press*, pouring scorn on Fraser's absurdly optimistic report on the prospects of the Pahang Corporation Ltd. This provoked a rude reply from Fraser, published the following day, and a week later a further rejoinder from Swettenham. Swettenham's cautionary attitude proved justified, for a week after that it was announced that Fraser's concession had been cancelled by the Sultan.⁷¹

Similar measures to those adopted in Selangor were also adopted in Perak. Astute handling of the revenue farms which were given to the Kapitan China, Chung Keng Kwee, head of the Hai San faction in Perak helped bring capital into the state from the early 1880s, and made him, by 1886, the largest financier in Larut. Attention at this time was also given to opening up the Kinta region, which was known to be rich in tin, partly by manipulation of the revenue farms, and partly by constructing a network of cart roads to link mining centres in the district with river posts. This of course led on to the construction of the Ipoh-Teluk Anson railway.⁷² As a result, tin production in Lower Perak rose from some 25,000 pikuls in 1883 to 119,000 pikuls by the end of the decade, and almost 320,000 by 1895. By 1889, the production of this district exceeded that of all the other districts of Perak combined. With a rate of duty which varied over the period between \$55 and \$78 per ton, the Kinta district began to loom large in Perak's finances.⁷³ Yet even as late as 1888, Swettenham was complaining that tin production was hampered by the lack of adequate transport.⁷⁴

Considerable interest was being shown particularly by the French in the Perak mining industry. Foremost among these miners was J. Errington de la Croix, half French, half English, who had been sent by the French government in the early 1880s to study the tin industry and geology of Perak. De la Croix was a cosmopolitan man, fluent in both English and French. After he retired from active mining in Perak, Swettenham often used to stay with him in Paris, enjoying the company of his friends, artistic, bohemian and otherwise well-known. Through him Swettenham met Degas and Rodin.⁷⁵

Given British rivalry with the French in the north of the Peninsula, and in Siam, de la Croix probably kept his contacts in the French government well informed of what the British were doing in

the Peninsula. To be involved in mining operations in Perak, and later Selangor, would have been one of the best ways of keeping abreast of British and Chinese opinion, his bona fides enhanced by learned articles published in both British and French journals.⁷⁶ The establishment of the French company received full publicity in the papers.⁷⁷ The following year there was a series of three articles, in the form of an extended review of French work in Perak by de la Croix and his mine manager, St Pol Lias.⁷⁸ The pattern of success for the Chinese and failure for the European mining ventures, which we have observed in Selangor, was repeated in Perak till the early or mid-1890s, with the exception of the de la Croix venture, and for similar reasons: labour problems, wasteful expenditure of capital, and advantages to Chinese operations inherent in combining mining with the revenue farms.

As early as 1884 the *Straits Times* was reporting on an exodus of European miners from Larut.⁷⁹ But this did not prevent Caulfeild, the State Engineer, from taking up shares in a reconstructed tin-mining company, in which the Premier of New South Wales was also one of the principal shareholders. Later it met the same fate as all the other European tin-mining companies.⁸⁰

The next stage downstream in the tin industry was smelting of the tin ore. Here the tables were reversed. Given the structure of the industry, where control ultimately lay in the hands of the advancer, who provided working capital against the output to be supplied to him, it was evident that the smelters would at an early stage come to exercise ultimate control. Swettenham's role in establishing European control of this sector of the industry was crucial.

In Selangor, smelting was originally undertaken locally by the Chinese, who resented any attempt by European interests to set up in competition against them. In this they were successful, until the late 1880s, when Mühlinghaus and Sword formed a partnership in Singapore to undertake such work. In November 1887 it was converted into a limited liability company, the Straits Trading Co. Ltd.⁸¹ This move may have been in response to steps taken by Rodger in Selangor, and later Swettenham supported by Smith in Singapore, which had resulted in the company being awarded a monopoly to buy, as well as to export all tin ore from Chinese mines in Selangor. The intention had been to give a monopoly on exporting only. When the matter was aired in 1891, Fairfield of the Colonial Office, in commenting on the Selangor Annual Report for 1890 charitably attributed the mistake to a careless reading of the documents. He noted however that the original concession, for three years, had been extended for a further two years, and three more years thereafter. Noting further that the arrangement was

particularly harsh on Chinese mines, he proposed to expunge from the 1890 reports and all associated correspondence effusive statements on the matter made by Smith and Swettenham. These he considered were prompted by a realization that they had mishandled the matter, and wished to cover their traces. Fairfield was of course an ardent supporter of Maxwell in the Colonial Office at a time in mid-1891 when Swettenham was particularly embattled.⁸² Swettenham certainly viewed the company favourably, for he had had personal dealings in land with them. By the end of 1888, Swettenham was able to record that the smelter which had been set up in Selangor was so busy it sometimes could not cope with all the ore submitted to it.⁸³

At about the same time, just after Swettenham arrived there, the company obtained a similar, though not exclusive concession in Perak.⁸⁴ Revealing minutes from Batang Padang show how the representative of the Straits Trading Company at Teluk Anson made loans to local miners in exchange for the charge of mining leases in favour of the company, which no doubt at the same time insisted that all ore be sent to their smelters.⁸⁵ With these agreements in hand, they were able to afford to set up a large modern smelter on Pulau Brani, off Singapore, where fuel costs could be reduced by taking coal directly from ships importing from overseas. They were thus able to compete effectively with the Chinese who still used charcoal.⁸⁶ Moreover in March 1891, two further furnaces were built at the Taiping Smelting Works.⁸⁷

In addition to competing with the Chinese over the fuel element in the smelting costs, the company eventually broke into both the Selangor and Perak markets in tin ore by paying cash, at higher levels than the Chinese. In particular, the failure of the revenue farms in 1890 in Perak led to the breakdown of the system of advances, and greatly facilitated the company's expansion in that state. They were also helped by the support of the British administration, which prevented rival Chinese operations from setting up business. Finally, increasing concern about the rate at which the forests in Perak were being felled for charcoal, to be used in Chinese smelters, forced the Perak administration to put controls on that commodity. This further helped loosen Chinese control of smelting in both Selangor and Perak, and steered more business into the hands of the Straits Trading Co.⁸⁸

Swettenham's involvement with the mining industry was therefore indirect, but ultimately to prove crucial to the retention of control of the industry in the Peninsula. In his Annual Report for Perak in 1894, he noted that the duty on tin was enabling the government, from a non-renewable resource, to build up capital of another, more permanent kind, in agriculture and transport facilities:

'but to make it easy to mine successfully and difficult to plant with profit may be good shopkeeping, but seems indifferent administration.'⁸⁹

NOTES

1. HC 3095:22 ff. SAR 1879.
2. Douglas Diary, quoted from Gullick, pers. comm.
3. HC 3895 Weld to CO, 31 May 1881, quoted in Thio, 1962, op.cit.
4. Loh, 1969, op. cit., p. 113.
5. See Chapter 29.
6. Loh, 1969, op. cit., p. 123.
7. *About Perak*, p. 38.
8. Sadka, 1968, op. cit., p. 411.
9. SSF 511/82.
10. SSF 34/83.
11. SSF 328/88 and KL 821/89.
12. SSF 366/84, 2047/84 and 1261/85, quoted by Thiagarajan, op. cit.
13. Sadka, 1968, op. cit., p. 344.
14. Loh, 1969, op. cit., pp.118-21 for an analysis of land alienated in Selangor.
15. Sadka, 1968, op. cit., p. 344 and SSF Misc. 1722/84, Misc. 1957/84, Misc. 1767/85, Misc. 452/86, Misc. 628/86, Lands 1539/86, Lands 2107/86, Lands 2180/86, Lands 2671/86, Lands 2672/86.
16. SSF CS 230/87.
17. *Straits Times Directory*, 1887.
18. SSF CS 3019/87.
19. SSF KL 2232/88, KL 2935/88 and KL 3310/88. On Toynbee's career as a coffee-planter, see *SJ* 3:209.
20. SSF KL 3309/88.
21. SSF KL 3650/88.
22. SSF Misc. 765/89.
23. HC 5884:56, SAR 1888 and HC 6576:9 and 24, PAR 1890.
24. SSF KL 822/89, KL 901/89.
25. SSF KL 1271/89.
26. SSF KL 461/89 and Misc. 1272/89.
27. HC 6576, SAR 1890, App. F.
28. HC 6576:46, SAR 1890.
29. HC 4958:2, PAR 1884, and p. 6, Smith to Derby, 5 June 1885.
30. Acting British Resident, Perak, to Colonial Secretary, 25 November 1885 in Maxwell, *Perak Land Regulations*, p. 26, quoted in Lim Teck Ghee, *Origins of a Colonial Economy*, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1976, p. 77.
31. CO 273/162:267-83 Swettenham's report of 6 November 1889 including an attractive sketch sent by Smith to Knutsford, Confidential, 23 November 1889.
32. *STD*, 24 April 1889.
33. HC 6222:14 and 23, PAR 1889.
34. *STD*, 2 October 1890.
35. HC 6576:4-5 Smith to Knutsford, 22 June 1891.
36. CO 272/176:218 ff. Lucas' comment of 14 December 1891 on Governor to CO, 405 of 28 October 1891.

37. HC 6576:9, 24, PAR 1890. HC 7228:25, PAR 1892.
38. HC 7228:15, PAR 1892.
39. HC 7228:11, 23, 25, PAR 1892.
40. HC 7546:19-20, PAR 1893, HC 7877:12, PAR 1894.
41. Full details are to be found in D.E. Short and James C. Jackson, 1971, 'The Origins of an Irrigation Policy in Malaya.' *JMBRAS*, 44 (1 and 2):78-103, esp. pp. 89-91. A useful summary of the scheme to 1895 is found in HC 8257:21, PAR 1895, Report by E.W. Birch.
42. HC 8661:7, FMS AR 1896, RG's Report, para. 15.
43. HC 382:6, FMS AR, 1899, RG's Report, para. 9.
44. HC 382:21, PAR 1899, para. 54, and *MM*, 27 July 1899.
45. HC 815:14, AR FMS 1900, PAR para. 26 and HC 1297:12 AR FMS 1901, PAR para. 39.
46. The scheme was officially launched in 1906 by E.W. Birch, who gave an account of its development over the years, reported in *TOM*, 9 August 1906.
47. HC 7228:12, PAR 1892.
48. HC 7877:22, PAR 1894.
49. *STD*, 16 November 1893.
50. CO 273/213:254 ff. Governor to CO, 111 of 23 March 1896 and CO 273/240:184 ff. Swettenham to Lucas, Private of 15 June 1898, on the encouragement of estates.
51. See Chapter 47.
52. Gullick, 1987b, see pp. 104 ff.
53. 'Report of the Commissioners under the Perak Engagement' dated 20 January 1874, p. 21, SP Item 72.
54. *Footprints*, pp. 71-2.
55. Wong, 1965, op. cit., pp. 145-6.
56. SSF 88/82 and 227/82 with letter from Talbot, for Col. Sec., Singapore of 22 November 1882. The mining regulations were explained and approved at the 32nd SCM of 30 October 1882.
57. See Chapter 18.
58. HC 4958:51, 52, 108, SAR 1884, 1885 and HC 5566:99, SAR 1886 quoted in Wong, 1965, op. cit., p. 105 fn.
59. See Loh, 1969, op. cit., pp. 122-3 for an analysis of different concessions.
60. SD 16 and 18 February 1883, Loh, 1969, op. cit., p. 123, Wong, 1965, op. cit., p. 146.
61. SSF 716 and 718/83.
62. CO 273/169:450 Weld to Swettenham, 28 May 1883 enclosed in Smith to CO, 488 of 16 December 1890.
63. SSF 1377/83.
64. The price of Straits tin had dropped in the late 1870s to between £61 and £74 per ton. In the early 1880s, it fluctuated between £86 and £107 per ton: Wong, 1965, op. cit., p. 243, App. A.
65. Wong, 1965, op. cit., p. 149.
66. HC 4958:29, PAR 1884, *STD*, 13 May 1885, *About Perak*, pp. 32-4. See also SAR 1885 (by Rodger) for a summary of the failure of the Selangor mining companies.

67. *About Perak*, p. 35 and *PGSC*, 4 October 1893, Wong, 1965, op. cit., pp. 76-81.
68. *STD*, 27 and 31 August 1889.
69. See *STD*, 29 October 1889, 28 November 1889 and 20 August 1890, the latter quoting a detailed article in the *Morning Post*. Also CO 273/176:274 ff. Governor to CO, 410 of 3 November 1891.
70. See Chapter 23.
71. *SFP*, 2, 3, 9 and 16 April 1888.
72. See Chapter 27.
73. Wong, 1965, op. cit., pp. 90, 254. 1 pikul was 133 lbs. in the Straits Settlements. There were variations elsewhere. See Wong, p. 163 fn. for details.
74. HC 5884:45, PAR 1888.
75. *Footprints*, p. 130. Swettenham also provided a description of de la Croix (Raoul de Mareuil) in *Also and Perhaps: 'Death's Devotion,'* pp. 119-128.
76. See for instance 'Some Account of the Mining Districts of Lower Perak.' *JSBRAS*, 7, 1881 and *Les Mines d'Etain de Perak*, Singapore, 1882.
77. *STD*, 25 April and 29 May 1883.
78. *STD*, 23, 24, 25 January 1884.
79. *STD*, 24 June 1884.
80. *STD*, 9 July 1884 and 2 March 1885.
81. Wong, 1965, op. cit., p. 163, and K.G. Tregonning, n.d., *Straits Tin 1887-1962*, a history of the enterprise.
82. Memo by Fairfield on 1890 Annual Reports in CO 273/173:580 ff. Gov. to CO, 258 of 18 June 1891. See also Chapter 30 and SSF 1012/89 quoted in Wong, 1965, op. cit., p. 164.
83. HC 5884:58, SAR 1888.
84. PGG 1889:308 and 363.
85. BPDO 203/91.
86. HC 6576:4, Smith to Knutsford, 22 June 1891.
87. *PGSC*, 5 March 1891.
88. Wong, 1965, op. cit., pp. 159, 164-6 and *STD*, 30 September 1893.
89. HC 7877:22, PAR 1894.

Labour and Immigration

It will be evident from a review of the previous two chapters on agriculture and mining that labour and immigration problems formed a third and crucial component in any strategy for the development of the Protected Native States. Given Swettenham's determination to promote such development, it is not surprising that he took a keen interest in the labour problems. There were two sources of supply, China and India.

Chinese labour was indentured: potential immigrants were rounded up, none too scrupulously, from port areas in southern China and transported under conditions of indescribable squalor to Singapore or other ports in the Peninsula. There they were handed over to their new employers, to work off, as soon as they could, the debts incurred on their behalf by the recruiters, and their fare to the Peninsula. Since their employers on the mines often also controlled the gambling and opium farms, and certainly controlled the sale of supplies to the coolies, the indenture generally lasted a long time. There was usually no written contract. Vast numbers died of disease, and exploitation was rife. It was, said the Protector of Chinese, Perak, 'a system in fact of debt slavery.'¹

In the absence of any welfare organization, secret societies were rife. The government's first move to combat these had been the appointment in the Straits Settlements of Pickering, as Protector of Chinese, in 1873. The remainder of the decade was devoted to attempts of various kinds to discourage and suppress the secret societies. These efforts were not always successful, for in 1878 and 1879 when the societies caused serious disturbances in Perak, Low as Resident had had to concede to certain of their demands.² In 1882, Weld proposed legislation which would increase the working hours, but also provide for the supply of better food to the indentured labourers.

In tackling the problems of Chinese labour on the ground, Swettenham appears to have been the first and most decisive in the field. On reaching Selangor in 1882, he showed his habitual decisiveness. Considering that the Chinese in Selangor were 'more

amenable to reason' than those in Perak, he summoned a large meeting of labourers from the mines and their employees. The result was a proclamation which regulated equitable arrangements between employers and employees, and established what came to be known as the Discharge Ticket System. This was proclaimed in Selangor on 31 October 1882 and enforced there on 1 January 1883. The system provided that each employer should provide a discharge ticket to every employee who had completed his term of employment and repaid his debts. This made it less easy for employers to 'crimp' labour from others, because when a man was re-employed elsewhere, he would be asked to produce his discharge ticket. Failure to do so entailed forfeiture of wages, fining and imprisonment. In the case of the predominantly Chinese tin miners, a lien was placed on all tin mined by the labourer, even that mined outside normal working hours, to secure monies paid by the advancer towards the worker's transshipment in the first place. At the same time considerable improvements were imposed upon employers in terms of the conditions, hours of work and provisions to be provided to labourers.³

The next step was the appointment, at the end of 1883 of one Captain Schultz as Protector of the Chinese in Perak. He commenced work at the beginning of 1884, a month or two before Swettenham took over in Perak when Low went on leave. Shortly afterwards, it was alleged by Powell, acting for Pickering in Singapore, that secret societies still existed in the Malay States. Swettenham, aggravated at what he saw as interference from Singapore in presuming to speak for affairs in Perak, consulted Schultz. The latter in his reply was guarded. There were, he thought, members of such societies in Perak, though he was less certain as to whether they met in the state. Nor did Schultz think that such societies had recently caused any trouble. This prompted Swettenham to remark, 'It appears that there are no secret societies in Perak, and, as far as I am aware, the existence of such societies is prohibited.' In Selangor, he added, 'where there are no such societies, I believe certain clans have in Kuala Lumpur what they call a kongsi-house, which corresponds to our rest-house, and they assist each other in making temples and burying the dead.'⁴

Subsequently investigations by Powell revealed that Swettenham's dogmatic assertion was far from correct. Yap Ah Loy and his successor as Kapitan China, Yap Ah Shak were both secret society headmen, so that when they sat in court, they were in fact acting on behalf of the secret society. Moreover Powell's researches revealed close links between societies in different parts of the country. Syers in Selangor persevered, in spite of the evidence, in maintaining that there was no secret society organization. So for

a time did Schultz, though by 1888 he had revised his views. As a result, by 1888, secret societies in Selangor were officially prohibited by an Order in Council of 24 May.⁵ Even so, Swettenham was able to comment in the same year, on an attempt to set up a secret society in Serendah, foiled with the assistance of the Kapitan China, that this proved, 'that there are no dangerous societies; the most respectable and intelligent members of the Chinese community possess a valuable influence over their countrymen and exert it to support the Government, which they regard as the cause of law and order.'⁶ It was a remarkably naïve comment from an otherwise cynical and hard-headed administrator.

A Discharge Ticket System had been introduced by Swettenham in Perak in February 1885, while he was Acting Resident. Here he relied on the good offices of Schultz to explain it to the Chinese work-force. Shortly after he arrived in Perak as substantive Resident in 1889 he made an Order in Council, similar to that which he had introduced in Selangor, in January 1883.

A slump in the price of tin in 1884 meant that there was no incentive to employers to crimp labour. However this changed over the following two years, and further provisions had to be introduced in 1886 in Perak, penalizing both employers who failed to comply with the requirement to provide discharge tickets, and labourers who absconded. The system was further refined in Perak in 1888, by making provision for coolies to be photographed, and for the establishment of a Chinese Immigration Depot, where all employers were obliged to register new arrivals under threat of fine. Similar provisions and penalties were introduced in Selangor around the same time by Swettenham himself. Employers were to retain the tickets of coolies working for them, and were only to hand these tickets back on completion of their contract. Offences by employers were to incur a fine of up to \$50. Coolies on the other hand were treated very much less favourably: absconders were to be subject to rigorous imprisonment not exceeding fifteen days, and/or whipping not exceeding twelve strokes. The imprisonment was increased to three months on the second offence.⁷

Where there were few employers, the Discharge Ticket System worked well, but in areas where employers were numerous, it tended to break down, assisted by widespread forgery of tickets by the labourers themselves. Thus cases of desertion in Larut in 1888 amounted to 3,246, but this had increased to 8,608 in 1893.⁸ As communications improved, it became increasingly easy for coolies to escape, and this factor also contributed to the complete discrediting of the system.

The case of the Indian community was rather different and, from the British point of view, rather more pressing. For the

Chinese worked in largely Chinese-operated tin mines, while the Indian immigrants were needed to work on roads and railways being built by the British, and to open up European-financed estates. Since the Straits Settlements had been moved from the supervision of the India Office to the Colonial Office in the late 1860s, there had been some reluctance by the Indian government to allow immigration, reinforced by unfavourable publicity in 1872-1873 over cases of ill-treatment of Indian labour by employers in Province Wellesley. The Indian Act V was passed in 1877 regulating the recruitment of Indian labour on an indenture system. Under this system, workers recruited in South India were obliged to repay to their employers the costs of recruitment and their fares to Penang. A labourer's only redress was to abscond, with debts unpaid, to another employer. This abuse was widespread, and it was difficult for the original employer to trace absconding labourers in this way.

Various documents in the Selangor Secretariat files testify to Swettenham's anxiety to encourage Indian labour to come to the Peninsula in the 1880s.⁹ The methods adopted included recruiting the Ceylon Pioneers, with the assistance of his brother, J.A. Swettenham, then posted to Ceylon. The Pioneers were a detachment of Ceylonese, under British officers who were sent to work, largely on the roads, in Perak and Selangor. Ceylon was also a source of clerks, and we find in 1888 Swettenham writing there to recruit a chief clerk.¹⁰

Yet the provisions of the India Act of 1877 were found not to have worked. European planters in the Peninsula pressed for repeal of the Act by the Indian government. In particular they wished to be able to recruit freely. The Act was therefore replaced in 1885 by the Indian Immigration Ordinance, passed by the Straits Settlements in 1884. Under this ordinance, the Straits Immigration Agent was empowered to register recruiters in southern India. Workers were to be indentured for three years, and transported at the expense of their ultimate employers to the Peninsula. Once the indenture was cleared, they could either return to India, or stay on the estates as free labourers. However the provisions were abused, and this piece of legislation was scarcely more effective than the one which it replaced.¹¹

Exasperation with the small numbers of Indian immigrants, and the poor physical condition of those that did arrive increased in the late 1880s. Swettenham reported in 1888 that Selangor was receiving the dregs of such immigrants, after the best had been picked for Penang and Province Wellesley. Those who reached Selangor were frequently mere skeletons, and the seven per cent death rate was less due to insanitary conditions and bad food than their basic condition when they arrived. Indeed their condition was

so bad that they had to be allowed to work on estates, where the work was deemed to be easier than on the roads. Those caught after absconding were to be whipped. Swettenham was keen to see those who came to Selangor working under a European who spoke Tamil. Toynbee, working then for Hill and Rathborne, was a suitable candidate to take them on. The Indians involved thought differently. They unanimously refused to move from Batu Caves, where they were staying, and a proportion of them absconded before their indentures were paid off. The Public Works Department took the view that it was not worth pursuing them: it would simply add prison and other expenses to those already incurred. At this stage Swettenham urged that the basic period of indenture be reduced from three to two years, or however long it took to pay the indenture. Two weeks later, he had had enough of the problem, and wished to have no more Indian immigrants in the state.¹²

By 1890, Swettenham's views on the subject had hardened, for the *Perak Government Gazette*, effectively under Swettenham's supervision, drew attention to long contracts and low wages, which it claimed were more important factors contributing to the high mortality of Indian labourers than the basically poor physical standards of the labourers themselves. The Perak government therefore proposed a minimum wage of twenty cents per day, and a maximum contract of two years.¹³ The faults were not by any means confined to the physical condition of the Indians who arrived. When one of the Selangor government officials wrote a critical report on the bad conditions under which Indian labour was required to live on Glenmarie Estate, he received a pat on the back from Swettenham: 'You have written a very proper letter to Mr Lammons [of Glenmarie]. See that he acts on it.'¹⁴

By the time Swettenham reached Perak in 1884, despite the changes he introduced in the labour legislation, there was still no real success. The 1888 Perak Annual Report shows that net arrivals of Indians in the state between 1885 and 1888 were less than 1,500 in total.¹⁵ Nor on his return in 1889, did the Straits Labour Contract Ordinance of 1882, which he adopted in Perak that year to govern the employment of ex-indentured and free labourers, have any noticeably beneficial effect.¹⁶

Increasing concern was expressed at the way in which agriculture was also being held back. In the 1889 Perak Annual Report, Swettenham noted in a tone close to desperation that the government had done all it could to encourage agriculture. The only thing left to be done was to bring in more cheap Indian labour because, as he noted, the Malays were not prepared under any circumstances to work on commercial terms. Swettenham also noted a further problem: the indentured Indian labourer was paid

substantially less than his free counterpart. This of course was further encouragement to absconding. Once again Swettenham complained about the poor physical condition of many of the indentured Indians, and concluded with the recommendation that the government should offer a free passage with no indenture to 1,000 able bodied Indians each year, who would be set to work at fair labour rates.¹⁷ The point about the difference in daily pay, between the indentured labourer, earning fourteen cents per day and the free labourer earning twice as much was given a considerable airing in the press. Moreover it was noted that wage rates in the Straits were lower than those for Indian labour in Fiji and the West Indies.¹⁸

Concern about the labour position became more acute, and on 6 October 1890, a meeting of employers of Indian immigrant labour was held in the office of the Secretary to the Government in Taiping, at which Swettenham presided. The meeting agreed that the terms of employment were fair and reasonable, and that the immigration enactment was workable. They felt it had failed due to a faulty system of recruitment, and lack of a government agent in India. They decided that they would prefer to see a system such as that in force in Demerara, British Guiana. Under this system, the government paid 1/3 and the planters 2/3 of the recruitment and passage expenses, and only the 2/3 advanced by the planter was recouped on the indenture. The government asked the planters to indent for the number of labourers they required, and then paid an agent in Calcutta to recruit. Good hospitals were provided, together with a form of ombudsman to listen to the complaints of aggrieved Indians once they had reached the estates in British Guiana. Wages were at the rate of twenty-four cents per day.¹⁹

As a result of this, a Labour Commission was appointed on 27 October 1890 under the chairmanship of Captain Cameron with Swettenham as a member, to enquire into 'the state of labour in the Straits Settlements and Protected Native States, with a view to devising a scheme for encouraging immigration and thereby supplying the demand for labour.' The remit of the Commission was wide, covering Chinese, Javanese and Indian labour. Swettenham was a prominent member of the Commission, and also gave evidence to it. The Commission's primary concern was estate labour. There was no miner on the Commission but there were four European planters and one Chinese sugar-planter.²⁰

Much of the following two months was taken up with listening to evidence to the Commission. Swettenham himself, giving evidence in Penang in early December, complained about the debilitated physique of the labourers imported to Selangor in the early 1880s. He further regretted that Perak paid \$10,000 p.a. to subsidize the Negapatam mail steamer contract. He would prefer to

see the money spent on subsidized passages. Three days later, members of the Commission boarded the steamer in from Negapatam to see for themselves the conditions on board, and found the coolies in good condition.²¹ Subsequent meetings of the commission were held throughout December and early January 1891, clashing, as far as Swettenham was concerned with his social and cricketing commitments over the Christmas period. The last sitting was held on 10 January in Selangor, and the commissioners returned to Singapore on the 16th to complete proceedings. The final document was ready by early March, although it was not published till May.²² So far as the Chinese were concerned, it concentrated on three major complaints: the poor physique and quality of coolies imported, the lack of adequate numbers, with the associated problems of crimping and desertion, and finally the excessive costs of obtaining coolies.²³

The state of affairs which it revealed was grim: earlier legislation established in 1880 had provided for government depots to receive coolies from south China. None had been established, but instead the government had licensed private depots to operate. This had led to considerable abuse. The Commission felt that the steamers transporting the coolies were well run and managed. However the privatised system of depots led to all kinds of misfeasance, best described in extracts from the Report itself.

Scenes of disorder, amounting almost to riot, sometimes occur on the arrival of cooly-ships, rowdies from the shore assaulting the Boarding Officers, boatmen, and depot-keepers, snatching ear-rings and bangles from the women passengers, and endeavouring to persuade the "unpaid" passengers to run away. To prevent a recurrence of such scenes, several of which took place in 1890, special police have been quartered near the docks, but this cannot ensure the space and quiet necessary for an effective examination.

The coolies are next marched to the various depots, guarded by employees of the depot-keepers. Once in the depot they are confined until selected by the agent of the employer, and it is this detention which forms one of the chief blots on the whole system....There are also obvious objections to the confinement of a large number of Chinese for a period which may extend to ten days within the walls of a house where they are without exercise or occupation. These are points which, if they stood alone, would call for reform, but, in our opinion, a far more serious evil...is the power which is thus placed in the hands of the depot-keepers.

Before the abolition of the Secret Societies many of the Brokers were numbered among their headmen, and thus the first real power with which the Sin-kheh [new arrival] comes in contact on landing, namely that of the depot-keeper who took charge of him was identified in his mind with one of these Societies. Though the Societies have been suppressed, the power for evil remains. While the Sin-kheh is in the depot, it is the keeper to whom he must look as his government, and it is the servants of this man who bring him from the ship, guard him in the depot, and eventually remove him to the scene of his future employment.

The power which is thus placed in the hands of the depot-keepers, who are agreed on all sides to be unscrupulous, appears to us greater than should be entrusted to private individuals, and we consider, therefore, that the system should not be perpetuated.

The Report was also critical about the manner in which European-owned estates recruited their labour. Basically everything was in the control of the headman, who acted as a contractor for the estates, both in recruiting coolies and subsequently employing them. This led to considerable abuse, which could have been greatly reduced if the estates had at least employed one or two Europeans who were conversant with the spoken Chinese dialects. Conditions on the Chinese-owned estates were even more appalling: the Assistant Protector of Chinese at Penang reported that Sin-khehs who had worked off their indenture, were kept working without being told that there were no further debts outstanding. They were more or less imprisoned on the estate, for some, when told that they were in fact free men insisted on running behind the Assistant Protector's carriage as it left the estate, 'in evident fear lest they should be again detained.' Medical and sanitary conditions were vile or non-existent.

The abuses which may arise under present conditions are innumerable and only a general investigation has been possible. We have, however, no doubt that both in European and Chinese estates, coolies are not infrequently beaten and otherwise ill-treated by their Tyndals or headmen. This is done without the knowledge of the employer, who may often be almost without power to check such practices.

As a rule the coolies are well fed so long as they are able to work, but we are not satisfied that this is the case with men who, from sickness or unfitness, become a source of expense to their employers.

It appears also that they are frequently detained long after the year has expired for which they contracted, and after they

have done more than 360 days' fair work. This is done by keeping them in debt by advances of cash or provisions, so that the cooly at the end of his year owes more than he did at the beginning.

It was, stated a press editorial, 'an impeachment of the past labour policy of the States.'²⁴ Figures produced by the Commission showed that from 1886 to 1890, Chinese immigration into Selangor fluctuated between 7,459 and 1,442 p.a., while that in Perak fluctuated between 9,653 and 1,351 p.a. The total net Chinese immigration for the two states for the years in question was 20,523 for Perak and 30,651 for Selangor. The total net Indian immigration for Perak during this period seldom exceeded 1,500 p.a.²⁵ The report made three major recommendations: government inspection to be established over Chinese coolies employed in the Colony or the Malay States; licensed depots and brokers to be abolished, subsituted by government depots in both China and the Straits; and attempts should be made to obtain the full sanction of the Chinese government to the revised arrangements. Moreover good working conditions were to be offered when labour arrived in Malaya.²⁶ Similar conclusions were drawn in respect of the Indians.

The Commissioners pointed out that there was no easy way to obtain cheap labour, but that the position would be very greatly improved if the government took steps 'to eliminate cheating, illegitimate profits, misrepresentation and every such bar to immigration: by inspection to ensure that the Straits shall offer an attractive field for labour, and to encourage by grants of land or other means our immigrant population to remain here instead of being birds of passage.' Beyond that, they felt it was up to individual employers to provide adequately attractive conditions.²⁷

Apart from the establishment in Singapore, later in 1891, of the Chinese Agricultural Labourers' Protection Ordinance, providing for inspection by Protectors, and the provision of basic facilities, little was done as a result of the report, chiefly because planting interests feared that improvements in treatment and facilities would make labour too expensive. However some steps were taken, notably by Maxwell in Selangor in 1890 to ensure that new arrivals were reasonably treated.²⁸

Other improvements took place in the 1890s, of which the most important was probably the abolition of the Discharge Ticket System at the end of 1893. Employers then ceased to have any redress against absconding coolies. Increasingly the labour employed on the mines was unindentured.²⁹ Two years later a new Labour Code was in fact introduced in Perak. It was felt to be almost too protective and the papers commented that if the provisions were strictly interpreted, it would be a major hindrance to

the state's agricultural development. At the same time in 1895, legislation was introduced in Perak for the registration of societies, following similar Straits Settlements legislation of 1889.³⁰

The remaining years of the century saw more difficulties caused by labour shortages. This produced a further Commission which reported in September 1896. Swettenham was not directly involved, but endorsed the need for more immigration of Indian labour, and for legal safeguards to be provided: estates should be subject to visits by government representatives to ensure that labour was well treated, and the government should have the right to intervene and close down any estate where the death-rate was unduly high.³¹ The report itself³² stated as its aim, 'to build up in the Malay Peninsula a great agricultural colony.'³³ Yet the fatalities due to diseases like malaria at least amongst the Chinese community, remained appalling. In Kinta it was reported, 'Dead bodies are to be found on the roads and in the jungle, as thick as blackberries.'³⁴

In his report for 1896, Swettenham reiterated the need for labour, and to persuade the Indian government to assist. He admitted that the government often stole labour brought into the country for the estates, and promised that in the current year (1897) the government would find a substantial sum of money to encourage Indian immigration.³⁵

Immediately after the 1897 Durbar, Mitchell, by then Governor, requested and was given permission to visit India, to find out the position at first hand.³⁶ Meantime there was considerable public debate in the local press about the advantages or otherwise of changes in immigration procedures. Mitchell, who had left for India on 22 December 1897, returned on 15 February 1898.³⁷ He explained to the Colonial Office that he had persuaded the Indian government to lift all restrictions on immigration. The result was the Indian Immigration Bill, which was read in the Legislative Council on 18 April 1898. It seems likely that Swettenham, back from leave the day before, attended the proceedings in Singapore.³⁸ Moreover steamers were laid on to bring Chinese immigrants direct from Chinese ports to the Malay Peninsula.³⁹

The Indian Immigration Ordinance was approved in 1898, but still labour remained inadequate. The higher the price of tin, the more the Chinese preferred to work on their own, rather than for employers.⁴⁰ The next year Swettenham was less critical of the Chinese. His scorn was reserved for the Indians, who had been offered well-paid work, food and comfortable homes, yet, 'the poor of British India seem to prefer starvation at home.'⁴¹ The position eased in 1900, when Swettenham reported increases in both Indian and Chinese immigrants.⁴² Yet by 1901, Swettenham was again

deploring the shortages of both Indian and Chinese immigrants.⁴³ The cry was re-echoed in his final report.⁴⁴

There was little sign that the basic shortages of labour, or their ill-treatment had been overcome, for in 1901 Hill was appointed Superintendent of Immigration and Protector of Labour. This was curious, for he was at that time a major estate-owner himself. The following year he visited India to assess the position, and returned suggesting that a government official should be stationed in India, or a European company be designated there to supervise the recruiters. The planters should co-operate with the government, using the government as the channel through which to recruit labour and thus reduce competition. Action was taken on this in 1904.⁴⁵

However it was not until the acute labour shortages of the late 1900s that the soaring price of rubber forced the planters to act in a very much more decisive way than they had up till then. By then, of course Swettenham's role had changed: his main retirement occupation was directorships of rubber companies. We shall see the sequel in Chapter 47.

NOTES

1. *PGG*, 1895, p. 214, quoted in Wong, 1965, op. cit., p. 96.
2. Wilfred Blythe, 1969, *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya*, pp. 249-54.
3. CO 273/117:74 ff. Gov. to Sec. State, 444 of 28 December 1882, quoted in Wong, 1965, op. cit., pp. 95-6. See also Loh, 1969, op. cit., pp. 149-50. SSF unnumbered, 16 December 1882, no longer available, quoted by P. Thiagarajan, 1953, op. cit., and Joey Yin, 'Sir Frank Swettenham — Relations with the Malay States.' Thesis, University of Singapore. See also *The Laws of Selangor*, compiled by A.B. Voules, Kuala Lumpur, 1901, p. 397. The text of the proclamation of 31 October 1882 is in SSF Lands 4784/91.
4. Blythe, 1969, op. cit., quoting M.L. Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, 1941.
5. Blythe, 1969, op. cit., p. 259.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *PGG*, 1888, pp. 94-5 quoted in Wong, 1965, op. cit., pp. 96-7, 106-7. The text of the Second Proclamation on Labour in Selangor, dated June 1888 is given in SSF Lands Misc. 4784/91.
8. HC 6858:17, PAR 1893-1894, *PGG*, 1891 p. 377 and 1894, p. 355, quoted in Wong, 1965, op. cit., p. 97.
9. See for example SSF 133/83.
10. SSF 351/83 and KL 3314/88.
11. See *Administration in the Federated Malay States*, Jagjit Singh Sidhu, OUP, Kuala Lumpur, 1980, pp. 12-3.
12. SSF KL 2408/88 and KL 2457/88, PPC 5884:52 and 68, SAR 1888. *STD*, 19 March 1889.

13. *PGG* quoted in *SFP*, 6 August 1890.
14. SSF Imm. 273/89.
15. HC 5884:20, PAR 1888.
16. Wong, 1965, op. cit., p. 73.
17. HC 6222:24, PAR 1889.
18. See for example *STD*, 14 and 20 October 1890.
19. *STD*, 10 October 1890 and 10 January 1891.
20. 'Historical Sketch of Chinese Labour in Malaya,' W.L. Blythe, 1947. *JMBRAS*, 20 (1):64-114. *STD*, 22 January 1891. Captain Maurice A. Cameron had been Colonial Engineer and Surveyor in Penang. He subsequently became Acting Colonial Engineer and Surveyor-General of the Straits Settlements. His papers are in Royal Commonwealth Society Library now in Cambridge. The Labour Commission Report (1890) is to be found in Singapore National Archives, MF 5642.
21. *STD*, 5 and 8 December 1890.
22. *STD*, 9 March and 9 May 1891.
23. Blythe, 1969, op. cit., p. 77.
24. *STD*, 11 May 1891.
25. Blythe, 1969, op. cit., p. 83.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
28. Sidhu, 1980, op. cit., p. 14 and Blythe, 1969, op. cit., pp. 91-2.
29. HC 7546:17, PAR 1893 and *STD*, 30 November 1893 quoting *PGG*, 24 November 1893.
30. *PGG*, 24 November 1893 and *PGSC*, 24 June 1895, quoting an article in the *London & China Express*. See also HC 8257:20.
31. CO 273/217:50 ff. Mitchell to CO, Emi., of 1 September 1896. Swettenham personally stressed the need for free immigration of labour in CO 273/226:481 in his letter of 20 August 1896 enclosed in Mitchell to CO, Emi. of 10 August 1897, with voluminous additional correspondence.
32. CO 273/217:79 ff. Mitchell to CO, Emi., 1 September 1896.
33. See *STD*, 3 July 1896 for a summary of the report and *SFP*, 2 July 1896. See also PSSLC 1896, C.219. No.27 of 2 July 1896.
34. *SFP*, 31 July 1896.
35. HC 8661:7 FMS AR, 1896, RG's Report, para. 14. \$30,000 was voted for the introduction of Indian Immigrants: see HC 9108:7 FMS AR 1897, RG's Report, para. 11. Little advantage was taken of this.
36. CO 273/226:417 Mitchell to CO, Emi. of 10 August 1897.
37. CO 273/235:170 Mitchell to CO, 40 of 17 February 1898 and CO 273/235:20 ff. Mitchell to CO, 25 February 1898.
38. *STD*, 19 April 1898.
39. HC 9108:7 FMS AR 1897, RG's Report, para. 11.
40. HC 9524:7 FMS AR 1898, RG's Report para. 7.
41. HC 382:5 FMS AR 1899, RG's Report para. 7.
42. HC 815:4 FMS AR 1900, Ag. HC's Report, para. 11.
43. HC 1297: 4-5 FMS AR 1901, HC's Report, para. 6.
44. HC 1819:4 FMS AR 1902, HC's Report, para. 3.
45. Sidhu, 1980, op. cit., p. 14.

Perak: 1884 - 1886

Swettenham took over from Sir Hugh Low in Kuala Kangsar as Acting Resident towards the end of March 1884.¹ Low was accompanied on leave by Raja Idris and Raja Mansur, the latter being the eldest son of the banished Sultan Abdullah.² Although it had been suggested by Weld that Swettenham be put on full pay in Perak, London disagreed and overruled him. It was not until the following year that Swettenham achieved this increase in salary which he so eagerly sought. A further appeal was required in 1885, again supported by Weld, to achieve the desired result: a salary of \$6,480 p.a. and an entertainment allowance of \$1,000 p.a.³ Weld continued to write well of him:

An excellent office man and master of routine by a not very usual combination he is at the same time possessed of the highest administrative ability, and neither difficulties, personal loss, inconvenience of health or personal danger has ever in the slightest degree been regarded by him when the interests of Her Majesty's service have been concerned.⁴

Swettenham moved into Low's office in the modest wooden Residency building in Kuala Kangsar, where his old ally Che Mida had lived. He described it by moonlight in one of his short stories.⁵ The house had thoughtfully been repainted by Low for Swettenham's arrival. The Chinese contractor who undertook the work had seen fit to paint, *in situ*, the pith helmet hanging on one of the walls. Swettenham, wishing to try out his pistol, took a pot-shot at the hat, and was almost hit by the bullet which ricocheted back onto the wall behind him. The incident gives an idea of the pioneer flavour of those days.⁶

One of the first items of correspondence he had to deal with involved the audit of the accounts of the Protected States. This had been suggested by Singapore, not unreasonably, in view of the fact that Swettenham had undertaken the job until recently. However he now bridled at the suggestion of interference from the Straits Settlements, quoting a recent remark of Weld, that the Native States 'are under the control of the Straits Settlements Governor, not of the

Straits Settlements Government.' When the matter was raised again a few months later, Swettenham thought that the complexity of the Perak accounts was such that a Straits Settlements-appointed auditor would not do them justice.⁷ Now firmly in the saddle as Resident, Swettenham was realizing how convenient it was to be free of Straits Settlements supervision.

A degree of autonomy from Straits scrutiny sometimes suited the Colonial Office as well. There was discussion at this time about a government note issue. Opinion in Singapore was hostile to this. As a result consideration was being given to the setting up of a government-sponsored bank in Perak and Selangor, with exclusive privileges of note issue. Swettenham, as may well be imagined, was vociferous in his support for this scheme. It was apparently the threat of a government-backed bank which eventually induced the Hongkong & Shanghai Bank and the Chartered Bank to open offices in Perak and Selangor.⁸

A further incident at this time involved his brother, J.A. Swettenham, who, as we noted, paid an official visit from Colombo in 1883.⁹ Towards the end of that year, while Swettenham was in India, Weld wrote to him suggesting that his brother, with extensive experience of a Crown Colony, be brought in to help out with administrative arrangements. Swettenham in his reply warmly supported this proposal, on the grounds that it would give the Resident more time to travel round the state, avoid the need to turn away petitioners, and, significantly, encourage uniformity in the development of administrative practices within the state. The matter was revived towards the end of 1884, when it was suggested that J.A. Swettenham be appointed an official secretary to the Resident in Perak. Swettenham again supported the idea with enthusiasm, and for a time it seemed likely that J.A. Swettenham would be transferred. Eventually in 1885, Lord Derby from the Colonial Office informed Singapore that the appointment would not be possible. J.A. Swettenham was finally appointed Colonial Secretary in Singapore, ten years later, under rather different circumstances. It seems possible that this earlier episode may also have been in response to the feeling that young Swettenham might, in Kimberley's words, 'drive the coach a little too fast.'¹⁰

Swettenham immediately threw himself into the business of administration in Perak. He appears to have been kept hard at work at his desk for the following five months. His hard work was interspersed with occasional visits to the Cottage, a holiday bungalow commenced that year under his supervision, some 4,500 feet above sea-level in the hills above Taiping.¹¹ More frequently in his first year in Perak he visited the Hermitage bungalow, 3,260 feet above sea-level on Gunong Arang Para, in the Bubu Range of

hills between Taiping and Kuala Kangsar. He spent a few days there in April 1884, with an Italian prospector, Bozzolo, and together they spotted, in exceptionally clear light, a new mountain, duly written up in the *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*.¹² Bozzolo subsequently joined the government service, and served for many years as District Officer in Upper Perak. It seems likely that his appointment was directly connected with his meeting with Swettenham on this occasion.

It is from this period in his career that most of Swettenham's watercolours and sketches can be dated.¹³ They show a skill above average, and an acute awareness of topography. This was particularly important for someone who was so passionately devoted to building roads and railways. In his use of colour, particularly in the sky and sunset scenes there is evidence of the influence of the Turner School of English landscape painting. From the subject matter of the paintings it is evident that Swettenham preferred landscapes to figures. The paintings which survive contain two exceptions: both untitled portraits of ladies from around this period, possibly painted from photographs. It is possible that one of these may be his wife, Sydney.¹⁴ The identification is not inconsistent with the petite, good-looking young woman that she was known to have been. Amongst his many other preoccupations, he also found time to produce a second edition of his *English-Malay Vocabulary*, printed on this occasion in London.

The development work concentrated as always on roads, railways and the provision of government buildings. The period when Swettenham was Acting Resident in Perak marked the gradual shift of the centre of British administration from Kuala Kangsar, to Taiping, twenty-three miles away. The move was apparently in response to the malarious climate of Kuala Kangsar.¹⁵ The headquarters of the state administrative departments had however always been in Taiping, in the charge of an Assistant Resident. The Resident also had an establishment there. It seems likely that during Swettenham's period of service, a new house was constructed for him, Drummonds Hill Bungalow, built apparently by a grateful, or perhaps still hopeful Drummond of Shanghai for Swettenham.¹⁶

However by early September he found it necessary to pay a visit to Lower Perak, which was subsequently reported in dry official prose:

It being imperatively necessary to visit Kuala Slim on the Bernam River, I left Kuala Kangsar in the beginning of September and returned to headquarters after an absence of 30 days. In that time I went down the Perak River to Teluk Anson, visiting all the important riverine villages on the way, inspected the works in progress at the post and then proceeded

up the Bidos (Bidor) and Songkei Rivers to Tiang Betara. The rest of the journey was performed on foot over jungle paths (except a few miles on elephants and on horseback in the Kinta district), and convinced me of the necessity of constructing the trunk road. Leaving Tiang Betara, the principal places en route were Kuala Slim, (a station it was then decided to abandon) Ulu Bernam, Songkok, Kuala Lipis, Tapa, Chendariang, Kota Bharu, Batu Gajah, Papan, Lahat, Ipoh, Tanjong Rengkong, Kunding, Chemor and Salak — about 200 miles by land and 150 by water.¹⁷

He had by this time appointed as his private secretary, Martin Lister, who accompanied him throughout the trip. At various times in the course of their visit they stayed with or were joined by Hewitt and the young Hugh Clifford.¹⁸

The expedition was also celebrated, in a much lighter vein, by some forty stanzas in a crude pastiche of Lord Macaulay's 'Lars Porsena:'

The Resident of Perak
By Gods and Demons swore
That he would make a journey
In September '84.¹⁹

The lines themselves are unmemorable, but they provide an interesting and light-hearted picture of the administration of the time by young men of energy and enthusiasm: the dogs belonging to the revenue farmer have savaged the sheep in the flock introduced by the government, and now that the two keenest shots are out of town, there will be no disturbance for the wild teal at Sayong. Along the course of the Perak River, miscreant penghulus, still capable of the occasional squeeze, find excuses to disappear on the approach of the Resident while the villagers flock to his boat to make their complaints.

On their way up the Sungkai River, Clifford was charged by an elephant, and fled, panic-stricken, till he was tripped up by the roots of the trees, to the great amusement of his companions. At Lahat they were entertained by St Pol Lias, the French miner in charge of the Mines d'Etain de Perak. The journey northwards from Songkei had been exhausting, to all in the party, especially Swettenham:

But the Tuan's face was sad
And the Tuan's voice was low
And he asked them for a B. & S.
And not to be too slow.²⁰

From there they went on to Ipoh, where the account of their stay indicates clearly that an enjoyable time was had by all, hosts and hostesses included:

There followed feast and revel
Melenggo on the floor,
Melenggo led by Che Mat Nuh,
Who wedded his Malayan Ruth
Despite her age, his early youth,
And great Mahomed's law.²¹

There follow references to a Malay picnic party on the Sungei Raya, due east of Ipoh. Malay picnics appealed to Swettenham's aesthetic sense, and enjoyment, for he wrote about them in 'Menggelunchor' (sliding down a waterfall), and was present with Sultan Idris at the grand picnic party laid on for the visitors to the Durbar in 1897.²² It seems likely that Swettenham composed the pastiche, for it is noticeably reticent on his own escapades, and in a light-hearted way revels in the misfortunes and indiscretions of his colleagues, Lister and Clifford. Indeed, the level of indiscretion disclosed may well explain why no other copies of this printed work have come to light. There may also have been a more secret side to the journey, for it seems possible that the visit coincided arrangements which needed to be made in respect of Swettenham's earlier misdemeanour.²³

Glimpses of the social life of the small European community in Perak at the time are few and far between. However G. Templer Tickell, a Burma-born surveyor and engineer in his reminiscences many years later, gave some idea of the frontier atmosphere of those early days.²⁴ Tickell, short of cash from a spell in New Guinea, arrived at Matang by boat from Penang in October 1884, having been recruited by C.V. Creagh, the Assistant Resident. Before embarking on rowdy tales of drinking parties, he gave this account of what he found:

Matang appeared to consist of a few trees and a large police station, but I was impressed by the fine metalled road to Taiping, (as it was then spelt) and awed by the vigorous military salutes of the Perak Armed Police, dotted along the road and streets at frequent intervals. The fine broad streets, shaded with handsome trees, shedding scented golden blossoms all day, were thronged with gaily-apparelled Orientals, and the busy brick shops betokened a well-to-do community in this little town at the foot of the densely wooded Taiping hills.²⁵

Shortly after taking up his job in Taiping, Tickell was posted to Kuala Kangsar, to meet up with his old school friend, Martin Lister, Swettenham's secretary. On the way to Kuala Kangsar, Tickell noted the Ceylon Pioneers, working under H. Ward to metal the road over the Pass:

Kuala Kangsar then consisted of the Police Station at the corner of the Kangsar River bridge, and leading up the rise to the Court House, Land and Post Offices, thence to the Residency on top of the hill. Behind the Residency, Messrs Lister and Clifford, and Inspector Buswell, occupied two wooden houses.... In the little town itself a dozen little one-storey brick shops failed to let as such.... Opposite these a row of double-storey brick shops, half completed but none occupied, were being built. The bulk of the town "shops" were rickety atap sheds, behind the brick shops towards the river, mostly occupied by Arabs and Malays engaged in the river traffic.²⁶

Tickell observed the great flood at the end of 1885, and was later responsible, in conjunction with Swettenham, for the layout of Kuala Kangsar after the floods. It was, he revealed, Swettenham who decided that all roads should be named 'jalan'. Swettenham had gone to Perak alone, Sydney being then in England. Again, the timing may have been significant. If it was necessary to cover up an earlier misdemeanour, it was best that this problem should be resolved while Sydney was safely out of the country. Such minor embarrassments settled, she came out to rejoin him there in November 1884. Swettenham himself went down to Singapore to meet her off the boat.²⁷ The almost complete lack of references to Sydney after her return suggests that her social life was minimal.

If Swettenham's expatriate colleagues at this time were in general congenial, the same could scarcely be said of the Regent, Yusof. His unpopularity had, as we have seen, caused him twice to be bypassed in the succession to the Perak throne. Yet he realized that he owed his position entirely to the British. Although Yusof was difficult, obstinate and occasionally flamboyant in dress, Low and Swettenham were able to deal with him.²⁸ By the time Swettenham took over in 1884, Yusof was growing old, and indeed nearly died during Swettenham's period in the state: an episode recounted by Swettenham in some detail. Swettenham no doubt endorsed the advice from Hugh Low, on his return from leave, that Yusof be elevated from Regent to Sultan: a distinction he was to enjoy only for a few months before his death.²⁹

The visit of the Acting Governor, Smith in February 1885 to inspect the progress of the Perak Railway from Port Weld to Taiping no doubt loomed large in Swettenham's calendar. After inspecting the railway,³⁰ the remainder of the visit was taken up by official visits, an inspection of the Perak Sikhs, immaculately paraded by Major Walker for the occasion, tent-pegging, parties and an expedition to Kuala Kangsar, in which Sydney Swettenham, emerging briefly from the shadows, also participated.³¹ In general,

the visit proved successful, and Raja Idris, whom Smith met in Kuala Kangsar was so pleased 'that he voluntarily expressed the opinion that the other Malay states, especially Pahang, should not delay in asking for a Resident.'³²

Much of April and May in 1885 were taken up with Swettenham's very substantial Pahang expedition.³³ By July however, scarcely more than fifteen months after Swettenham assumed his post in Perak, the effect of his work was beginning to be felt. On the occasion of a Muslim New Year feast, at the Court House in Kuala Kangsar, with the Malay chiefs present, Raja Idris back from his visit to London and speaking on behalf of the chiefs, said how much they appreciated British administration. It is of course possible that Raja Idris, who was responsible for this initiative in praising Swettenham had an eye to the possible succession on the death of the ageing Yusof. Swettenham's support would be important at that moment. Swettenham, reporting this to Smith, remarked that such a gesture was unusual for Malays.³⁴

Smith, in his covering letter to Colonel Stanley, the Colonial Secretary, added:

Mr Swettenham has not unnaturally abstained from mentioning the laudatory remarks personal to himself which were made by Raja Idris and the Regent, but it is right I should state my belief that the ability and distinction with which he has discharged the duties of Acting Resident during the past sixteen months have been mainly instrumental in evoking so unprecedented an outburst of native feeling in connection with the Government of the country.³⁵

Around that same time, Swettenham submitted his Annual Report for Perak for 1884. Smith, forwarding it to Lord Derby in London, commented favourably: 'I consider the Government of Perak has been most ably carried on by Mr Swettenham, who has unremittingly devoted his whole time and powers to its service, and whose official training, which has developed high administrative qualifications, has proved of marked advantage in dealing with the system of Government in its varied phases in a new country.'³⁶ The press however saw in it the shadow of future criticisms, which were to become so strident in the early 1890s: 'The Resident is very much of an autocrat in his mode of governing.'³⁷

Autumn saw an official visit to Perak by the young Sultan of Kedah, one of Tunku Kudin's nephews,³⁸ and, towards the end of the year, serious floods in Kuala Kangsar. Clifford, hurrying at Swettenham's request to join him in Kuala Kangsar, to prepare for a trip to Singapore over Christmas, recorded how he found all the shopkeepers camping out on their roofs to avoid the flood-waters.³⁹ Clifford's reference indicates that Swettenham spent Christmas of

1885 in Singapore, conferring with Weld on the latter's return from leave. Apparently Pahang was the main subject under discussion, in view of the fact that Clifford, who was shortly to be sent there, was one of the party. Swettenham returned briefly to Perak to hand over to Low who had returned from leave in early January, spent three weeks in Selangor and then retraced his steps to Singapore before departing with his wife on leave on 8 February 1886.⁴⁰ From a comment made subsequently by Low, it appears that Swettenham's departure on leave at the end of such an exhausting stint of work was accompanied by signs of an impending breakdown in his health.⁴¹

Now the plaudits began to roll in. Swettenham left Kuala Kangsar on 11 January 1886 with a glowing letter from Low. 'I beg to be permitted to express to you how much in my opinion the State of Perak is indebted to you for the manner in which you have advised this Government and conducted its affairs during the 22 months you have acted in my place.' Low enumerated Swettenham's achievements: the opening of the eight-mile railway, extensive public buildings at Taiping, commodious residences for the chief officers of government and a large new market. He praised the improvements in the designs, the construction of the works and the reduction in cost compared to earlier years. The roads in Larut were in good condition,

and the Pass leading into the valley of the Perak River will form a beautiful and lasting memento of the ability and boldness which induced you to conceive and undertake (for Perak) so difficult and costly though necessary a work. At Kuala Kangsar, the town is of your creation, the foundations of its oldest buildings not having been laid two years ago, it is now a well-built town progressing quite as fast as did Thaipeng [Taiping]...

I cannot therefore but congratulate you on the success of your administration, and it will be a great pleasure to me to bring to the notice of His Excellency, Sir F.A. Weld who appointed you to the duties, the brilliant way in which you have carried out His Excellency's wishes, and the exceptional success of your administration.⁴²

Never one to hide his light under a bushel, Swettenham faithfully reproduced the letter in its entirety many years later.⁴³ Low continued in the same vein in his 1885 annual report on Perak: 'The architectural pretensions of all the buildings undertaken by the advice of Mr Swettenham shows a very great improvement in taste on those which were erected in the preceding years, and many ... are equal in beauty of design and excellence of workmanship to anything to be found in any older colony.' Low charitably drew

attention to the fact that Swettenham had planned the museum, by then under construction in Taiping. It seems likely that this was in response to Low's specific instructions before he went on leave. Swettenham was not particularly interested in fauna and flora, beyond that which could be shot. Low on the other hand was a keen naturalist. Yet Swettenham in time came to take some pride in the museum at Taiping, for years later as Resident-General he strongly discouraged the development of a museum in Kuala Lumpur, on the grounds that the one in Taiping sufficed for the FMS.⁴⁴ The museum at Taiping was to become for many years, the outstanding institution of its kind in the Malay States, attracting some of the most distinguished naturalists of the late nineteenth century in South East Asia. The opportunity was also taken at this time to level and drain an area of old tin mines at Taiping, with a view to turning it into what is now the Taiping Lake Gardens.⁴⁵

Low concluded his annual report with a typically generous tribute to Swettenham:

I cannot conclude this report without recording the very great care and able manner in which Mr F.A. Swettenham exercised the function of Resident adviser to this Government, while I was absent in England for nearly two years. Although during that time he carried on more extensive works than had ever been undertaken, he left the financial position of the state in a better position by the sum of 302,353.86 dollars than it was on 1st January 1884. As he had not the assistance of a trained secretary, I can fully understand the amount of work which pressed upon him, and which prevented him from visiting all parts of the state: it was only possible to carry on the duties with the success which attended his efforts in consequence of his previous knowledge of the country and the people, and it is not to be wondered at, though much to be regretted, that his health at last broke down, and he was obliged to go to England.

Personally I am under the greatest obligations to Mr Swettenham; he has provided commodious residences for the chief European officers of the state, instead of the tumble-down wood and attap houses he found here, and he has made the administration much easier for his successors by the regulations on various subjects which he drew up and caused to be drawn up during his tenure of office, and the order which he successfully introduced in every department.⁴⁶

It was an impressive testimony to two years' hard work, and it is easy to believe that the energy with which Swettenham threw himself into the development of the state was enhanced by the

unhappy domestic atmosphere. Of real relaxation at this period there can have been little, except such as his painting afforded.

Weld, still suffering painfully from gout, visited Perak soon after to see for himself the progress achieved, and was fully satisfied. Low's glowing reports including his recommendation that Swettenham be given 'some mark of favour' for his achievements, were forwarded to London, and Meade, in the Colonial Office minuted of Swettenham: 'I think he ought at the birthday to be considered for a CMG.' Herbert however was less sure: 'Yes, among the many others with strong, or strongly commended claims.'⁴⁷

However there were moments of criticism as well as praise. In 1885 Weld reported that the Native States were anxious to give him a personal allowance, direct, thus bypassing the scrutiny of the Legislative Council. Correspondence on this matter led de Robeck to minute testily: 'I suspect as far as opposition comes from the Native States, it comes from Mr Swettenham, who is Resident of Selangor and Acting Resident of Perak. Selangor left to itself I am sure would do anything we might suggest.'⁴⁸

Swettenham's earlier efforts in planning for Selangor did not go unnoticed. In March 1886, Weld paid a visit to Kuala Lumpur, and reported back to Colonel Stanley in the Colonial Office:

I travelled on a trolley from Batu Tigah for about four miles, propelled by coolies ... [In Kuala Lumpur] on all sides signs of progress and prosperity are evident. My selection of Mr Rodger to act for Mr Swettenham was a fortunate one. He has ably continued what Mr Swettenham so successfully began, and Mr Swettenham has expressed unqualified approbation of the administration of his *locum tenens*, who will continue to act in his absence on leave.⁴⁹

NOTES

1. *STD*, 8 March 1884.
2. PPC 4958:31, PAR 1884.
3. CO 273/126:360 ff. Weld to Sec. State, 75 of 5 March 1884.
4. CO 273/136:226 ff. Gov. to Sec. State, 442 of 26 November 1885.
5. *Also & Perhaps*: 'Death's Devotion,' p. 122.
6. *Footprints*, p. 87.
7. CO 273/130:60 ff. Swettenham's comments dd. 28 May 1884 and 28 July 1884 in Gov. to CO, 446 of 4 October 1884.
8. W. Evan Nelson, 1983, 'The Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation Factor in the Progress Towards a Straits Government Note Issue, 1881-1889' quoting the Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation Board Minutes for 21 February 1884 in F.H.N. King (ed.), *Essays in the History of the Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation*, Athlone Press, London, 1983.

9. See Chapter 17.
10. See CO 273/130:251 ff. Smith to Lucas (private), 3 November 1884, enclosed in Smith to Derby, 486 of 3 November 1884, including Swettenham's comments. 20 October 1884, Derby to Weld 23 May 1885. See also CO 426/8:1 Letter from Weld on appointment of J.A. Swettenham, 8 January 1884. The post of Secretary to the Government, Perak, eventually created in 1888, brought in W.H. Treacher, who was to be closely associated with Swettenham over the following fifteen years.
11. HC 5566:10, PAR 1886. For a summary of the various houses in the hills behind Taiping, see *TOM*, 31 August 1906.
12. 'New Mountain seen in Perak,' by F.A. Swettenham, *JSBRAS*, 12:286-7, December 1883. The fact that the sighting was dated 21 April 1884 indicates that this issue could not have been published before April 1884.
13. For a full account and reproduction of Swettenham's paintings, see Lim Chong Keat and Henry Barlow, 1988, *Frank Swettenham and George Giles: Watercolours and Sketches of Malaya, 1880-1894*, Pertubuhan Malaysia British.
14. Lim and Barlow, 1988, op. cit., illustration on p. 111, Plate 83.
15. M. Watson, *The Prevention of Malaria in the Federated Malay States*, 2nd ed., London, 1920.
16. *PP*, 12 May 1897 records the demolition of this bungalow. See also E. Sadka, 1968, op. cit., p. 197, and Chapter 20 for details of Drummond.
17. HC 4958:30, PAR 1884.
18. Hugh Clifford had arrived in Singapore towards the end of August 1883: *STD*, 22 September 1883. He was posted to Perak, where Swettenham found him in 1884. The two men developed a considerable admiration for each other. For Hewett, see HC 4958: 28.
19. 'Translation of an Ancient Malay Heroic Poem, A.H.56,' SP 12/123 gives the full text, together with annotations, possibly by the second Lady Swettenham: see Chapter 49.
20. B & S: brandy and soda.
21. *Melenggo*: to sit at ease on the floor. Che Mat Nuh may refer to Hugh Clifford.
22. *Malay Sketches*: 'Menggellunchor,' pp. 211-26, and 'A Fishing Picnic,' pp. 19-24. See also Chapter 33.
23. See Chapters 17, 24 and 31.
24. See articles by G. Templer Tickell in *BM*, March 1927:317-20, June 1927: 67-70, October 1927:155-8, November 1927:175-8. October 1928:156-8, November 1928:183-5, December 1928:209-11, January 1929:235-6.
25. *BM*, March 1927:317.
26. *BM*, July 1927:68.
27. *STD*, 30 October, 10 and 20 November 1884.
28. See Gullick, 1987b, esp. notes on pp. 44-5 for an account of Yusof, not without humour and some sympathy.
29. For Swettenham's account of Yusof's illness, see *Malay Sketches*: 'Berhantu,' pp. 147-60, and the next story, 'The Kings Way,' pp. 161-78, for sporadic references. This appears to have been the only occasion when Clifford, who was also present, gave an account of the same incident, in *Malayan*

- Monochromes*: 'The Familiar Spirit,' pp. 62-80. See Chapter 48 for a comparison of the writings of these two men.
30. See Chapter 26 for serious problems with the wharf at Port Weld.
 31. *STD*, 23 February 1885.
 32. HC 4958:4 Smith to Derby, 72 of 23 February 1885 and CO 273/133: 235 ff.
 33. See Chapter 23.
 34. CO 273/135:85 Swettenham to Smith, 16 July 1885, in Smith to CO, 298 of 31 July 1885.
 35. *Ibid*.
 36. HC 4958:6 Smith to Derby, 72 of 23 February 1885.
 37. *STD*, 5 June 1895.
 38. CO 273/136:91 ff. OAG to CO, 416 of 29 October 1885, and CO 426/8:123 Letter of 30 November 1885.
 39. See Clifford, 1926, *In Days That Are Dead*: 'In the Rushing of Many Waters.'
 40. *STD*, 3 and 9 February 1886, and CO 273/139:191 ff. Gov. to CO, 53 of 5 February 1886.
 41. HC 4958:75 ff., PAR 1885.
 42. CO 273/139:191 ff. Gov. to CO, 53 of 5 February 1886.
 43. *Footprints*, p. 88.
 44. *SJ* 5:215 and *PP*, 27 March 1897.
 45. HC 4958:14, PAR 1884.
 46. HC 4958:75 ff. PAR 1885.
 47. CO 426/9:8 Letter of 9 March 1886.
 48. CO 273/136:336-9 de Robeck's minute of 23 December 1885 on cable from Weld to Sec. of State, 22 December 1885.
 49. HC 4958:64-5 Weld to Stanley, 15 March 1886.

Pahang

Wan Ahmad, by a series of manœuvres and conquest had made himself the ruler of Pahang, with the title of Bendahara in 1863. Despite continued allegations of ill health he was to live till 1914. In 1881 he was proclaimed Sultan by his chiefs, although this title was not recognized by the British till 1886.¹

The Bendaharas of Pahang had traditionally derived their powers from the ancient Johore Sultanate. Although nominally representatives of the Johore sultans, they were effectively independent rulers. On occasion there had indeed been disputes between Abu Bakar of Johore and Wan Ahmad of Pahang, in which the British had taken an interest. Thus in 1862, under the Treaty of Pahang, Abu Bakar agreed to refer any disputes between the two States to the British Government. The terms of this treaty had been invoked over a boundary dispute between the two states in 1868. It was partly therefore this traditional association between the states which caused the Maharaja of Johore to take a keen interest in the affairs of his neighbour. Moreover the Maharaja of Johore had married a niece of Wan Ahmad.

Swettenham's career up till 1885 had on various occasions, which have already been noted, taken him to Pahang. He was therefore better placed than most to pass judgement on its ruler, whom he described many years later in the following terms: 'The Ruler, the Sultan of Pahang, was unkindly described as the wickedest man in Asia. It was a description which tripped easily off the tongues of those who only knew Sultan Ahmad by rumour. He had his faults, some of them serious, but I knew him and liked him.'²

When Weld reached Singapore in 1880, he rapidly became aware of the imminent arrival of Wan Ahmad, who had been staying with the Maharaja of Johore. He arrived from Johore on the *Pluto*, accompanied by Swettenham.³ Weld had written to London for advice on how the matter should be handled.⁴ Kimberley at the Colonial Office in a succinct expression of the forward movement replied: 'Her Majesty's Government would view with satisfaction

that the intercourse between the Straits Government and the Malay States should assume a character of more intimate friendship.' He went on to warn that no precipitate steps should be taken without clearance from London.⁵ On this, and on a subsequent visit, it fell to Swettenham to act as Wan Ahmad's liaison with the Singapore authorities. It seems likely that Wan Ahmad was in close touch with, if not living near the premises of Swettenham's former teacher, Munshi Mohamed Said, whose house, as we have seen, was a centre for senior Malays visiting from the Peninsula.

When Wan Ahmad returned for a second visit to Singapore in November 1881, having proclaimed himself Sultan by September 1881, Weld suggested, in an interview with Swettenham interpreting, a treaty between Pahang and Britain, to include a clause settling the succession, in favour of the Sultan's eldest son, Tunku Mahmud. The Sultan, not for the last time, took refuge by saying he would have to consult his chiefs. However he conveyed to Weld the impression that he was not ill-disposed to the idea of a closer association with Britain.⁶ Heartened by these good omens, Weld arranged for the Sultan to be presented to the Royal Princes, Albert Victor and George of Wales, when they paid an official visit to Singapore in mid-January 1882.⁷ It is likely that Swettenham was also present on this occasion.

Weld pressed for a return visit to Pahang, but was rebuffed. He then began to look for an excuse to intervene. The first pretext was a case involving an Arab, who was a British subject, accused of intriguing with a woman in the Sultan's household in Pahang. The Arab was subsequently tortured there, and then, according to rumour, poisoned in Johore. An investigation on behalf of a British subject would form an excellent opportunity for embarrassing the rulers of both states. Eventually however Weld decided not to intervene on this issue.⁸ At the same time the Sultan's visits to Singapore had stimulated considerable commercial interest in the state. It was rumoured that the Maharaja of Johore was attempting to acquire concessions in Pahang, and it was established that the Sultan was granting enormous leases of state land on the vaguest terms, to disreputable foreigners, regardless of the rights of local residents.⁹ The Maharaja of Johore was reported as having requested concessions in Raub, Pahang in mid-1885. 'It is of great political importance that he should neither obtain nor be mixed up with concessions in Pahang,' minuted the Colonial Office.¹⁰ Finally there was increasing apprehension in Singapore over possible attempts by the European powers, especially France and Germany, following the foreign concessionaires to establish a toehold in the state.



38. Kuala Lumpur, early 1880s.



39. The old Residency, Kuala Lumpur, ca. 1883.



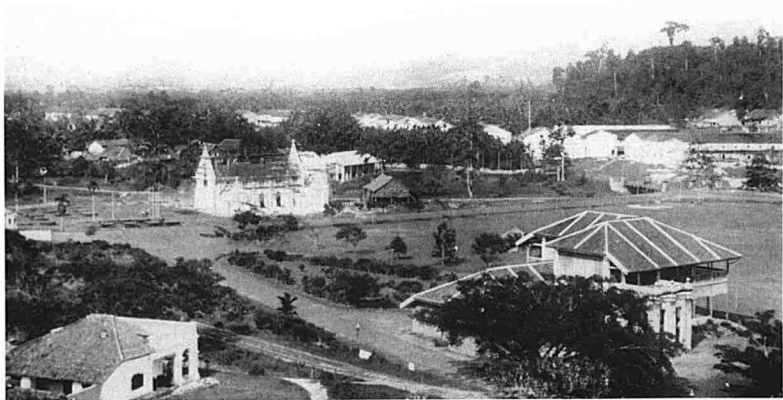
40. Frank Swettenham,
about 1884.

41. Tunku Kudin
of Kedah.





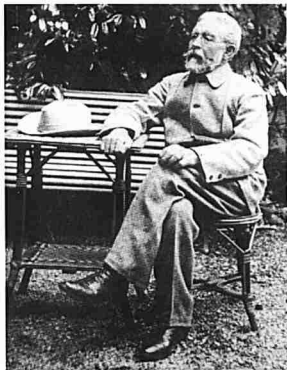
42. Looking across the Klang River to the padang (now Merdeka Square) to the Selangor Club at the foot of Bukit Aman. On the top of the hill, the old government offices.



43. Looking across the padang from behind the Selangor Club, St. Mary's Church (now Cathedral) is seen nearing completion, the roof unfinished. mid-left. 1894.



44. The bridge over the river at Kuala Lumpur, 1889. Photo by A.W. Bean.



45. W.A. Pickering,
Protector of Chinese.

46. Sir William
Maxwell.





47. Sir Hugh Low, Sultan Idris of Perak, with Hugh Clifford standing in white hat.

In 1884 a suitable opportunity appeared to present itself, in the form of a disaffected brother of the Sultan, Wan Mansur. He was dissatisfied not only with the succession arrangements but more immediately with the small allowance he received from the Sultan. When he was prevented by the British from using Ulu Selangor as a base for hostile operations, he moved to Perak. Here once again he was stopped by Swettenham and then summoned back to Singapore by Smith.¹¹

It has been suggested that the British reaction to Wan Mansur's activities was so half-hearted that the Singapore government must have been using him as a stalking horse, to frighten the Sultan into coming to terms with the British. There may be some truth in this; and if there is, the British authorities were at least partly successful, for the Sultan soon opened negotiations for British arbitration, under which it was agreed that Wan Mansur would be recognized as heir apparent, and resume his duties in Pahang on an allowance of \$200 per month.¹² Wan Mansur was dispatched to Pekan from Singapore on a government steamer in May 1885, with a view to meeting there Swettenham, who had set off some weeks earlier to cross the main range into Pahang from Perak. Swettenham was in no doubt that his objective was 'to get its ruler into the fold, a position he was not at all eager to occupy; for he had never known control of any kind.'¹³

In his official report Swettenham indicated that he had been authorized by Smith to 'accept a pressing invitation from the Bendahara of Pahang to pay him a visit.' There is no indication that an invitation existed, let alone a pressing one.¹⁴ At this stage, the British had refused to recognize Wan Ahmad as Sultan. To them, he was still the Bendahara. The expedition was to go up the Slim River, as far as possible by boat, then walk on over the main range, picking up the Lipis River on the other side, and continuing down to Pekan. The logistics were formidable:

For such a journey as I contemplated — long in distance, arduous, climbing through primeval forest in the ascent, and the same going down the other side of the range till we reached a navigable stream — it was necessary to take a large party to carry luggage and supplies. As companions I had Martin Lister, Captain G.E. Giles, an officer seconded for service with the Perak Sikhs, and Wan Muhammed Saleh, a young and highly intelligent Malay who later succeeded his father as Dato Sri Adika Raja, one of the four great Officers of State. There was also a guard of a few Sikhs and two guides; altogether we must have numbered two hundred. I had chosen Giles, not only because he was six-foot-four in height and very good company, but he was a gifted

draughtsman with the knack of catching natives of any nationality, and under any circumstances, and transferring what he saw to paper. He made a number of interesting drawings illustrating our progress...¹⁵

Lister and Wan Muhammed Saleh we have already encountered.¹⁶ Giles, who by all accounts did not greatly distinguish himself with the Perak Sikhs, left shortly afterwards for South Africa. In terms of exploration the expedition was successful: Swettenham wrote up a diary of the trip, published later that year.¹⁷ Both he and Captain Giles did extensive painting and sketching work. Many of the pictures can with the help of the diary be dated to the exact day. It is interesting to note that Swettenham was in fact a far more accomplished artist than Giles.¹⁸

Swettenham in his account of Pahang noted the high prices of commodities, and the injustices inherent in the Sultan's rule. Smith, summarizing Swettenham's report in a dispatch to London, said:

Mr Swettenham speaks in glowing terms of the magnificence of the scenery, and the great resources of this State, both for mineral and agricultural operations, but he adds, that owing to misgovernment, they are not being developed and oppressive taxation or 'squeezing' prevents those in the country from exertion of any kind beyond what is necessary to meet their simple wants, and keeps out other races whose labour and capital would so much advantage the State.¹⁹

Swettenham found that the chiefs he met en route for Pekan were divided in their views on the desirability of introducing British rule. It was clear to him that ultimately the chiefs would do whatever they were instructed by the Sultan. One, Toh Bakar, who had travelled down the river for four days with Swettenham on a raft, when asked his views about British rule replied, 'Saya habis suka.' ('There is nothing I would like more.') However when it came to the deliberations at Pekan with the Sultan, Swettenham was remarkably reticent, both in his published diaries, and in his autobiography:

I saw my friend, the Sultan of Pahang, and after much talk he gave me a letter to the Governor couched in very friendly terms. I had not expected more than that. My mission concluded, we left for Singapore in the Colonial Yacht - which had been sent to meet us outside the river mouth - and reached our destination on the following morning.²⁰

This could be explained *prima facie* because at the time when the diaries were published, the matter was still very much under discussion in Singapore. But it also conveniently hid the fact that in political terms the mission had failed. The Sultan had made himself

ill with anxiety before Swettenham arrived at Pekan on 6 May. Two days later Swettenham took Wan Mansur to meet him, and a reconciliation between the brothers was effected. Thereafter however the Sultan resolutely avoided Swettenham, who was reduced to writing several strongly worded letters, before a further interview was granted. Eventually on 13 May, the Sultan saw Swettenham again, and undertook to provide an answer the following day on the question of a British Resident. On that day, taking refuge in the time-honoured formula, he explained that he had to consult his chiefs upriver. In a letter addressed to the Governor he undertook to give a reply within four months. Swettenham and Lister thus departed by boat for Singapore empty-handed. Giles, the third European in the party had been sent back earlier, for he was ill.²¹

Smith reported to Derby in London on this visit, mentioning that Swettenham had indicated that the Maharaja of Johore was angling for substantial concessions in the state. He concluded, inaccurately as it transpired:

In closing this report I beg to bring Mr Swettenham's name under the favourable notice of your Lordship. He has acted with great tact and discretion, and I have little doubt but that his personal influence with the Bendahara, based on a friendship of many years' standing will have had great effect in strengthening the cordial feelings of the Ruler towards the British government, and will tend in due time towards bringing the State of Pahang more and more under our influence.²²

The seal was set on this by a letter from the Sultan to Smith in July 1885, reporting that he and his chiefs 'had not the heart to have an Officer of the Government, that is, a British Resident, in Pahang.' Smith, reporting to London, stated that he believed the letter had been written under the influence of the Maharaja of Johore. While Swettenham's ostensible aim of reconciling the two royal brothers of Pahang had been successful, the real aim, of laying the groundwork for British intervention in Pahang, was not so easy.²³

Colonial Office officials in London, minuting on Smith's report of Swettenham's mission reiterated: 'the gradual extension of British influence over the whole peninsula must be our almost inevitable policy, and one from which we ought not to shrink.' Another added: 'It may also have been felt in the Colony that the only certain way of checking the Maharaja's (Johore) interference in Pahang was by interposing ourselves.'²⁴ There was no doubt that the influence of the Maharaja on Wan Ahmad at this time was powerful and extensive, not least because of marriage ties and the presence at his court of men from Johore.²⁵

Subsequently it transpired that Swettenham's overbearing attitude in Pekan had hardened the Sultan's determination not to accept a British Resident. The impression was reinforced by a memorandum prepared by William Fraser, at that time manager of a mining syndicate in Pahang. He wrote, in May 1887, of the expedition:

The present Governor of the Straits Settlements (Weld) and his official retinue are not popular in Pahang, though they are always treated with the utmost respect. This friction arose from the very indiscreet conduct of Mr F.A. Swettenham, Resident of Selangor, (presently in England) who, at the instigation of the Governor undertook an expedition to Pahang two years ago which was ostensibly an exploring, but really a political mission ...

He was particularly uncomplimentary about Swettenham's behaviour in Pekan:

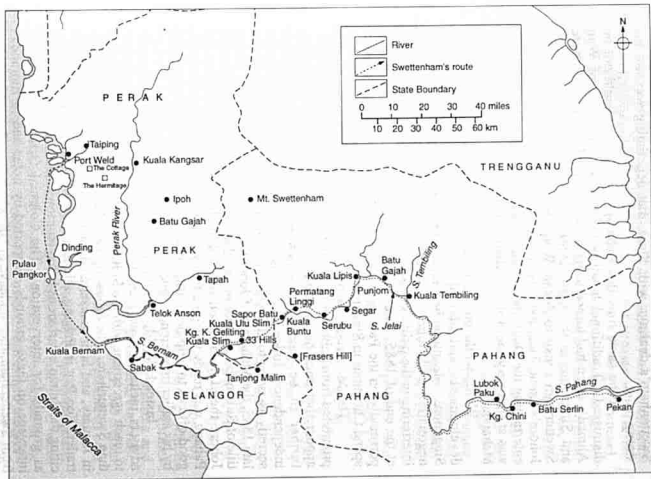
On arriving at the Sultan's seat on the East coast, thinking that he could do very much as he pleased with that potentate, he asked him in a very overbearing manner, "When will Your Highness be ready to receive a British Resident here?" Naturally the Sultan was very much surprised at this extraordinary manner of forcing a British official upon him, but cautiously answered: "Wait three months and I'll give you an answer." In the interval he communicated with his old friends at Singapore, asking them whether he had insulted British dignity, and inquiring what course he should pursue. Needless to say the response was unfavourable to Mr Swettenham, but that energetic gentleman did not rest there. He wrote three letters to the Sultan, each more polite than the preceding one, but the Sultan, reluctant to prolong any negotiations with Mr Swettenham, remarked on receipt of the third and last letter: "Why does Mr Swettenham continue to molest me in this manner? When the English Government finds it necessary to come into my country, I am not so foolish as to try to resist it, but if black men try to invade us, we will fight to death."

Fraser concluded:

In private Sir Fred. Weld has expressed his strong condemnation of Mr Swettenham's injudicious conduct, but in public he has interpreted it in quite a different manner.

The fact however remains that Mr Swettenham has not only brought himself into disfavour in Pahang, but also the whole of his colleagues as a body.²⁶

Fraser's evidence should be taken with some degree of caution. His own shady financial dealings in Pahang at this time



Map 10. Route of Swettenham's journey on foot across the Peninsula, 1885.

predisposed him against the activities of the Straits Government.²⁷ Fraser's comments do however suggest, as will be seen in Swettenham's dealings with Siam, that negotiating was not his strong point.

At the same time the Maharaja's influence should not be dismissed. Traditional hostility during the early years of Wan Ahmad's reign had turned to friendship during his visits to Johore and Singapore in the early 1880s. Moreover, by the time of Swettenham's visit to Pekan, Wan Ahmad had not only installed Johore's agent, Tuan Itam, as his secretary, but was simultaneously entertaining the Dato Mentri, the Maharaja's Chief Minister, who was at that very moment negotiating concessions on behalf of the Maharaja.²⁸

Weld, while on leave in London, was kept informed of developments, and advised caution, at least till he was back in Singapore. Meantime he caused to be inserted in the treaty under negotiation with Johore a clause prohibiting the Maharaja from interfering in the politics of any native state.²⁹ Upon Weld's return at the end of 1885, Swettenham lost no time in reporting to him personally on the Pahang impasse, travelling down from Perak to spend Christmas in Singapore, accompanied by Hugh Clifford.³⁰

The Maharaja's wings were now clipped: he was finally prohibited from dabbling in the affairs of other states, and it would appear that once he realized this, he decided there was nothing further to be gained in scheming for Pahang's continued independence. Indeed, he seems to have hoped to make money by secretly assisting to divide the state up for commercial benefit.³¹ In late 1885, the Maharaja of Johore was elevated by the British to the title of Sultan, by a treaty of that date.³² In early 1886 the Sultan of Johore therefore advised the Colonial Office that the Sultan of Pahang was ready to sign a treaty and he would be happy to use his good offices to help bring this about. The Colonial Office, piqued by his earlier interference, ignored the offer.

Instead, Weld, accompanied by a high-powered team of advisers, including Low, made their own trip up the coast to attempt to reach agreement with the Sultan. They were no more successful than Swettenham. The following year Weld sent Clifford to Pahang in January, and later resuscitated the case of the wife of a Chinese trader, Yeo Pau in Pahang, allegedly forcibly detained since 1884, citing the Sultan's barbarous behaviour towards her and her children as grounds for intervention. The Colonial Office hesitated to intervene on these grounds, supported by notes and memoranda from Swettenham, then on leave in UK who believed the story to be exaggerated, as indeed it turned out to be:

The story of the Chinese wife dragged from the loving Chinese husband by the wicked Malay Raja who flattens out the wretched woman's newly born infant with demoniacal cruelty.... is decidedly pitiful, — but it loses some of its pathos when you understand that the L[oving] C[hinese] husband would sell the lady, (if he could only recover her) to anyone who would offer him a slight profit on her original cost I mean it is an outrage on one's common sense to trust the dramatis personae in this case as tho' they were English

I trust our influence will shortly be established in Pahang but I hope it will be for some better reason than the excuse furnished by the story of the uxorious Chinaman.³³

Clifford as British Agent spent a considerable time in Pahang in 1887 to no avail, and there were disputes over concessions granted to British investors, in particular the Pahang Corporation Ltd., a company headed by influential British board members. Finally in June 1888, Smith decided that the moment had come to insist that Clifford, still in Pahang, but with no real power to act, should be upgraded to Resident. The Sultan of Johore, recovered from his fit of pique, had finally decided that his investments in Pahang were best secured by the presence of a British Resident.

A further opportunity was not slow to present itself. Once again, it involved a Chinese, Goh Hui, alleged to be a British subject, who in February 1888 was stabbed close to the Sultan's palace, amidst rumours that the Sultan was personally responsible, and coveted Goh's wife. Goh himself died a month later, and his widow was indeed forcibly detained by the Sultan, until representations from Singapore secured her release and return to that city. Although the Malays maintained that Goh was not a British subject, the Straits Settlements authorities endorsed a report by Pickering, heading the Chinese Protectorate in Singapore, which insisted that he was. This then provided the pretext for a further visit to Pekan by Smith, accompanied this time by Pickering and Swettenham on 22 June 1888. On arrival they demanded, *inter alia*, that the Sultan accept a British Resident. Although the Sultan expressed his regret at the incident, he proved as intractable as ever over the appointment of the Resident:

The Governor's visit was not marked by an enthusiastic welcome from the Sultan's followers: and there were moments during the discussions when the situation in the Audience Hall — which was crowded with armed Malays - looked ugly, the spectators observing a profound silence and my friend the Sultan regarding proceedings with an air of

complete detachment. Pickering told me he carried a revolver in one pocket and a box of matches in the other.³⁴

Eventually on 29 June, Smith issued an ultimatum, giving the Sultan ten days in which to write with a satisfactory reply. On his return to Singapore, Smith considered the use of force, but not primarily on account of Goh Hui, the Chinese who was stabbed:

It seems to me that directly it is recognized that Pahang is a sphere for British commercial enterprise, the Government is bound to take care that British lives and property are safe. Hence I have not hesitated to push the case of the murdered Chinaman in order to get good government introduced into the State.³⁵

Smith, unlike Weld, got on well with the Sultan of Johore, and, while deliberating a further episode of gunboat diplomacy with London, discussed with the Sultan of Johore the need for a Resident in Pahang. The Sultan of Johore jumped at the chance to assist. He visited Pekan with his chiefs, and prevailed upon the Sultan of Pahang to consult his own chiefs, and the ubiquitous William Hole.³⁶ As a result, on 24 August 1888 the Sultan of Pahang wrote to the Governor asking for a Resident.³⁷

Three years later, Sir Frederick Dickson, by then Colonial Secretary made the following assessment in a Legislative Council debate on Pahang:

The financial interest which influential men in England had in that State was much greater than had existed in the case of any other state, and those interests were able to bring to bear upon the Government at home, and through them on the Government of the Colony, an amount of pressure which it was impossible to resist.... The Sultan of Pahang's conduct was so arbitrary that the largest and most important of the concessionaires were absolutely at his mercy, and received notice that their concessions were at an end, and they were practically ruined if the Sultan's order could not be cancelled, and it was at this juncture that the Government was able to make a Treaty with the Sultan and take the administration into its hands. That was not for the avenging of the life of a British subject, but really for the preservation of British capital.³⁸

It may be noted that Dickson's account given above is much at variance with that provided by Swettenham, who, not unnaturally in view of his hostility to the Sultan of Johore, makes no mention of the latter's role, or indeed of the commercial considerations, which ultimately proved to be paramount.³⁹

There can be little doubt that the tactlessness of Swettenham's discussions with Wan Ahmad in 1885 strengthened

that ruler's determination to resist British rule for as long as possible, and may well have contributed to the Pahang War which troubled the state in the early 1890s. An offer by Swettenham, on leave in December 1891, to return to the Peninsula at once to assist in putting down the Pahang uprising was not taken up.⁴⁰ Nor was Swettenham, though conveniently posted in Perak, ever required to visit Pahang. Had his relations with Wan Ahmad been as good as he himself maintained, he would have been an obvious choice to go and help his colleague Clifford in what were very difficult circumstances.

Swettenham made one further, and half-hearted attempt to involve himself in Pahang affairs, when on leave in 1891. In November that year he submitted to the Colonial Office a memorandum, urging that the government of the state should resume the excessive concessions which the Sultan had made earlier to foreign businessmen. In the handwritten memorandum he urged the Colonial Office to persevere with settling the state.⁴¹ No specific action was taken on this recommendation.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated in this chapter, background information is drawn from Linehan, 1936, *op. cit.* and Thio, 1957a, 'The Extension of British Control to Pahang', *JMBRAS*, 30 (1):46-74. Wan Ahmad was not of the royal line, but was descended from the Bendahara family of Malacca, Johore and Pahang. The first Sultan of Pahang was a son of Sultan Mansur of Malacca, and was sent from Malacca to Pahang to create a new dynasty. Pahang had previously been part of the Malacca empire ruled by the Sultan of Malacca. This young Sultan of Pahang died in 1475. But the new Pahang dynasty only continued until 1560. Pahang was then governed either by the sultans of Johore or Aceh, and later became part of the Johore Empire, with the Bendahara of Pahang as a Viceroy of the Sultan of Johore/Riau. Bendahara Wan Ahmad assumed the title of Sultan, without authority from Johore or the British in Singapore.

2. *Footprints*, p. 89. See also *Bushwhacking* by H. Clifford, 1929, pp. 193-201 for an extended character study of Wan Ahmad.

3. *STW*, 3 November 1880.

4. CO 273/104:554 ff. Gov. to CO, Confidential of 21 October 1880.

5. CO 273/104:567 SS to Weld, 11 February 1881 in dispatch quoted above.

6. CO 273/114:144 ff. Gov. to CO, Confidential of 19 April 1882.

7. *STW*, 14 January 1882.

8. CO 273/123:412 Gov. to CO, Confidential of 22 December 1883.

9. Thio, 1957a, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

10. CO 273/134:256 ff. OAG to CO, Confidential of 20 May 1885 and CO 426/8:118 Comments on Johore's application of 22 June 1885.

11. CO 273/130:358-66 Acting Governor to CO, Confidential of 17 November 1884, PPC 4958:30 ff., and SP 12/123, stanzas 12 and 13.
12. Thio, 1957a, op. cit., p. 70.
13. *Footprints*, p. 89, which incorrectly gives the date of the expedition as 1884, not 1885.
14. CO 273/134:287 OAG to CO, Confidential of 23 May 1885, with memo from Swettenham enclosed.
15. *Footprints*, pp. 89-90. The book includes Giles' sketches.
16. For Wan Muhammed Saleh, see Chapter 18, fn. 61.
17. *JSBRAS*, 15:1-37 and map. 'Journal kept during a journey across the Malay Peninsula' by F.A. Swettenham, 1885.
18. See Lim and Barlow, 1988, op. cit., and Chapter 22 for a discussion of Swettenham's paintings.
19. CO 273/134:283 ff. OAG to CO, Confidential of 23 May 1885.
20. *Footprints*, p. 90.
21. CO 273/134:283 ff. Smith to CO, Confidential of 23 May 1885.
22. *Ibid.*
23. CO 273/135:263 ff. OAG to CO, Confidential of 1 September 1895.
24. CO 273/134:291 ff. OAG to CO, Confidential of 23 May 1885.
25. See Aruna Gopinathan, 1991. *Pahang, 1880-1933: A Political History*. MBRAS Monograph 18.
26. CO 273/148:248-55 W. Fraser, after whom Frasers Hill is named, to CO, 4 May 1887, filed with Gov. to CO, Confidential of 15 October 1887.
27. Wong, 1965, op. cit., pp. 133-7.
28. Thio, 1957a, op. cit., p. 58.
29. See Sir W.G. Maxwell and W.S. Gibson, *Treaties and Engagements affecting the Malay States and Borneo*, London, 1924, pp. 132-3.
30. See Chapter 22.
31. Wong, 1965, op. cit., p. 132.
32. Henceforth he is referred to as the Sultan of Johore.
33. CO 273/141:680-3 Swettenham to Lucas, 14 February 1887 in file with Gov. to CO, Confidential of 6 December 1886.
34. *Footprints*, p. 105.
35. CO 273/154:12-58 Smith to Knutsford, 302 of 3 July 1888.
36. Hole was then residing as a merchant in Pekan. He had previously been private secretary to the Sultan of Johore, and was to fill that role again, later.
37. CO 273/154:525-36 Gov. to CO, 396 of 30 August 1888.
38. PSSLC 1891. Dickson's speech at the meeting of 15 January 1891.
39. *Footprints*, pp. 105-6.
40. CO 426/10:416 Letter from Swettenham of 28 December 1891.
41. CO 273/185:813 ff. Swettenham's memorandum on Pahang, 24 November 1892.

Leave: 1886 - 1888

Swettenham left Perak on 11 January 1886, after a three-day handover to Hugh Low. He was scarcely three weeks in Selangor before returning to Singapore for a week. There is no mention of Sydney accompanying him during these travels. However, the couple eventually left Singapore on the *Ganges* on 8 February, and arrived in UK in the spring of 1886. Swettenham was immediately heavily involved in two projects. One was the tortuous negotiations with the Siamese authorities, considered elsewhere.¹ The second was his role as Commissioner for the Straits and Malay States at the Indian and Colonial Exhibition at Shepherds Bush, on the outskirts of London.²

For the exhibition, Swettenham had arranged for the Perak Regalia, which had caused him such trouble twelve years before, to be exhibited. In addition it had been arranged that a Malay house should be constructed near the Straits pavilion, complete not only with all the customary household utensils, but also a Malay family to show how they used them. Unfortunately the inclement British weather proved too much for the Malays, who had to be sent home. The Straits Settlements and Malay States Court also contained items from Swettenham's own collection: *objets d'art*, silver work, and Malay and Chinese tin ware, together with the usual samples of commercial produce.³ The catalogue for Perak, entitled 'Notes on Perak,' was largely written by L. Wray of the Perak Museum. It contained a summary of useful information, prepared for visitors who might have potential business or investment interests in the state. Swettenham's hand is evident only in the section on railways, where he discusses the long-term prospects of a line from Kinta to the coast. This he felt would be justified as a state project only if it ultimately led to the country being opened up.⁴ Swettenham later recalled the frustrations and difficulties in getting the exhibits into the country.⁵

More to his taste were the various official functions held in connection with the exhibition, which enabled him to rub shoulders with the mighty. The first event was a levée at St James's Palace

held on 3 April, at which Swettenham met the Prince of Wales, and was presented to the Queen.⁶ The official opening by the Prince of Wales, took place a month later, an event celebrated by Alfred Lord Tennyson, the Poet Laureate, in distinctly unmemorable verse.⁷ The Queen paid a further visit to the exhibition later in the month, and was received in the Straits Settlements Pavilion by Swettenham.⁸ Finally on 5 July all the Commissioners and their wives were invited to Windsor Castle for presentation to the Queen. On this occasion Sydney emerged briefly once more, to accompany her husband. Swettenham's detailed account of the events, over fifty years later, attests to the pleasure which this work gave him.⁹ At last, in recognition of his outstanding work in Malaya over fifteen years, official public recognition came his way with the award of a CMG.

The disposal of the items in the Straits pavilion of the exhibition was also Swettenham's responsibility. Here de la Croix reappeared. For to him Swettenham gave a substantial collection of the Malay artifacts exhibited in London, and these together with a number of items from Swettenham's own collection were passed on at once to the Musée du Trocadéro, now de L'Homme in Paris. In recognition of Swettenham's generosity, de la Croix recommended that an award be made to him by the French Government. It was thus that at the close of 1886 Swettenham was made *Officier d'Académie*. This involved the award of the purple rosette in the order of *Palmes Académiques*, generally given to professors and teachers, or in this case for services rendered in the field of culture.

It may seem a little strange that Swettenham should have disposed of the exhibits in this way, rather than to a British institution. The possibility of an award may have tempted him. Whether the exercise represented any conscious attempt by de la Croix to influence him in favour of the French at some future date can never be known. Certainly there was no sign, in his negotiations with the Siamese at this time, or later, that Swettenham had any real insight into the Anglo-French rivalries that were being played out above his head.¹⁰

There were other social events. In January 1887 the Swettenhams paid a visit to his old friends, Charles and Maria Rome, at North Cadbury in Somerset. The beautiful Maria, or Meta as she was called, had a young family with two small girls still at home. Sydney was charmed by them. Yet tragedy was just round the corner, for later in the year Charles Rome, conscious of an impending fatal cancer, took what steps he could to settle his extensive business interests in Melbourne, and committed suicide in London by shooting himself. He left his wife not badly off by the standards of the time. But as most of his assets were in Australia, a visit to consult with the Australian executors seemed necessary.

Meta Rome was to play an important role en route in the Swettenham ménage.¹¹

The original arrangements over Swettenham's leave provided that he should come home for three months on full pay, and a further twelve months on half pay. Swettenham wrote repeatedly to the Colonial Office in the summer of 1886 asking that he be kept on full pay so long as the exhibition and the negotiations with the Siamese continued. But the Colonial Office were unsympathetic. Swettenham, they considered, was young, and he should do the work for the honour of it. In any case it was noted that his acting stint in Perak had placed him in an almost unassailable position to succeed Low, when the old man eventually retired.¹² A further appeal in 1887 for full pay leave to be extended brought another refusal from the Colonial Office, who reminded him that he himself had particularly asked for the job at the exhibition.¹³ He did however achieve a modest settlement of £200 for his services over the Perak boundary dispute.¹⁴ Eventually Swettenham wrote in to say that if he could not be given further extended leave, he would apply for eight months leave on half salary on medical grounds. With this request he enclosed a somewhat imprecise medical certificate. This in due course was granted, and thus extended Swettenham's leave to early 1888. Swettenham's tenacity in pursuing his claims for leave pay provided an opportunity for his claims to the Perak Residency to be established over those of W.E. Maxwell. They also laid the foundation for his reputation in the Colonial Office of being a grasping man where his own emoluments were concerned.¹⁵

With the collapse of the negotiations with Siam in early July 1887, Swettenham had no further official business to take up his time. But he was never one to miss his opportunities. His colleague and near contemporary in the Colonial Office, C.P. Lucas, was engaged in producing *A Historical Geography of the British Colonies*. The first volume, which appeared in 1888, contained in the Preface an acknowledgement of Swettenham's assistance in the inordinately long account of the Straits Settlements and Malay States. This account omits the grosser fallacies of Swettenham's later efforts as an historian, where the causes of British involvement in the Native States are discussed. Yet there can be no doubt from the text of this edition that Swettenham, enthusiastic as ever for the prospects of Perak and Selangor, was the chief author. More importantly for the future, this collaboration set the seal on Lucas' firm friendship and support for Swettenham in the ensuing years. They formed a powerful combination, Lucas, 'that mild-mannered but truculently minded individual,' in a position of increasing

influence in the Colonial Office, was a perfect foil for Swettenham's energy on the ground.¹⁶

Swettenham's assistance to Lucas produced immediate dividends, for in a minute discussing candidates for the post of Resident Councillor in Penang, Lucas weighed up amongst others Maxwell and Swettenham. Maxwell was, 'now Commissioner of Lands, and I think the Governor would like to get him out of the office, where he has fallen foul with some of his brother officers, being an able but somewhat impractical man.' Swettenham he considered, 'much the ablest of all these men, but he is junior to some of them. He is in the Native States line and ought to have the reversion of the Residency of Perak.'¹⁷ With these words, Lucas, acting as Swettenham's proxy threw down the gauntlet on his protégé's behalf for what was to become the most bitter squabble in the Malay Peninsula in the 1890s. The leave years also saw work on another article, published in 1888 in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*. Swettenham was spreading his wings beyond the narrow confines of the *Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*.¹⁸

However a further, and infinitely more serious problem now arose, in the form of Sydney Swettenham's health. The first hint of a mental breakdown appeared in May 1887, just after Swettenham had applied for an extension of leave on medical grounds. When Swettenham was asked by Rodger, with Weld's support to assist in the recruitment of a district surgeon for Selangor, one of the letters gives Swettenham's address as Middlesex Country Asylum, Colney Hatch.¹⁹ Sydney's autocratic father had died suddenly of pneumonia on 25 April.²⁰ If the nervous and excitable Sydney was already under strain, it would not be surprising to learn that she had had some form of minor breakdown at this stage.

Swettenham may have accompanied his wife to the asylum for a day or two. It was a straw in the wind of worse to come, for later that year, on 3 October 1887, she was certified insane and admitted for five weeks to an institution in Cheadle, Cheshire.²¹ It is not clear what the couple were doing in Cheshire on this occasion, but the event may be linked with her later allegation that he took her to Manchester, where she found him, presumably in bed with another woman. This, it was alleged 'drove her wild.'²²

Sydney Swettenham's first recorded mental breakdown is perhaps a suitable moment to consider the marriage so far. She had, since her arrival in Singapore in 1878 played no more than a shadowy role in her husband's life, and that of the Colonial communities of Singapore, Selangor and Perak. When Sydney's movements in relation to those of her husband are examined, a pattern becomes evident. Swettenham himself would go on ahead,

and Sydney would follow a week or two later. This happened when the couple moved to Province Wellesley in 1879, and on Swettenham's posting to Selangor in 1882. When he was posted to Perak, to relieve Hugh Low, Sydney was out of the country, returning only in November 1884. There is no evidence that Sydney accompanied her husband on his busy schedule of visits when Low returned from leave in early 1886. It could be argued that Swettenham's busy schedule meant that it was inconvenient for Sydney to accompany him. Alternatively, Sydney's repeated absences on such occasions could be interpreted as signs of strain in the marriage. For long periods she must have been left on her own when her husband was away on business or even local leave, without her. It is not difficult to imagine a withdrawn, unhappy young wife, with few friends, and the reputation for bouts of manic behaviour. These symptoms would undoubtedly have been exacerbated by Swettenham's own insensitive attitude towards her. His exasperation with a wife who so clearly failed, at this stage at least, to fulfil the social duties required of her, led, it would appear, to more than insensitivity on occasions. By the late 1880s, the Holmes family was beginning to break up, and what little stability or security it had provided for Sydney must have been greatly reduced. The eldest son was rather pointedly omitted from his father's will, and Sydney's mother moved to London to stay, for the remaining two years of her life with her second son, Gerald Frederick Holmes, a stockbroker.

The nervous breakdown mentioned above suggests that the marriage was already under considerable stress. It was significant that there were no children. At the very least, Swettenham must have been satisfied that he himself was not infertile. This must have heightened tensions. There is strong circumstantial evidence of a personal misdemeanour on Swettenham's part.²³ The importance of this particular episode was not that it necessarily contributed to the breakdown of a marriage, which was probably already doomed in any case. It was rather that Swettenham's mishandling of the affair was to expose him to blackmail, certainly for more than a decade, and in all probability contribute to his decision to retire early from Singapore.

What then is the available evidence? Swettenham's own activities in the early years of his Residency in Selangor must be examined. The strains in Swettenham's marriage seem to have become more acute in 1883, judging from his diary entries. It seems likely that Sydney left for a visit to England towards the end of 1883. The last confirmed record of her presence in Malaya is of a visit to Klang with Swettenham on 1 September 1883.²⁴ Certainly with Swettenham planning to be away at the Calcutta Exhibition, it

would have made sense for Sydney to return home before he left. Whatever the date of her departure, she returned to Singapore in November 1884.²⁵ This tallies well with the probable date of Swettenham's misbehaviour.

The dates of Sydney's absence in England may thus be more than coincidence. Years later, Horace Bleackley, a professional author, wrote about two visits he made to Kuala Lumpur in 1926. He was taken round by a lawyer, David Freeman, who had been practising in Kuala Lumpur since before 1914, and on his second visit was taken to see the reservoir at Klang Gates. He commented on the visit:

Here stood a derelict bungalow, formerly used as a rest house, where, so my guide informed me, one of the former Governors of the Straits Settlements used to bring his lady friends for the week-end.²⁶

In theory, the possible 'former Governors' might be Mitchell, Swettenham, Anderson and Young. If the story contains any truth, it is doubtful whether any Governor would have brought a 'lady friend' on an official visit. Such visits were brief and very much in the public eye. It is more likely that Freeman was referring to an official who was residing in Kuala Lumpur and later became Governor. That would narrow the choice down to Swettenham and Young, who resided only briefly in Kuala Lumpur. Swettenham is the more likely of the two. There is moreover evidence in the *Selangor Journal* that the construction of the Klang Gates Reservoir, between 1893 and 1895 was preceded by careful waterflow measurements and a survey of the site. Thus a rest-house could have been required on site well before construction began. Freeman would not have mentioned the matter if it had not been the subject of gossip.²⁷

In order to hide the results of his misbehaviour, Swettenham needed the assistance of a reliable colleague. His choice fell upon the Young family. Swettenham's first recorded contact with any Young dates from 21 April 1883, when he noted laconically in his diary that while on a trip to Malacca, he had visited 'the Youngs.'²⁸ The Young concerned was almost certainly Robert Heydon Young, at that time working in Malacca as a draftsman in the PWD.²⁹ R.H. Young's job was a lowly one, which would not normally involve more than a passing acquaintance with so senior a figure as Swettenham. He was at the time only 25 years old.³⁰ There is no evidence that he was working for Swettenham on any design projects in Kuala Lumpur, and the fact that Swettenham noted the event suggests that the meeting had some personal significance. Young is of course a common name, and there were several individuals of that name in the Peninsula at that time. Two of these

may have a bearing on the story. Captain O.R. Young was a merchant sea-captain whose incompetence hit the headlines in 1896 when his ship went aground off Labuan.³¹ He was reaching the end of his career at that time, for it was recorded at the enquiry that he had not sailed in those waters since 1868.³² He is important for the story only in that a certain Walter McKnight Young was recorded as being born on board ship, 'son of the late Captain Young.'³³ It is possible therefore that R.H. and W.M. Young were sons of Captain O.R. Young.

Walter McKnight Young was a lowly British clerk, who first appeared in 1882 in the office of the Lieutenant Governor of Penang. On 26 July 1883, he started work in the Perak government service.³⁴ His subsequent career in the Perak Government Service was one of no great distinction, involving a series of junior postings.³⁵ By 1884 he was Registration Clerk in the Perak Chinese Secretariat, and in 1887 moved to Teluk Anson.³⁶ In the early 1890's he was transferred to the Chinese Secretariat in Batang Padang, then to Gopeng, Kinta. From 1897 to 1899 he worked as an audit clerk in Taiping, still in a lowly position, under two more senior Eurasian clerks.

W.M. Young was married to a Miss Good of Bangalore, possibly a Eurasian. From Swettenham's point of view, he would have seemed as good an accomplice as any. W.M. Young's social status was sufficiently lowly that there was no risk of meeting Swettenham at parties: for it would scarcely have been possible to keep the secret if they moved in the same social circles. Such people moving in a social circle of their own, mixing with and sometimes marrying Eurasians, were kept apart from the European upper crust by their limited financial resources.³⁷ Finally, Swettenham would already have had his eye on Perak, even if he had not yet been posted there. A junior European employee in his own state, suitably remunerated, would, Swettenham misguidedly hoped, not be likely to cause embarrassment. It is suggested that Swettenham's visit to R.H. Young in Malacca was to discuss his problems and that R.H. Young obliged by facilitating arrangements with his younger brother, W.M. Young. It may be worth recollecting that the prefix 'Mc' was traditionally used in some British circles to denote, in the case of an illegitimate male, the identity of the putative father. Applied in this instance it would suggest that the true father of Walter McKnight Young was a certain Mr Knight. Whether there was in fact a connection between W.M. Young and Arthur Knight who was so helpful to Swettenham in his early years, must remain an interesting speculation. That for the moment is all that needs to be said of the Young family. They will reappear later on.

Swettenham left England towards the end of 1887 for the return trip to Malaya. He travelled out via Italy, spending some days there with Italian friends before catching the boat from Brindisi.³⁸ It is not clear whether Sydney accompanied him during this part of the trip. As was always the case, Swettenham made no mention of her in his memoirs, *Footprints in Malaya*. It may well be that medical opinion advised against too much excitement, in which case perhaps she joined him at Brindisi. She was certainly with him by the time he reached Kuala Lumpur. The Governor wrote him a private note the day after his return, concluding in a somewhat formal manner with the hope that Mrs Swettenham had travelled out comfortably: the tone and context suggest a sympathetic boss well aware of the troubles his young subordinate was having with a trying wife.³⁹ For Swettenham this was the beginning of a matrimonial nightmare, which, in its acute phase, was to last over six years.

NOTES

1. See Chapter 25.
2. CO 273/142:925 ff. Swettenham to CO, 14 May 1886 and *STD*, 3 and 9 February 1886.
3. *STD*, 8 July 1886 contains a full account of the Straits Settlements' part of the exhibition.
4. See *Notes on Perak with a Sketch of its Vegetable, Animal and Mineral Products compiled by order of the Perak Government to accompany the exhibits sent by the State of Perak to the Colonial and Indian Exhibition 1886*, by L. Wray, published in London in 1886 by W. Clowes & Co. Available in India Office Library ref. T 29790.
5. *Footprints*, p. 91.
6. *STD*, 1 June 1886. *Footprints*, p. 92, suggests incorrectly that the levée was held at Marlborough House.
7. This was loyally reprinted in its entirety by *STD* on 6 May 1886.
8. *STD*, 24 June 1886.
9. *Footprints*, pp. 90-2, and *STD*, 4 August 1866.
10. See Chapters 25 and 38-9 for a discussion of the Siamese question.
11. CO 273/150:235 Swettenham to CO, 17 January 1887 written from North Cadbury enclosed with FO to CO, 8 January 1887. See also Chapter 29.
12. CO 273/142:938 ff. Swettenham to CO, 10 June, 10 and 25 July 1886.
13. CO 273/145:194-9 Governor to CO, 214 of 23 May 1887.
14. CO 426/9:129 Letter of 15 November 1887. See also next chapter.
15. CO 273/149:734 ff. Swettenham to CO, 7 April 1887.
16. *A Historical Geography of the British Colonies*, Vol. I (1st ed.), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1888. The description of Lucas comes from the Lansdowne Papers, Lansdowne to Sanderson, 16 September 1902, FO 800/15, quoted in Chandran Jeshurun's M.A. thesis, 1958, 'Lord Lansdowne and the 'Anti-German Clique' at the Foreign Office: Their role in the making of the Anglo-Siamese Agreement of 1902.' University of Singapore.

17. CO 273/141:890 ff. Lucas in a comment dd. 25 January 1887 on Weld to CO, Confidential of 27 December 1886.
18. 'On the Native Races of the Straits Settlements and Malay States,' *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 16:1888.
19. CO 273/149:741 Swettenham to CO, 29 May 1887.
20. Obituary of C.F. Holmes in St John's College Magazine, *The Eagle*, 14, 1887.
21. See Chapters 42 and 49 and Swettenham's 1938 divorce papers Reg. 7814 Ref. 3/107/85P.
22. Ibid. Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore had visited Manchester 23-26 March 1886, but there is no evidence to suggest Swettenham was present on that occasion. *STD*, 28 April 1886.
23. The circumstantial evidence cannot be proved and has therefore been omitted. See Foreword.
24. SD, 1 September 1883.
25. *STD*, 30 October 1884 and 10 November 1884. Chapter 22, fn. 27.
26. Horace Bleackley, 1928, *A Tour in Southern Asia*, p. 182.
27. *SJ*, 2:42 contains an account of the construction of the reservoir, by Paxon, the engineer in charge.
28. SD, 21 April 1883.
29. *Straits Directory*, 1883.
30. CO 273/281:71 Swettenham to CO, Confidential, 17 November 1902, enclosing PWD list which records his birthdate as 27 June 1858.
31. CO 273/205:236 ff. J.A. Swettenham to CO, 309 of 1 August 1895, *STD*, 19 July 1895.
32. Ibid.
33. *PGSC*, 25 March 1919. Obit of W.M. Young.
34. Government of Perak, List of Establishments, 1897.
35. *PGSC*, 25 March 1919.
36. Blythe, 1969, op. cit., p. 258.
37. Butcher, 1979, op. cit., for a discussion of such matters.
38. *Footprints*, p. 92.
39. SSF Misc. 113/88, Smith to Swettenham, 9 January 1888.

The Problem of Siam: The First Round

Swettenham's consistent failure adequately to resolve the problems posed by Siam was a source of dissatisfaction and even bitterness, up to the end of his life. However before we begin to analyse these reverses, it is necessary to consider the ambiguous position which Siam occupied in the eyes of the British Foreign Office.

As European colonial spheres of influence began to expand in South East Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century, Siam found itself caught between the French and the British. To the north-east, traditional spheres of Siamese influence were being eroded by the French, who had established control in Laos and Cambodia. To the west, Britain established control in Lower Burma. During this period, Siam was ruled by two able kings, Mongkut (1851-1868) and his son Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) of the Chakkri dynasty. Chulalongkorn in particular had the vision to realize that Siam's only hope of avoiding partition between these two colonial powers lay in accepting Western influence, modernizing the country with the help of European advisers, and maintaining Siam as a stable buffer state between the French and the British. These two powers watched each other warily, each hesitant to make any pre-emptive move against Siam, for fear of driving that country into the arms of the other.

Added to this, any expansion of British India interests would sooner or later result in a common border with the French, which would give rise to disputes, and would be likely to provoke French retaliation by laying further claims on Siamese territory. Such a move would of course also threaten the extensive British commercial interests in Siam, shrewdly encouraged by the Siamese government against precisely this eventuality. Finally, the British India government, armed against possible Russian aggression on the north-west Frontier, had no wish to find itself obliged to maintain further forces on its south-east border. It was Swettenham's misfortune that he failed to assess the situation adequately. Had he

done so, he would have realized that Britain in the long run was bound to subordinate the local territorial ambitions of the Straits government to broader considerations of superpower rivalry in South East Asia.

The position on Siam's southern border with the Malay States was confused. A predominantly Malay population extended as far north as the Siamese state of Patani. To the south, the Malay states of Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Trengganu all acknowledged, with varying degrees of loyalty and frequency, some element of Siamese control. This took the form of *bunga mas* rendered in tribute by these Malay states yearly, or in certain cases every three years to the government in Bangkok. Apart from this tribute, direct Siamese involvement was nominal, or non-existent, and to a large extent the states conducted their own affairs, in an unsupervised manner calculated to arouse the Colonial ambitions of Weld, Swettenham and their supporters in the Straits government. They had visions of linking Singapore by rail through the Peninsula, Siam and Burma with India. It was not surprising therefore that Weld and Swettenham in particular regarded Siam with jaundiced eyes, as many of their predecessors in the Straits Settlements had done.¹

Before 1882, Swettenham's exposure to Siam had not been extensive. It had been confined as we have seen to diplomatic visits up the east coast of the Peninsula with Ord and later Clarke, and a possible trip while working in Penang in the early 1870s over the border into Kedah. In 1880 he had accompanied Weld on a brief visit of familiarization to Kedah, when the question of Siamese influence must have been discussed at some length.² Weld, with his hectic round of visits could scarcely have had time to consider in any detail the full implications of the Siamese problem. Now, firmly installed, conscious no doubt of the possibility of using the occasion to further expand British interests, he turned in early 1882 to his resident expert on such matters, Swettenham, and requested him to provide a memorandum on the Siamese question. The memorandum was submitted early in the year and forwarded by Weld to Kimberley. Swettenham was duly congratulated on producing the report efficiently and at short notice.³

The report, which was ably written and impressive in its historical detail, contained considerable background displaying a bias against Buddhism. It showed that the British had failed in their commitment to protect Kedah from Siamese domination in the first half of the nineteenth century. This had compromised the British position in the eyes of the Malays. Swettenham showed his admiration for Cavenagh's bombardment of Trengganu in 1863,⁴ and deplored Ord's later admission that Kelantan and Trengganu were Siamese tributaries. He concluded by drawing attention to the

strategic importance to British interests of the two states, especially in relation to French proposals to build a canal across the Isthmus of Kra. Swettenham's tone of hostility towards Siam drew an appreciative response from Thomas Braddell, whose congratulatory letter dwelt on the horrors of Siamese suzerainty compared to the enlightenment of British protection. Swettenham's hostility was echoed in many influential quarters in Singapore.⁵

Shortly thereafter, Weld sent Swettenham to Trengganu, ostensibly to congratulate the Sultan on his accession, but actually to attempt to counter Siamese moves to establish further influence in the state. Weld wanted permission to protest officially against Siam for sending their envoy to assist in the installation of the young Sultan of Trengganu. This it was felt would help guard Malay interests, and strengthen the British bargaining position over the proposed Kra canal. The visit, which lasted less than a week, was not publicly reported, reinforcing the impression that it was primarily a diplomatic exercise.

The proposal, like so many concerning Siam and emanating from Singapore, was opposed by W.G. Palgrave, the British Consul in Bangkok, supported by the Foreign Office. The most convincing reason given was that Kelantan and Trengganu still sent *bunga mas* to Bangkok, and the incident to which Weld objected was, by the time a reply from London was due, six months old, with no ill-effects being obvious.⁶

In early 1882 a crisis erupted between Kedah and Siam. The young Sultan of Kedah, Zainal Rashid II, had died in September 1881, and the rival Kedah factions, in the form of Tunku Kudin and his enemies, solicited the support of the Siamese in Bangkok for their respective candidates. There was a suggestion that the Siamese were contemplating the outright annexation of Kedah, or the imposition of a Siamese Resident Adviser backed by Siamese troops. Indeed, Swettenham, writing in 1902, indicated that they did send an adviser to Kedah for a short time.⁷ In June 1882, Weld reported back to London, in a dispatch possibly drafted by Swettenham, 'Kedah is now being brought more and more under the immediate dominion of the Siamese, a military Siamese guard is now there and much discontent prevails among the Malays — Tunku Kudin, the late Regent has taken up his abode in Penang and it is said that many Malays are leaving Kedah.'⁸

Thereafter, for two years Swettenham's career precluded any close involvement with Siam, until he found himself in Perak, acting for Hugh Low from 1884 to 1886. A perennial problem was the line of the ill-defined frontier between Perak and the Siamese-dominated state of Reman. Raja Idris, on his visit to England with Low in the summer of 1884 was given special authority to arrange

the northern boundary with the Siamese government. Since the problem remained unsettled on Raja Idris' return to Perak in September 1884, the State Council, headed of course by Swettenham, formally requested Weld to act for the state in this matter.⁹ Weld, on behalf of Perak, claimed that Siam, or Siamese subjects from Reman had occupied some 2,000 square miles of northern Perak. While initially the occupation had been peaceful, incidents had been reported later, through the Collector of Upper Perak, Bozzolo, where Malay traders had been harassed, their goods seized, and forts along the alleged boundary manned by the Siamese. Some of these incidents had occurred while Swettenham was Acting Resident.¹⁰ Meantime official British policy towards Siam had been spelt out unequivocally in a dispatch to Satow, the British Minister in Bangkok, with the support of both the India and the Colonial Offices, copied to Weld:

HM Govt. fully recognize the advantage to British interests that Siam should be maintained an independent Power, allied to this country by ties of good feeling and friendship, but they do not think that looking to the special interests of Great Britain in the Malay Peninsula it is desirable that any measure should be adopted which would tend to strengthen the nominal connection between Siam and Trengganu or any other Malay states similarly situated.¹¹

Weld, in reporting the various incidents to London urged Colonel Stanley, the Colonial Secretary that Britain must either undertake to defend Siam against all the Western powers, or at least oppose her encroachment on any of the Malay states. Ideally, he felt Britain should extend her influence wherever possible, and consistent with good faith, over all the Peninsula between the Straits, and what he called 'British Birmah.' Moreover the prospect of Swettenham handling the negotiations with the Siamese met with Weld's unqualified approval: 'No better man than Swettenham can be consulted.'¹² Two days later he wrote again to report a further border incident, and simultaneously addressed a stiff note to Satow, in Bangkok, urging him to appeal to the King to put a stop to the border incidents. The Colonial Office commented: 'It would be a mistake to fall foul of the Siamese, as it would only drive them into the arms of the French or Germans.'¹³

Meade minuted on the same dispatch: 'Sir F. Weld adopts a haughty tone which had better be repressed. He hints that he may be authorized to take the place by force. From my conversation with Mr Swettenham, I think he may possibly prove a more efficient and less unbending negotiator, and he should be put in communication with the FO as soon as possible.'¹⁴

Shortly afterwards, Weld reported to Lord Granville, the new Secretary of State, that the Perak State Council had appointed Swettenham, on leave in London, to negotiate on its behalf on the Perak boundary question.¹⁵ Swettenham's true priorities only came to light some years later when, again embattled with the Siamese he gave an account of the negotiations of this period. In his opinion the Perak boundary dispute was very much less important than that Siam should be excluded from Kelantan and Trengganu.¹⁶

Swettenham was therefore briefed by the Foreign Office at the end of April 1886, and met Captain Frederick Verney of the Siamese Legation in London on 11 May. His remit was to consult with Verney to arrange, either that Britain should undertake to administer the disputed territory, in exchange for an annual payment, or to negotiate an outright purchase. Weld preferred annual payments, but Verney seemed to favour outright purchase. Swettenham regarded Verney's proposals with an open mind.¹⁷

Weld and Low were informed by cable of the position, and sent an encouraging reply. Two days later Swettenham submitted to the Colonial Office a memorandum on the subject, which pointed out that he had plenary powers, but that the Siamese Minister in London did not. Unless the Siamese were so empowered, Swettenham saw 'no likelihood of making satisfactory progress toward a settlement.' Therefore he urged that the Foreign Office should put pressure on Satow in Bangkok to convince the Siamese to allow their London representative to conclude a settlement.¹⁸

Swettenham's pressure on the Foreign Office was successful, and a telegram to Weld prepared by Swettenham and de Robeck of the Colonial Office on 8 July indicated that the Foreign Office were ready to instruct Satow to exert his influence in favour of whichever solution was preferred by Weld and Low. Weld was asked to indicate whether he was prepared to settle for a purchase of the contested territory, and if so, the outside price Perak would pay.¹⁹

The cable crossed Weld's dispatch, in which Swettenham was given a free hand in the negotiations. A successful conclusion, Weld believed, would result in 'our being before very long asked to assist Kedah and other states between Perak and British Birmah [*sic*], and to our being put into a position that whatever may happen to Siam, no foreign power at peace with England will be able to interfere in the Peninsula.'²⁰

There followed a hiatus of about a month, after which Swettenham paid a visit to the Colonial Office, read up the papers, and a day or two later submitted a résumé of the position to date. The prospects for settlement were, he thought, good. But he noted that it was Verney's view that Satow had more influence than Verney himself. Swettenham again stressed how unsatisfactory the

present position was, and the importance of finding a solution. By now Swettenham was perhaps beginning to realize that his own reputation in the Straits government was at stake if he failed to bring back a satisfactory agreement.²¹

Unfortunately for Swettenham, the delay in the negotiations had enabled Satow to re-establish his influence in the Foreign Office. Currie, from the Foreign Office in a private letter to 'Bolsie' (probably Meade) made it clear that Satow was reluctant to press hard for a settlement, for several reasons: '...he is perhaps in this instance a little influenced by a spirit of opposition to the pompous jingoism of Sir F. Weld ... is afraid of lowering his own influence in other matters by supporting the filibustering propensities of Weld and Low.' Currie cynically inquired whether the Colonial Office was really concerned about this piece of territory. If such were the case, he concluded they would indeed issue instructions to Satow, but, '... so long as it is known at Bangkok, as I suppose it is, that [Satow] and Weld take different views, Swettenham and Low will labour in vain. Shall we let them go on labouring, or shall we send peremptory instructions to Satow?' Meade supported the Colonial Office stand half-heartedly: 'It is too late to back out of our proposals.' Eventually on 30 September 1886 the Earl of Iddesleigh, the new Foreign Secretary instructed Satow to negotiate an agreement with the Siamese, preferably through an arrangement which would allow Perak to administer the disputed territory.²²

In this Satow was less than successful. King Chulalongkorn proved unyielding, because his Foreign Minister, Prince Devawongse, pleaded that a concession to the British would lead to demands by the French. By the end of the year, Satow reported that he foresaw very long negotiations, concluding that 'the only way to induce the King of Siam to accept a compromise is to make him feel that if he refuses the claims of Perak will be enforced.'²³ Swettenham vented his frustration to C.P. Lucas in the Colonial Office, and Lucas, as became his custom, supported Swettenham in his thinly veiled demands for a show of force. Deliberations dragged on inconclusively till April 1887. Satow was due to come home on sick-leave, when suddenly the Siamese authorities changed their minds and announced that Prince Devawongse would be representing his King at the forthcoming Jubilee Celebrations in London, 'and will probably have instructions [to negotiate].'²⁴

Swettenham, on being told of this in June, prepared yet a further memorandum on the position. He met Satow and drafted a protocol on the basis of Perak administering the contested territory. Having cleared this with Currie, he was finally prepared to meet Devawongse a week later on 1 July.²⁵ Morale was high, for he had 'every reason to hope that, being agreed on the principle, there

would be little difficulty in arranging the minor details on which there was still any difference of opinion.' But he was to be sadly disappointed, for Devawongse entirely repudiated the assurances he had given to Satow, and repudiated the proposals made in negotiations with Low, and those subsequently carried on between Swettenham and Verney. Swettenham was appalled, and terminated the interview. In fury he wrote to the Colonial Office: 'In matters of negotiation the Siamese Govt. cannot be treated like a European power.' Swettenham later gave an understandably sour account of this episode.²⁶ His general account of the Siamese presence in the north of the Peninsula is similarly prejudiced against them.²⁷

Swettenham thus encountered a further reverse in his efforts at diplomacy. But while the failure of the Pahang mission might with some justification be attributed in part at least to his tactless handling of the Sultan, and to that extent self-inflicted, the same cannot be said for his failure in the Siamese negotiations. Swettenham himself had shown tact and flexibility, although it is true to say that Weld's performance, less outstanding in this respect, may have hampered Swettenham's efforts. For it was Weld who upset Satow, the key operator in Siamese affairs. Both Weld and Swettenham underestimated the ability of the Siamese not only in playing the role of the inscrutable oriental, but also in successfully playing off British against French interests to preserve the Siamese position.

From the point of view of Swettenham's career, however, his failure at this stage over the Siam question did not count against him. Indeed the negotiations themselves illustrated the confidence placed in Swettenham by his superiors, and his own skill, tact and flexibility in negotiations. These abilities, combined with his close association with Hugh Low over the years weighed heavily in his favour when the moment came for Low to retire, and his successor to be chosen. Such abilities were less evident in his dealings with the Siamese between 1901 and 1903.²⁸

NOTES

1. See for example John Anderson's 'Political and Commercial Considerations Relative to the Malayan Peninsula and the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca (1824)', reprinted in *JMBRAS*, 55 (4) with an introduction by J. Bastin. Note also Swettenham's anti-Thai attitude in *British Malaya*, Chapters 3 and 7 and his warning at the end of 'Some Account of the Independent Native States of the Malay Peninsula,' *JSBRAS*, 6, to keep an eye on Kelantan and Trengganu. For an explanation of Siamese 'non-intervention' until policy changed in the 1890s, see Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, 1988, *Thai-Malay Relations*, pp. 41 ff. and 207 ff.

2. See Chapter 16.

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3. The report, entitled, 'An account of the Origins and Progress of Siamese Influence in the Malay Peninsula, 1795-1882' is to be found in SP 12/125. For associated correspondence, see CO273/113:561-6 Weld to Kimberley, Confidential of 14 March 1882. The position was summarized by Gullick, 1987a, op. cit., pp. 73-98.
4. Cowan, 1961, op. cit., p. 16 gives details of this incident.
5. CO 273/134:309-16 T. Braddell to F.A. Swettenham, 12 March 1882 enclosed in OAG Straits to SS, Confidential of 25 May 1885.
6. CO 273/114:317 ff. Gov. to CO, Confidential of 4 May 1882.
7. CO 273/282:317 ff. Swettenham's 'Memorandum on Siamese Relations with Malay States,' accompanying Swettenham to CO, Secret of 3 February 1902.
8. CO 273/115:13 Weld to CO, 222 of 3 June 1882.
9. HC 4958:31.
10. CO 273/137: *passim*. He had realized the sensitive nature of the issue in his 1875 report to Jervois, and also made mention of it in his 1882 report on Siam. Chew Appendix E and SP 12/125.
11. CO 273/156:27-33 CO to FO, 7 March 1889.
12. CO 273/139:332 ff. Weld to CO, 71 of 22 February 1886.
13. CO 273/139:350 Gov. to CO, Confidential of 25 February 1886.
14. *Ibid*.
15. CO 273/139:599 Weld to Granville, 22 March 1886.
16. CO 273/246:137 ff. Gov. to CO, Secret of 6 January 1899 enclosing Swettenham's memorandum dd. 5 January 1899.
17. CO 273/142:925-36 Swettenham to CO, 14 May 1886 with details of communications with and from Verney, 12 May 1886.
18. CO 273/140:127-43 Gov. Straits to Swettenham, telegram of 13 June 1886 cited in Gov. to CO, Confidential of 21 June 1886 and CO 273/142:940-6 Swettenham to CO, 15 June 1886, enclosing a memorandum on the dispute.
19. CO 273/142:940-6 Sec. State to Gov. Straits, telegram of 8 July 1886 in Swettenham to CO, 15 June 1886: minute by de Robeck 8 July 1886.
20. CO 273/140:127-43 Gov. to CO, confidential of 21 June 1886.
21. CO 273/142:955-62 Swettenham to CO, 7 August 1886.
22. CO 273/142:955-62 Currie to Bolsie [?Meade], private of 8 September 1886, in file with Swettenham to CO, 7 August 1886.
23. CO 273/150:241-2 and 256. FO to CO, 8 January and 3 February 1887, including Satow's dispatches of 14 November and 2 December 1886.
24. CO 273/150:225-43 Swettenham to Lucas, 14 January 1887 in FO to CO, 8 January 1887 and minute by Lucas of 17 January 1887 thereon. CO 273/149:725 Swettenham to CO, 13 March 1887 and CO to FO, 4 April 1887, CO 273/150:347 ff. and 379 ff. FO to CO, 13 April 1887, with Satow's telegram in CO 273/150:358 ff. For Satow's letter, see CO 273/150:397 ff.
25. CO 273/149:745 Swettenham to CO, 2 June 1887, with memorandum and Swettenham to CO, 6 July 1887.
26. *Footprints*, pp.100-1 misdates his meeting with Devawongse to 1891.
27. *British Malaya*, pp.40-5, 50-3, 310-28. CO 273/149:749 ff. gives Swettenham's account of the meeting, 6 July 1887.
28. See Chapters 38 and 39.

Railways in Perak

On Low's retirement, one of the Perak District Officers commented, 'Mr Swettenham has arrived. Now all the money old Low has been bottling up will begin to fly.'¹ While Swettenham had been busy in Selangor with his railway, Low had pressed on with the construction of the first railway in Perak, between Port Weld and Taiping. Low's job had not proved easy. In particular, it was discovered that the wharf at Port Weld, built under the supervision of Caulfeild, the State Engineer was unsatisfactory. McCallum had been sent from Singapore to investigate, and reported that it had been built on mud without adequate pilings. There had also been considerable over-expenditure, both at the port and on the line itself. As a result, the railway was not ready till early 1885. Sir Cecil Smith and his wife paid a visit to Perak in February that year. They were met at the mouth of the Larut River by Swettenham and Creagh, the Assistant Resident, and together they went on the *Kinta* to Port Weld, where Smith inspected the wharf.

After viewing the wharf, the party embarked on the first passenger train on the line to Taiping. They travelled cautiously: it took forty minutes to cover the eight miles.² The caution was understandable, and the party was perhaps a little apprehensive as they travelled, for the newspapers in the previous year had carried reports criticizing the incompetence of Caulfeild, the state engineer, who was held responsible for the collapse of the main bridges, and the hopeless state of the line.³ Safely back in Singapore after the visit, Smith remarked ominously in his report that it was not the only case where the PWD had shown itself incompetent, and changes would be required when the Governor returned from leave. The Colonial Office in London took a bleaker view: 'Mr Caulfeild's failure will hasten the time when we must begin to look deeper into the inordinate appointments made in the Protected States,' minuted one official.⁴ The line was officially opened on 1 June 1886 at a total cost of \$357,000, and Low, in his report for 1885, while absolving Caulfeild of responsibility for his unsatisfactory performance over the construction of the railway itself was less

happy about the wharf.⁵ Caulfeild long survived as Chief Engineer in the state for he had influential connections, not least through his wife, who perhaps even then had caught the eye of the Resident.

Little further railway development took place in Perak, till Swettenham returned in 1889. Low was becoming old and slower. However a modest extension of the original line for some three miles from Taiping to Kamunting was under consideration in 1888: Low was aware that the development of the mining industry in the state depended on adequate communications. Mining attention was increasingly being focused on the Kinta Valley, near Ipoh, and the course of a railway between Teluk Anson and Tapah was discussed. The Chinese miners realized the value of such a line as well. They had offered a subsidy of \$1.5 million towards it.⁶

Important as Swettenham considered the railways, he agreed with Smith, who regarded a grand trunk-line from Singapore to India as a pipe-dream, which could never be made to pay for itself, so long as there remained diplomatic troubles in Siam, and to a lesser extent Kedah, not to mention the large stretches of the Peninsula which were virtually uninhabited. As soon as Swettenham took over in Perak, being doubtful of Caulfeild's abilities, he took steps to enlist Spence-Moss's assistance in that state as well. The result of course was friction, chiefly between Spence-Moss and his new superior in Selangor, Maxwell.⁷ The Kamunting extension, approved by the Governor at the end of September 1889 had been opened on 6 May 1890 in Swettenham's absence, using rails borrowed from Selangor.⁸ Further thought was now given to extending this line to Blanda Mabok (Ulu Sapetang) and Selama.⁹

However the major exercise, that of constructing a line from Teluk Anson (Teluk Intan) to Tapah ran into considerable problems on Swettenham's arrival in Perak. A line had been proposed and sanctioned before Swettenham's arrival. Spence-Moss had reported on this in September 1889, and concluded that it was not satisfactory. It was too long, and the curves and gradients were such that it would never run economically. This was particularly important if, in the far distant future, there was to be a grand trunk-line from north to south through the Peninsula. Spence-Moss therefore recommended the survey of a different route. Moreover the press had become involved: an article criticising the route had appeared in late 1889, with the suggestion that by using road instead of rail, \$250,000 could be saved for a more effective result.¹⁰

Swettenham supported the arguments and recommendations in Spence-Moss's report which he forwarded to the Colonial Secretary in Singapore.¹¹ The Colonial Secretary's office agreed to a resurvey, which was not submitted till early March 1890, the day before Swettenham departed on three months' leave to Europe. A

bureaucratic dither ensued. It was complicated by the question of whether Lumut, in the Dindings, or Teluk Anson should be regarded in the longer term as the port for southern Perak.

Swettenham, on his return from leave, renewed his urging for the line proposed by Spence-Moss which would run from Teluk Anson to Ipoh, with a branch-line to Tapah, pointing out that such a line had already been approved by London. The Colonial Secretary's office in Singapore then took issue on this point. There had been no such agreement, Swettenham was assured, despite newspaper reports to the contrary. Moreover no money was available for such a line, implying that Swettenham was adopting a somewhat cavalier attitude to the financing.

Laboriously Swettenham replied showing that the new line would cost only \$2 million, compared to the \$3 million estimated by Low, that it would take at least four years to build, and setting out reasons which should assure Singapore that adequate finance would be available. Not least of these was his objection to the proposal that the Perak government should retain \$500,000 in Indian securities, which could be much better used on roads and railways. He concluded that if after his success with the Selangor railways, it was felt that he approached the finance of the Perak railways 'summarily and lightly, ... I can only plead that I took it for granted my statement would be accepted, both because it could be largely verified, and because it came from what it would hardly be presumptuous to consider the best available source.'

Not till December 1890 did the Colonial Secretary's office in Singapore capitulate, and agree to Swettenham's proposals. At this stage Dickson rubbed salt in the wound by forwarding correspondence showing that a circuitous route, costing \$3 million had been agreed earlier, and that it had also been agreed that Perak could finance the line itself. Swettenham was furious at the inefficiency, if not downright obstructiveness of Singapore. On this occasion, Dickson and his colleagues were spared the full venom of Swettenham's sarcasm: they were at that moment independently investigating Swettenham on charges of land-jobbing.¹²

Tenders for the railway construction were invited towards the end of the year.¹³ When the Perak Annual Report came to be written the following year, Swettenham was guarded on the reasons for the delay: 'This delay is very greatly to be regretted, for reasons too numerous to relate.' When completed, he added, it would avoid dependence on the Kinta River, unnavigable much of the time. The only alternative, since the previous year, had been sixty miles of cart track from Taiping to Ipoh, 'at of course a prohibitive cost.'¹⁴

Meantime Swettenham had not been idle in other aspects of railway expansion. He talked in the same report of the possibility of

linking the Perak line with the Kedah-Singora line in the north. The Kuala Kangsar to Ipoh stretch had been surveyed, together with a preliminary survey both of the Kuala Kangsar to Larut stretch, and that between Batu Gajah and Lumut. The main problems he envisaged were getting a bridge over the Perak River, and making a railway trace through the Berapit Pass.

In the early years of Swettenham's stay in Perak, he had the support of his old colleague Spence-Moss. One of Maxwell's first actions on taking over as Resident, Selangor, was to investigate Spence-Moss's land dealings in Klang. Spence-Moss disliked Maxwell as cordially as Swettenham did, and was thoroughly uncooperative in his dealings with him. Despite Swettenham's attempts to retain his services in Perak, Spence-Moss, with Maxwell hot on his heels investigating his land dealings asked for leave in the middle of 1891, and never returned to work in the country.¹⁵

The question of the final route to be adopted in taking the railway into Pahang also received Swettenham's attention. In November 1892 he submitted a hand-written memorandum on the need to open up Pahang. In this he urged a railway from Klang or Port Dickson with a terminus on the Pahang River. From there, good cart roads would be constructed to lead to the mines. It was to be some years before the line north into Pahang was constructed from Gemas in Johore.¹⁶

The actual construction of the Teluk Anson to Ipoh railway was fraught with problems and delays. Three contractors were used, none of whom were wholly satisfactory, and as a result the government was obliged to take over much of the work itself. Campbell & Co.'s contract for the 33-mile Kinta stretch was unusual, in that it required the contractor to bring into the country a certain proportion of the workers required. This of course was an attempt to alleviate the acute labour shortage in the state.¹⁷ Campbell & Co. also proved unsatisfactory contractors for the construction of the railway extension from Kuala Lumpur to Ulu Selangor, and they were relieved of their task.¹⁸ The upper and lower sections of the railway were eventually opened on 17 October and 19 May 1893. Smith visited Perak to inaugurate the opening of the lower section, spending two nights at the Residency with the Swettenhams. The intervening middle section was completed in 1894. The bad experience Swettenham had with the contractors convinced him that in future it would be best for the government itself to undertake such work. By the end of 1893, \$1,780,091 had been spent on the railway; even if there were delays, Swettenham had kept within his original estimates.¹⁹

By then Swettenham had survived the investigations into land-jobbing, the hated Maxwell was no longer in a position of authority,

Mitchell had become Governor, and Swettenham felt able to pay off old scores, and indulge in a little boasting:

If the suggestion made by this Government in August 1890 to realize the Indian investments and remit them at once to the Crown Agents to meet our requisitions for railway and other material had been accepted and acted on, \$100,000 would have been saved. As a set-off against this loss may be placed the \$62,000 profit made when the balance of these investments was realized at my request and remitted to Singapore in August 1893.²⁰

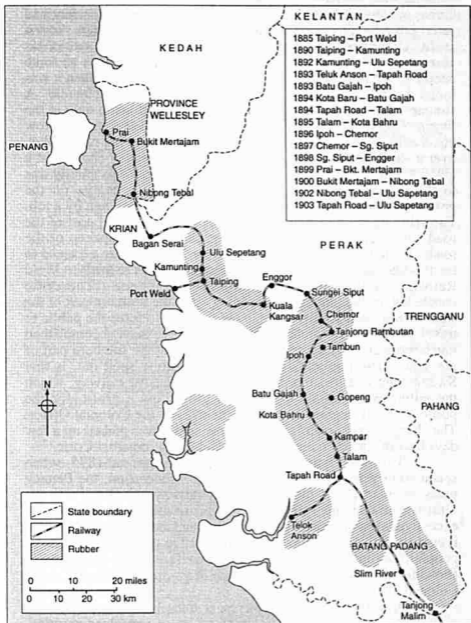
Minor additions had meantime been made to the Taiping line; another nine miles were added to the existing eight at Larut, while a survey was carried out north to Selama and east towards Kuala Kangsar and Ipoh.²¹ The stretch of line between Batu Gajah and Ipoh was opened on 7 February 1894, and celebrated with a ball at which Swettenham delivered a speech with a particularly characteristic flourish:

The Residents were sent to the Native States as advisers, and though a great deal of control has, by force of circumstances been put into their hands, I can speak for my distinguished predecessor Sir Hugh Low and myself when I say that that control has been exercised as far as possible in consultation with the Sultan and Chiefs of Perak: and I believe they resent the statement that the contrary has been the case.

The Sultan, replying in Malay, duly confirmed that he was indeed kept informed of all developments.²² Unfortunately the impression of full consultation was somewhat tarnished a month later when a Mr Forsythe, commenting on the report, pointed out that the Sultan's speech, which had taken fifteen minutes to deliver in Malay, had been translated into English in a mere two minutes.²³ By 1894 the Taiping-Kuala Kangsar trace was cleared, preliminary examination of the Ipoh-Chemor line had been completed, and work started in early 1895. Towards the end of the year the trace from Taiping to Parit Buntar was examined, and a report prepared on the Taiping section of the Taiping-Kuala Prai (Province Wellesley) railway.

Before concluding this account of Swettenham's railway activities in Perak, note must be taken of the opposition. Swettenham wrote for the *Straits Times* in 1893 a series of articles, which were shortly thereafter published in book form, *About Perak*. This publication produced a flurry of comment in the rival *Pinang Gazette and Mercantile Advertiser*. Other criticisms, and there were many, will be treated elsewhere. However on 2 October 1893, the anonymous author, apparently a European resident in Perak, wrote of Swettenham's attempts to make the railway profitable.

Railways in Perak



He stated that Swettenham's article on opening up communications had been read with great distaste by residents of Perak, in view of the fact that Swettenham himself as Resident had taxed bullock carts on one road to enable the railways to show a profit. A further article the following day noted that in one of his absences on leave a tax had been imposed on sampans to force people to use the railway. This had only been removed when it was found that there was more traffic than the railway could handle. A similar anonymous charge was made at about the same time in the *Straits Times*. The author then quoted from *About Perak* to show that Swettenham himself agreed that where road and rail ran parallel, over a short distance at least, even when the railway charged at a low level, the road was cheaper.²⁴ This of course was chiefly due to the expenses of road upkeep, which were a charge on the government, and which could not be recouped, other than by a toll. The critic went on to point out that the original capital cost of the road was a fraction of the cost of the railway, the upkeep of the roads should be met from general revenue, and 'that it is a scandal to tax the Matang Road to throw its natural traffic on to the Port Weld Railway, as the present Government has done.' The critic concluded by alleging that the opening up of the southern part of the state by rail intentionally left gaps in the road to force the public to travel by rail. The whole exercise could have been accomplished much more cheaply by using roads throughout the southern part of the state. The implication, though never quite spelt out, is that Swettenham had insisted on an unduly expensive railway, which the public was obliged to use, and thus show a profit, for the purpose of self-aggrandizement in the eyes of the Colonial Office. The charge, if not specific, was serious, and it was picked up a few days later in a letter to the editor, signed by 'An Impartial Critic.'²⁵

The point was not forgotten, for as late as 1895, when speculation was rife on the possibility of Federation, the Penang press, in an article on the Kinta Valley railway, noted that revenue returns showed the railway to be profitable only because of excessive taxes on roads and rivers. It concluded: 'It would be well if egotistical administrators were compelled to consult some body of people more interested in the general welfare of the state than in showing profits on paper for the sake of gaining preferment at the Colonial Office.'²⁶

In the final analysis however, it must be admitted that the arguments of the critics scarcely stand up to any close scrutiny. Taxes were indeed imposed, but they cannot have had any significant effect on the long-term profitability of the Perak railways. On these, in his six years as Resident, Swettenham left an indelible mark. Swettenham was not slow to take credit for his achievements

in railway line construction. In *British Malaya* he announced grandly: 'I am responsible for the Malay States lines, with the exception of the eight miles branch in Larut from Taiping to Port Weld, and the twenty four miles branch in Sungei Ujong, from Seremban to Port Dickson....' This was an assertion which was to be hotly contested later.²⁷

NOTES

1. C.D. Bowen, District Officer, Selama, 1889, quoted from 'British Malaya as it was,' *The Asiatic Review*, 46 (165), pp. 896-910, January 1950, in Rex Stevenson, 1975, *Cultivators and Administrators*, p. 43.
2. HC 4958:4 Smith to Derby, 23 February 1885 and *STD*, 23 February 1885.
3. *STD*, 27 September and 11 October 1884, quoting *PGSC* articles.
4. CO 273/133:235 ff. Comments on OAG to CO, 72 of 23 February 1885.
5. HC 4958:76 PAR 1885.
6. HC 5884:45, 48 PAR 1888 and HC 6222:7, Smith to Knutsford, 10 July 1890.
7. SSF Ry 2941/89, Ry 3379/89 & CS 2458/89. *STD*, 18 July 1889.
8. SSF 4070/89, *PGSC*, 16 May 1890, *STD*, 2 October 1889 and PPC 6222:18, PAR 1889 and PPC 6576:15, PAR 1890.
9. *STD*, 10 October 1890.
10. *STD*, 26 October 1889.
11. See The Kinta Valley Railway Survey from Telok Anson to Tapah, 1889. University of Malaya Library, Microfilm 606.1., HC 6222:19, PAR 1889, and *STD*, 16 January 1889.
12. Kinta Valley Railway Survey, op. cit., and CO 273/168:423 OAG to CO, Confidential of 28 October 1890. See also Chapter 30.
13. *STD*, 8 November 1890.
14. HC 6576:15-6, PAR 1890.
15. SSF 323/91.
16. CO 273/185:813 Swettenham to CO, March 1892, and Kaur, 1985, op. cit., p. 54, and HC 6576:15-6, PAR 1890.
17. HC 7228:16, PAR 1892 and *STD*, 25 April 1894.
18. HC 7228:49-51, AR Sel Rly 1892. *SJ*, 1:51.
19. HC 7546:11, PAR 1893, PPC 7877:13, PAR 1894, *STD*, 15 May 1893.
20. HC 7546:18, PAR 1893.
21. HC 7228:22, PAR 1892.
22. *PGSC*, 17 February 1894.
23. *PGSC*, 12 March 1894, *STD*, 17 March 1894.
24. In *About Perak* pp. 22-3, Swettenham was notably cautious on the comparative costs of railway and bullock cart transport.
25. *About Perak* and *PGMA*, 29 September, 2-5, 10 October 1893, and *STD*, 27 September 1893.
26. *PGSC*, 17 June 1895.
27. *British Malaya*, p. 279.

Education

The Colonial authorities, from the establishment of Residential rule up to the turn of the century have often been accused, not without reason, of disregarding education in the Malay Peninsula. In this chapter we shall trace the development, or more correctly, fossilization of Swettenham's views on the subject, and consider to what extent they influenced general attitudes towards education in the Peninsula at that time.¹

The views of British administrators at this time in the Peninsula closely reflected those of their contemporaries in the UK. In this they were influenced by Forster's Education Act of 1870. The Act had only been passed after much public debate, but it established for the first time the desirability of providing education for every child. The State's duty to educate its citizens had been recognized.²

In parallel with the debate over education in the UK, there was set up in the Straits Settlements in 1869 a Select Committee, the Isemonger Committee, named after its Chairman, to decide on the level of funds to be allocated to education in the Settlements. This committee recommended that the annual grant of \$14,480 be increased to \$17,632, with the modest increase to go chiefly to mission schools, because of their charitable activities. But this was no more than an interim measure: the whole question was to be reviewed in more detail a year later, by a further Select Committee, headed by Colonel Woolley, assisted by W.R. Scott, and the ubiquitous W.H. Read.

The Woolley Report, as it came to be known, remarked on the government's inadequate encouragement to education, and the indifference of the 'Native Races,' particularly the Malays. It further pointed out that such sums as had been expended had not been effectively used from lack of adequate supervision: '... the general result has been far from satisfactory.' Their recommendations included the appointment of an Inspector of Schools, a reform of the grants system, and the extension of vernacular education.³

It was two years before A.M. Skinner was appointed Inspector of Schools, a post he held till 1879. Vernacular education, especially in Malay, became a key policy: so much so that after 1876, government support for the few Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools stopped, on the convenient assumption that parents of children attending such schools would prefer to support the Mission and Free Schools, where English was the medium of education. In all fairness it must also be mentioned that as a result of immigration policies, the proportion of children (and women) amongst the Chinese and Indian immigrant communities was a small fraction of what might be expected in a normally balanced population. The need for education in these communities was not therefore regarded as urgent.⁴

Meantime until 1882 little progress was made in Perak and Selangor. The Residents had more pressing business on their hands. Nevertheless, Davidson opened a government Malay school in Klang in 1875, and James Innes, one at Bandar, Langat in 1876. In Perak, the first school was opened by Hugh Low at Sayong in 1878. In all cases attendance was poor, and supervision minimal. Innes recorded that the schoolmaster at Langat confined his activities to teaching the rudiments of the Koran, and considered that if he did not limit himself in this way, he would have no scholars at all. If education was to progress, Innes felt that it should be made compulsory, for the reading and writing of Malay.⁵

Thus education stagnated in the Protected States till the arrival of Sir Frederick Weld. On his first extensive tour of the States with Swettenham, he was concerned to note the lack of educational facilities. Forwarding the 1881 Annual Reports of the States to Lord Kimberley, he wrote: 'I have invited the special attention of the Residents in all States to the question of education, and I trust that next year I may be able to report that schools are being established.'⁶

In Selangor, Douglas submitted comprehensive proposals for the expansion of the education system, including school boards, having established from the Sultan and the leaders of the Chinese community that both groups would welcome instruction in English as well as the vernacular.⁷ However these proposals, motivated perhaps by his desire to retain his job as much as by any new found enthusiasm for education, came to nothing. As we have seen, he lost his job to Swettenham in the autumn of 1882. Swettenham had of course been in the Colonial Secretariat in Singapore when Weld's instructions on education had been sent out earlier in the year. He was therefore well aware of the importance which the Governor attached to the issue, even if he did not whole-heartedly share Weld's enthusiasm for the subject.

On arrival in Selangor, Swettenham hastened therefore to take the matter up with Singapore. He commented: 'I think the scheme proposed by Mr Douglas is rather elaborate. I should like first to be sure of the scholars, and where I can get twenty *certain*, to put in a schoolmaster who will teach the Koran, Reading and Writing Malay and Simple Arithmetic.'⁸ In the 1883 estimates, he indicated that he wanted schoolmasters at each major centre of population, where schools were to be set up, supervised by the Collectors of Land Revenue.⁹ Within a year he had increased the number of Malay vernacular schools from one to six, and the number of pupils to exactly 200, with an average daily attendance of 167. He remarked on a problem which was increasingly to trouble the Residents: the difficulty in encouraging school attendance in the outstations. Only in Kuala Lumpur and Klang were the schools well attended. In the outstations, attendance improved in the second half of the year, after a notification had been sent to all parents urging their children to attend. He further noted the need for a good visiting teacher and 'an European officer with time enough at his disposal to enable him to make constant inspections of the schools.'¹⁰

An attempt was made at this time to establish the post of Malay 'Visiting Teacher': one who would visit the schools and ensure that standards and uniformity were maintained. A suitable teacher from Singapore was appointed in April 1883, but though his work was well regarded, he resigned in 1884 and was not replaced.¹¹

Below the minimum of twenty pupils, guaranteed by the District Officer and the Penghulu, it was felt the school would be totally uneconomic, and indeed should be closed. In addition a suitable teacher had to be hired: he should be able to teach the Koran, reading and writing Malay and simple arithmetic. For this he was to receive \$20 a month. There were to be five hours of instruction a day, divided between morning and afternoon, six days a week, with long vacation during the Muslim fasting month. Instruction, together with the children's books and slates, was to be free.¹²

In the 1884 estimates for Selangor, Swettenham continued to urge expansion of the State education system: 'I need say nothing to recommend to His Excellency the cause of education in Selangor, a cause for which I think the Government has hitherto done too little.' He was also mindful of the needs of the Chinese community, whose children regrettably spent so much of their time in the gambling booths: 'It is but right, tho' the Chinese are aliens, to furnish education for the children of those who mainly contribute to the revenue of this State.'¹³

Of all the problems faced by the school system at this time, the reluctance of the Malays to send their children for education at a

government school was one of the most serious. There were two reasons for this: one was Malay suspicion in the early days, that the British were using this as an opportunity to convert Malays to Christianity. It was gradually overcome, in part by allowing the premises to be used after school-hours, by the teacher for Koran classes. In this way Malay suspicion was allayed. There was also a considerable suspicion of any teacher, albeit Muslim, from outside the local community. The second problem, which again diminished with time, was the inability of the Malay community to understand the potential value of education. In traditional Malay society, the Koran school had been the customary form of education, teaching children to read and recite Koranic verses, often without understanding what they meant. In many rural areas this had for generations been the only form of education.

An interesting instance, which illustrated all these problems, occurred towards the end of 1883, when Swettenham was in India at the Colonial Exhibition. Raja Mahmood was at this time penghulu at Pasir Penambang in the Kuala Selangor district. With his support, the Collector, Turney, had appointed a local man, Haji Dollah, as master of the new school which had been opened in March 1883. Raja Mahmood's own son was one of the first pupils. However in September 1883, Haji Dollah suddenly died, and the school was closed for a short time. Haji Dollah's successor appears to have been a Malay, brought in from the Straits Settlements. As attendance was low, Turney obtained permission from Rodger, in Swettenham's absence, to send a circular to all parents with children of six years old and above, urging them to send their children, or face a fine. Turney's notice, interestingly, stressed that the school was still a Malay school, the teacher a Malay, and that afternoons were still devoted to reciting the Koran.¹⁴

Raja Mahmood evaded signing this notice, and indicated that Turney should do so. This was done, and had a salutary effect on the attendance levels. However Turney additionally sent the teacher out to visit parents who had not yet sent their pupils, to explain to them why they should do so. Raja Mahmood was among the parents thus visited, and was extremely angry at being approached in this way, interpreting it as an act of attempted intimidation against himself, and his relations. The problem was serious, for Raja Mahmood and his relations lived within a few yards of the school, and if such an influential man as he refused to co-operate, the outlook for schools in Kuala Selangor was bleak.

Further investigations revealed that there were two reasons why Raja Mahmood refused to co-operate. First, the new master was a stranger. Secondly, Mahmood's son, together with various other boys were by then being taught the Koran in an approved

fashion at home, in the same way as his ancestors had been taught. When the boy's Koran studies were complete, Raja Mahmood indicated that he would not prevent him from attending school if he wanted, but he would not encourage him. Raja Mahmood, in his letter of justification to Turney, said he 'would rather die or leave the country than send his own child and the children of his people to the government school.' Rodger, as Acting Resident, had offered to replace the master with a man more congenial to Raja Mahmood, while Turney pointed out that if the administration accepted Koran study as an adequate excuse for avoiding all other forms of education, 'I have but little hope for the success of the school at Kuala Selangor.'

At this stage Swettenham returned from India, and it is a tribute to the strength of his relationship with Raja Mahmood that he alone was able to resolve the problem. The precise details are not clear, but a mutually acceptable solution was reached on the basis that the master would be changed, while Raja Mahmood on his part would send his children and those of his people to the government school, in the mornings at least. Swettenham's emollient abilities were illustrated in his memo to Turney: 'I have seen ... Raja Mahmood and settled this — R. Mahmood is extraordinarily sensitive and full of Malay prejudices but as far as I know is perfectly honest and loyal and his service has been great. He is a man of energy and ability, and all I know against him is that he often asks for money.'¹⁵ For many years, Swettenham's successors in Selangor approached the question of compulsory school attendance with considerable caution. It was an issue to be handled by persuasion rather than coercion: the principle came to be accepted gradually, as the older parents were replaced by younger people whose memories scarcely extended to the time before British intervention.

Swettenham's annual report for Perak in 1884 highlighted some of the problems. Regretting the lack of interest by both parents and pupils in schooling, Swettenham added: 'The Government has so far accomplished very little in the cause of education I am inclined to believe that the Government must make greater efforts to build schools, engage teachers and persuade scholars to attend.' He went on to remark that the sum spent on education in 1884 was a modest \$4,046, and stressed the need for a government education officer. Smith, in his covering letter to Lord Derby supported this proposal by noting the need for a special officer to be responsible for education in the three Protected States. The idea was never implemented.¹⁶ Swettenham's thoughts on this particular subject lacked the ring of conviction which marked his approach to issues closer to his heart. Low was perhaps being a

little charitable the following year, when he sent in the 1885 report: 'Very fair progress was made during the year under the personal efforts of the Acting Resident, who has always taken a great interest in this subject.' The *Straits Times* took a similar view.¹⁷

An Honorary School Inspector was indeed appointed in Selangor in 1884. He was H. Conway Belfield, the Kuala Lumpur District Magistrate. He immediately took steps to introduce examination standards, to standardize the curriculum and extend it, with beneficial results. It seems that a similar appointment was made at around the same time in Perak.¹⁸ Yet in his Education Report for 1887, Belfield noted: 'I desire again to point out that I have been afforded no opportunities whatever for visiting the district schools and have not the smallest personal knowledge of the greater number of them during the year.'¹⁹

Yet as responsibilities of government officers increased in both states, it became less and less possible for such inspectors to devote adequate time to the post. In 1888, when Templer Tickell was appointed Collector of Land Revenue in Selangor, and coincidentally Inspector of Schools, Swettenham remarked *en passant*, 'the Inspectorship of Schools is but an honorary post.' The point was reiterated in the Selangor Annual Report for 1887, prepared by Swettenham: no substantial progress would be obtained without better supervision. The Inspector of Schools was far too busy with other jobs to leave his office, a point confirmed in the State Education Report for that year, in which the Inspector admitted that he had not been able to visit or examine even once the bulk of the schools in the state.²⁰

In 1890, Smith, in response to such comments, suggested that H.B. Collinge be appointed Superintendent of Education for Perak and Selangor. This idea was supported by Lord Knutsford in the Colonial Office. Unfortunately W.E. Maxwell was by now in Selangor as Resident, and greatly disliked the idea of sharing such an officer with his rival, Swettenham, in Perak. Moreover, as he pointed out in a brusque reply, he had already made his own arrangements to recruit the Revd F.H. Haines. Collinge was therefore appointed to Perak only. For the first time, in the two most important Protected States, education was being given the attention it deserved.²¹

The final three years of Swettenham's tenure of the Selangor Residency saw no very great increase in the numbers of pupils in the schools, and certainly no attempt to introduce English into the curriculum. In Perak the same mood prevailed. Low subsequently justified his inaction in the educational field by saying: 'I am afraid I did not go in much for schools, because I did not think that at the time they would be much appreciated.'²² However after Low's

retirement, Swettenham greatly increased the expenditure on schools in Perak from \$1,256 in 1889 to \$10,034 in 1891. The numbers of schools increased in the same period from eleven to 51, and the registered pupils from about 500 to 2,780. Moreover in the last two years of this period, four girls' schools were opened.²³

The 1888 Annual Report indicates that as a result of a request from the Sultan, Swettenham arranged for his brother-in-law, M.E. Holmes, of the magistrate's office in Kuala Kangsar, to give English tuition to the Sultan and certain of the young rajas. The arrangement lasted little more than a year, at the end of which some of the rajas transferred to the first Government English School at Kuala Kangsar, which was opened at this time.²⁴

With Collinge's appointment in Perak, the idea of creating posts of Malay 'Visiting Teachers' was revived, one being appointed in 1890, and two or three more fairly soon thereafter. Each was given fifteen Malay schools to supervise, and was required to visit each school once a month. Amongst their other supervisory duties was the duty to visit parents of truant children, to encourage regular school attendance.²⁵ Yet the early 1890s saw a drawing back by Swettenham from his previous attitudes which were generally in favour of cautious expansion of education. The reasons for these are complex, and throw some light on his overall underlying attitude, not only towards the Malays, but towards colonialism in general:

The one danger to be guarded against is an attempt to teach English indiscriminately. It could not be well taught, except in a very few schools, and I do not think that it is at all desirable to give the children of an agricultural population an indifferent knowledge of a language that to all but the very few would only unfit them for the duties of life, and make them discontented with anything like manual labour. At present the large majority of Malay boys and girls have little opportunity of learning their own language, and if the Government undertakes to teach them this, the Koran and something about figures and geography (especially of the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago), this knowledge and the habits of industry, punctuality and obedience that they will gain by regular attendance at school will be of material advantage to them, and assist them to earn a livelihood in any vocation, while they will be likely to prove better citizens and more useful members of the community than if imbued with a smattering of English ideas which they would find could not be realized.²⁶

This highly articulate outburst was prompted chiefly by the realization that his successor in Selangor, Maxwell, had committed himself to an extension of English education in Kuala Lumpur, with

the establishment there of a school to teach English to the Malay aristocracy.²⁷ By 1893 Swettenham's views had hardened:

I am not in favour of extending the number of English schools except where there is some palpable desire that English should be taught. Whilst we teach children to read and write and count in their own languages or in Malay, the *lingua franca* of the Peninsula and Archipelago, we are *safe*. Beyond that I should like to see the boys taught useful industries and the girls weaving and embroidery.²⁸

It was not until he addressed the Royal Colonial Institute in 1896 that Swettenham elaborated in fullest detail his attitudes on the subject.

Though we have not done all for education that was possible, still we have done a good deal - and the question of education in the East is one that I feel possesses great difficulties. Nothing but good can, I think, come of teaching in the native languages what we call the three R's; and of greater value still are the habits of orderliness and punctuality, and the duties inculcated by teachers in the hope of making good citizens of their pupils. We have schools for girls as well as boys; and that I think, is cause for congratulation in a Muhammadan country, where it will be understood that the only religious instruction is that of the Koran, at special hours, and usually by a special Koran teacher. I do not think we should aim at giving Malays the sort of higher education that is offered by the Government of India to its native subjects, but I would prefer to see the establishment of classes where useful trades would be taught. It is unfortunate that, when an Eastern has been taught to read and write English very indifferently, he seems to think that from that moment the Government is responsible for his future employment, and in consequence the market for this kind of labour is overstocked, while many honourable and profitable trades find difficulty in obtaining workmen, because of the prejudice against anything like manual labour.

A native of the East is curiously prone to imitate the Western, but his imitation is nearly always only partial — hardly ever goes to the root of things, and fails by the omission of some important particular. He clothes himself in items of the European dress, he learns scraps of the language, essays British sports, without sufficient energy or determination to thoroughly succeed, and he will even, with what seems praiseworthy enterprise, take up the planting of some new product in imitation of an European neighbour, often I regret to say, wasting thereby a capital that would have

been better employed in some other form of planting or business which he really understood. Just as I think the Eastern is never so well or becomingly dressed as in his national costume, so I think it should be our object to maintain or revive his interest in the best of his traditions, rather than encourage him to assume habits of life that are not really suited to his character, constitution, climate, or the circumstances in which he lives — which are, in fact, unnatural to him, and will lead him to trouble and disappointment, if not to absolute disaster.²⁹

Underlying Swettenham's pronouncements was his concept of order: a Victorian concept, in which the social fabric of society was maintained by ensuring that all knew their station in life. The Malay agriculturalist must on no account be allowed to rise above his station, or disorder could be expected. On the other hand, the Malay ruling classes were to be allowed some modest access to an English-based education. This was to assist them in their role as figure-heads in a British-controlled administration.

There was a further reason for this attitude, though Swettenham never spelt it out. By maintaining the position of the Malay kampong-dwellers, unable to speak English, and the facade of a Malay ruling class involved on the periphery of the British administrative system, Swettenham and his colleagues enhanced and entrenched their own roles. Being fluent speakers of the language, as Residents and intercessors they could speak on behalf of the simple, scarcely educated kampong-dweller. Moreover as advisers to the Sultans, still nominally at least independent, they could enhance their own status as being in a very different category and separate from the Straits Settlements. Once the idea of Federation or annexation came to be discussed, this latter argument proved particularly valuable.

Closely allied to the concept of order, was Swettenham's idea of 'regeneration of the Malays.' In this the vernacular schools which he was prepared to encourage, played a key role. Such an education would change the social and political character of the Malays, but at the same time not endanger the existing structure of Malay society, dominated by the Sultan, manipulated by the British, to exercise control over the rural populace. A populace that had been taught the virtues of obedience, punctuality and industry was likely to prove much easier to rule in the future. Thus moral regeneration was encouraged, so long as it was not at the expense of the social order.³⁰

'Unregenerate' was a term often applied by Swettenham to conditions in the days before British intervention. After spelling out the changes brought about by British intervention, Swettenham

wrote: "the old order changeth," and in the case of the Malay, the change amounts to something like regeneration.' Then, after mentioning the physical changes in the countryside, he adds with obvious approval: '...but at heart the Malay man and Malay woman are very much what they were.'³¹ Here was the key to resolve the puzzle posed by Swettenham's opposition to Malayan Union at the very end of his long life. It was a very simple one: there could be no change.

H.B. Collinge, Inspector of Schools in Perak, fully set out the views to which Swettenham subscribed:

Thousands of boys are taken away from idleness, and whilst learning to read and write their own language, to cipher a little, to know something of geography, to write Malay in the Roman character, and to take an active interest in physical exercise and manly sports, they at the same time acquire habits of industry, obedience, punctuality, order, neatness, cleanliness, and general good behaviour.... After a boy has been a year or two at school he is found to be less lazy at home, less given to evil habits and mischievous adventure, more respectful and dutiful, much more willing to help his parents, and with sense enough not to entertain any ambition beyond following the humble home occupations he has been taught to respect. Our schools furnish good clerks to help the Penghulus in their work, and I know of several instances where the Penghulu himself has sat on the benches with the boys to improve his own knowledge of writing and accounts. The school also inspires a respect for the vernacular; and I am of opinion that if there is any lingering feeling of dislike of the "white man," the school tends greatly to remove it, for the people see that the Government has really their welfare at heart in providing them with education, free ... and with the greatest consideration for their Mohamedan sympathies, whilst the subjects taught are those that the people themselves most value at present The education afforded is suited to the pupil's station in life.... In conclusion, I would once more say that it is not advisable to teach English indiscriminately.... It is the mere smattering of English and English ideas that is harmful, and which in India causes the country to "swarm with half-starved, discontented men, who consider manual labour beneath them, because they know a little English". Some of our Malay boys may have the disposition to copy the gorgeous dress of the wealthier young men among them, and of their own rajas, but give them indiscriminately — children of an agricultural population — an indifferent knowledge of English, and they will not stop at this little weakness. A simple

vernacular education will, however, tend to make them better citizens and more useful members of the community.³²

The relaxed attitude on Swettenham's part towards education remained evident in his first Resident-General's Report. It merited two lines, recording simply that the post of Inspector of Schools was vacant.³³ However Rodger, Resident of Selangor took a more enlightened view: '... in my opinion we shall fail in our duties if we do not make every effort to encourage and develop the capabilities of those who, had not the States been brought under British protection, would now be in sole and absolute control of each district.' J.H.M. Robson, by then editor of the *Malay Mail*, took up the question again the following year: '... little or no attention has been bestowed on the subject of Malay employment.'³⁴ Swettenham remained adamant in his opposition to education, even disapproving, in 1897, of plans to mark Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee with a scholarship, on the ground that it would not benefit Malays. He preferred that a mosque be erected instead.³⁵

By the following year, with a Dr Driver recruited from the Seychelles as Federal Inspector of Schools, progress was anticipated:

Not that the subject has been neglected, but it is a question how far we are justified in giving to our native population an education which unfits them for manual labour and gives them a smattering of knowledge that may only make them discontented with their lot in life, while it fails to supply them with new careers or even to qualify them to compete successfully for subordinate Government posts. Personally, I should like to see the foundation of two schools, one for the training of Malay schoolmasters, and the other a technical school where boys of any nationality could acquire a sound knowledge of some such useful trade as printing, building, carpentering, or mechanical engineering.³⁶

Unfortunately for Malay education, Dr Driver was reported to have the same views as Swettenham.³⁷

By the following year, Swettenham was reluctantly conceding the need for, 'a few schools where English will be as thoroughly taught as possible.' But, 'for the great majority, there are the Vernacular Schools They do not attempt too much, but if they succeed in imparting the knowledge they profess to teach that is all that is required of them, and probably as much as is good for the children who attend them.' He went on to discuss the establishment of a Malay college, which should take in the best products of the Vernacular Schools, to become teachers. He also recognized in the same report that there was a need for industrial and technical

education, which he hoped might be financed by 'our wealthiest Chinese miner:' almost certainly a reference to Loke Yew.³⁸

By the following year, Swettenham admitted that the pressure to obtain clerks in government service and private business was so great that plans to attract school-leavers, especially Malays, to enlist for technical education, were being thwarted, '... and there is little chance of inducing any of the more intelligent scholars to turn their attention to any form of manual work.'³⁹ Swettenham initially favoured Malacca as the site for the technical school.⁴⁰ Two months later he felt that Kuala Kangsar would be preferable. The curriculum was to cover railway matters, printing, surveying, and skills appropriate to other government departments.⁴¹

There was a gradual modification in Swettenham's views, occasioned one senses largely by force of circumstance rather than conviction, for at about this time he wrote to Belfield, by then Acting Resident of Selangor, enquiring what 'the Selangor Government is doing or ever has done to educate the children of Malays to take a part in the administration and reap some of the advantage of the present prosperity It seems to me that we are bound to take some trouble in this matter to encourage the Selangor people and make them useful assistants.' Belfield in his reply stressed the need to expand the institutions which already taught English, rather than spreading English classes to other schools, on the grounds that supervision and discipline could never adequately be maintained outstation. Swettenham endorsed Belfield's views, and agreed to his proposal to establish a scholarship scheme for Malays, albeit reluctantly: '... provided the DO's are discreet and only send intelligent, well-behaved boys.'⁴²

The true nature of his conservative views he shared with Driver at the end of 1899: 'I deprecate the idea of forcing any form of education in these states.'⁴³ It was a subject which Swettenham harped on again in 1901: 'It is a characteristic of the Malays that they will adopt no measure of educational improvement even when they are ready to admit it is for their own good, without some degree of compulsion.'⁴⁴

The necessary compulsion was eventually applied, but only in the Straits Settlements by the passing of an ordinance compelling parents to send their children to school.⁴⁵ The exercise proved a success in Singapore, and plans were made later in the year to extend its application to Province Wellesley.⁴⁶ Meantime it had also been applied in certain of the Federated States, but, as an increasingly weary Swettenham reported, without significant results:

It is estimated that there are in the Federated Malay States about 70,000 children of a school-going age, but only 9,000 of these attend any recognised School, while many live in

places far removed from any school house; it is a fact that education has no great attraction for Malay parents, or Malay children who might contribute by far the largest number of scholars. The Government offers every reasonable encouragement and there is even a law in force in Selangor and the Negri Sembilan for compelling the attendance of children who live within a fair distance of a school. Inducements are offered to the most intelligent children in the Vernacular Schools to prosecute their studies in English teaching schools. The Government is most anxious to give a technical training to those who will profit by it, but the result of all efforts has so far proved disappointing. The fact is that, both in the Federated Malay States and the neighbouring Colony, the extension of Commercial and other enterprise has been so rapid, within the last 20 years, that the supply of intelligent and trustworthy clerks and other subordinates has never been equal to the demand. As a result almost every boy leaves school far too early, and, beginning with a wage beyond his worth, becomes discontented after a few years when his smattering of English and other acquirements fails to secure for him the preferment of his ambition. Whilst half-educated boys can obtain high wages it is almost hopeless to expect that they, or their parents, will reject the opportunity in favour of further and better education. Equally hopeless, apparently, is the expectation that boys similarly tempted will devote some years to a course of technical education. Whilst there is much to regret in a state of circumstances which can only right themselves, and that very gradually, it is perhaps not altogether to be deplored that youthful Malaya is not yet in the grip of that education epidemic which has already laid hold in India with such pathetic results.⁴⁷

In Swettenham's final two years of service, the problem of Malay employment in the higher echelons of government service resurfaced. In late 1902, he recorded, not entirely accurately, in a dispatch:

It has been my constant endeavour from my earliest connection with the Malay States to give every encouragement to the Malays, and whenever possible to employ them as native officials in every capacity for which they are fitted. I have constantly impressed this policy upon Residents in all the States.⁴⁸

The matter was raised again in 1903, when three Malay clerks wrote to Rodger pleading that Malays should be exempted from the senior-grade examinations which determined access to the top levels of the clerical service. Rodger, in commenting on this,

recommended that a school be established in the FMS for the sons and relatives of Malay nobility. Treacher, as Resident-General, opposed the idea, when he passed it up to Swettenham, who replied as follows:

I agree with you...on the question of schools. The only strong argument I can see for a special school for the children of Malays of good family is that they might receive more attention than in a general school. That could be met by having a special class for them.

The Malacca school is, however, a capital place to train intelligent Malay boys, and what, I think, might be done is to institute some valuable scholarships to be given by the Government, on the advice of masters of schools to, say, 10 Malay boys annually (if there be so many deserving)⁴⁹

However by the time he wrote his 1903 Annual Report, Treacher had changed his views, and become an enthusiastic supporter of the scheme.⁵⁰

With Swettenham in opposition, and Rodger posted in November 1903 as Governor of the Gold Coast, there was little hope of progress. It was not till Swettenham was gone, and a new Inspector of Schools, R.J. Wilkinson had been appointed, that Malay College, Kuala Kangsar, was established. The final years of Swettenham's service therefore saw only the most tentative and hesitant attempts to educate Malays in English. There was no attempt to provide education on a federal, as opposed to state basis, till after Swettenham had left.

Before concluding this chapter, we should note that in 1901 a Commission of Enquiry was appointed by the Governor to inquire into the state of English education in the colony (of Singapore). It reported that there were widespread complaints of the inadequacy of the English spoken by children leaving school. This was putting a severe strain on government offices and business houses. Such pressures gradually forced the government, both in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, to modify its attitude towards English education. By then Swettenham had retired, and it fell to his successors, notably Wilkinson and Treacher, to take steps to correct the position.⁵¹

Swettenham thus missed the opportunity of using education to start to forge a genuine multiracial society out of the racial mixing which his other activities had done so much to foster in the Peninsula. This can be traced directly to his views on the regeneration of Malay society: a development to be accomplished by restricting the spread of English language education to a small group of elite Malays. The approach was little more than an adjunct to his policies for the control of the Malay population. In Swettenham's

view, to give such people access through the English language to the intellectual mainstream was fraught with danger. For his entrenched colonialism was matched only by his paternalistic attitude towards his protégés. In failing thus to bring together the different racial groups through a broad-based and uniform education policy, Swettenham sowed the seeds of inter-ethnic stress in the Peninsula, and fostered the preservation of a plural economy in which the Malays occupied a less-favoured position than other ethnic groups. His rigid attitude towards maintaining social distinctions between *raja* and *rakyat* has helped to maintain the stratification of Malay society to the present day.

NOTES

1. For this chapter I have drawn extensively on Stevenson, 1975, op. cit. and Chai Hon Chan, 1969, op. cit.
2. Stevenson, 1975, op. cit., p. 23.
3. PSSLC, 8 December 1870, quoted in Stevenson, 1975, op. cit., p. 12.
4. Chai, 1969, op. cit., p. 228.
5. SSF 219/81.
6. HC 3428:5 ff. Weld to Kimberley, 4 July 1882.
7. SSF 320/82, quoted by Stevenson, 1975, op. cit., p. 28.
8. SSF 226/82. See also SSF 99/82 of 30 November 1882, quoted by Stevenson, 1975, op. cit., p. 30.
9. SSF 88/82 of 30 November 1882, p. 31.
10. HC 4192:54, SAR 1883.
11. Stevenson, 1975, op. cit., p. 98, fn. 14. SSF 226/82, 802/83, 4206/83 and 1703/84.
12. SSF 226/82, Swettenham to Col. Sec., 18 December 1882 quoted in Stevenson, 1975, op. cit., pp. 31-2, SSF 802/83.
13. SSF 1330/83, being the 1884 estimates.
14. A fuller account is given in Stevenson, 1975, op. cit., pp. 121-4. The relevant Selangor files are SSF 137/83, 706/86, 1971/83, 1244/86, 1734/86.
15. *Ibid.*
16. HC 4958:7 and 18 ff., PAR 1884.
17. HC 4958:78, PAR 1885, *STD*, 23 June 1886.
18. SSF 1880/84, 208/85, 126/86 and 743/87.
19. SSF 341/88, being the Education Report for 1887, dd. 20 January 1888.
20. SSF 1305/88, HC 5566:111, SAR 1887 and SSF 341/88.
21. HC 6222:89 Sec. State to Gov. Straits, 16 September 1890, SSF 75/90 and HC 6576:17, PAR 1890.
22. For average school attendance in Selangor 1886 to 1889 see Loh, 1975, op. cit., p. 167. For Low's comment see Kratoska, 1983, op. cit., p. 249.
23. Figures extracted by Stevenson, 1975, op. cit., p. 43 from PAR 1889-1891, found in HC 6222, 6576 and 6858.
24. HC 5884:36-7, PAR 1888.
25. SSF 1026/93 and 645/94, quoted in Stevenson, 1975, op. cit., p. 81.
26. HC 6576:18, PAR 1890.

27. See Stevenson, 1975, op. cit., p. 56.
28. HC 7546:15, PAR 1893. *Safe*: Swettenham's italics in a similar passage in *PGG*, 6 July 1890.
29. Kratoska, 1983, op. cit., pp. 186-7.
30. Stevenson, 1975, op. cit., pp. 196-7.
31. *The Real Malay*, pp. 261-2. See Chapter 48 for a comparison with Clifford's views.
32. *PGG*, 4 January 1895, pp. 4-7 quoted in Loh, 1969, op. cit., p. 172.
33. HC 8661:5, FMS AR 1896, RG's Report, para. 9.
34. HC 8661:38, FMS AR 1896, SAR, para. 9 and *MM*, 6 December 1897.
35. *PP*, 2 June 1897. The Jubilee Mosque erected at Bukit Chandan was estimated to cost \$40,000. *PP*, 9 June 1897.
36. HC 9108:6, FMS AR, 1897, RG's Report, para. 7.
37. *MM*, 8 June 1898.
38. HC 9524:7-8, FMS AR 1898, RG's Report, para. 10. There had been earlier suggestions for training schools for teachers. See SSF 5974/96 for example. See also *ST*, 12 July 1899.
39. HC 3826, FMS AR 1899, RG's Report, para. 10.
40. CO 273/246:239 ff. Mitchell to CO, 28 of 26 January 1899.
41. CO 273/250:386 ff. Governor to CO, 49 of 3 March 1899, enclosing memo by Swettenham of 21 February 1899.
42. SSF 668/99 quoted in Stevenson, 1975, op. cit., p. 165.
43. CO 273/252:708 ff. Report on Technical Education, FMS, 319 of 28 December 1899. Swettenham's memo is of the same date.
44. CO 273/269:94 Swettenham in Education Report, 1900, 272 of 13 June 1901.
45. CO 273/270:385 ff. Governor to CO, 421 of 25 September 1901 and CO 273/278: 340 ff. Governor to CO, 88 of 20 February 1901.
46. CO 273/281:579 ff. Governor to CO, 534 of December 1902.
47. HC 1297:4, FMS AR 1901, HC's Report, para. 4.
48. CO 273/284:373 Swettenham to CO, 463 of 15 November 1902.
49. Swettenham to Teacher, 16 September 1903 in Minutes of Conference of Residents, March 1904.
50. HC 2243:30, FMS AR 1903, HC's Report, para. 43.
51. Report of the Commission of Enquiry in the System of English Education in the Colony. SSLC Paper No. 24, 6 June 1902, quoted in Philip Loh Fook Seng, *Seeds of Separatism: Educational Policy in Malaya, 1874-1940*, OUP, Kuala Lumpur, 1975, pp. 50-1. See CO 273/284:421 Swettenham to CO, 448 of 27 November 1902.

Social Life

The preceding accounts of Swettenham's endeavours in the various fields of development may have conveyed the impression that there was little time for relaxation and social pleasures. Certainly until his return from leave in 1888, he did not even have a private secretary. However in that year, possibly as a result of contacts made while on leave, Swettenham recruited Arthur L. Keyser, a well connected young man, who in various capacities worked for Swettenham on and off till the turn of the century and remained in touch with him thereafter. Keyser in his memoirs¹ described his arrival in Kuala Lumpur and reception by Swettenham:

[a] picturesque figure, surmounted by the enormous hat which he then affected ... a few hours later my host in that delightful drawl which always made me wonder whether its words were really as soft as their sound, casually enquired whether I had come out to work or play, since once he knew, he could arrange a programme for either.²

There was a lively expatriate social circle, both in Kuala Lumpur and Taiping. In each place, the Resident, by virtue of his pre-eminent position in government, was expected to play a leading social role, a duty greatly simplified by a competent and presentable wife who could assist in entertaining, both the senior officials from Singapore, and the leading members of the local community.

The almost complete absence of references to Sydney Swettenham in the year of their return from leave in 1888 suggests that after her first recorded breakdown at the end of the previous year she scarcely appeared socially. The position changed the following year around March. It was by then an open secret that Swettenham was to succeed Low in Perak later that year. The *Straits Times* reported that he was anxious to leave Selangor, where he would be much missed, particularly for his clear and comprehensive view of details, unequalled in the region. After paying tribute to his engineering skills, the article continued: 'If his health can bear the strain, (which is what his friends fear) five years' brilliant administration of Perak will cover that neglected country

with roads and railways, and crown a career of exceptional usefulness bravely pursued under social conditions perhaps the most appalling that could befall a gifted and versatile man.³

This article, by an anonymous 'Selangor Correspondent' comes closest to revealing publicly what all must have known about the state of Sydney Swettenham's health. It confirms the impression that since her certification at the end of 1887, her mental health had remained precarious. Initially therefore it seems likely that both Sydney and her husband welcomed the news of the forthcoming arrival of their old friend, the recently widowed Meta Rome. She was almost certainly heading to or from Melbourne to settle her late husband's complex estate with the assistance of her Australian lawyer, Alfred Malleson.⁴ It would be congenial to visit old friends in Kuala Lumpur, and her presence would provide companionship for Sydney while her husband was so preoccupied with Selangor affairs.

Meta Rome accompanied by her ladies' maid⁵ was in residence with the Swettenhams in Kuala Lumpur by December 1888. Widowed at the age of thirty-three, with a young family left at home in England, her cheerful disposition no doubt contrasted, in Swettenham's eyes, very favourably with Sydney's precarious mental state. She came to play an increasingly major role in Swettenham's social life, at Sydney's expense. Thus by March 1889 she was partnering Swettenham at tennis in Kuala Lumpur in the ladies' and gentlemen's doubles, while Sydney was partnered by W.R. Wragge, a combination which proved superior to that of her husband and Mrs Rome.⁶ Concern continued to be expressed over the state of Swettenham's own health, brought on in part by worry over his wife.⁷

Sydney Swettenham meantime won the state tennis championship towards the end of May, with her earlier partner, Wragge.⁸ By the end of the month they were engulfed in a blaze of publicity marking their official departure from Selangor for Perak. Swettenham attended farewell dinners, including one given by the towkays of Selangor, while on the day of their departure, 31 May at 11:00 a.m. there was a farewell address at the public offices. Swettenham himself was presented with the text of the address on vellum in an ivory casket, ornamented with moonstones and set in gold filigree. The presenter was John Muir of the Rawang Tin Mining Company, the only such company in Selangor at that time which had not yet collapsed at the end of the mining boom.⁹

Swettenham replied suitably. Sydney was privately presented with a handsome diamond brooch, 'a souvenir from a large section of the community who have thoroughly appreciated the influence for the best which she has unceasingly exercised among all classes.'

The party made its way in a large procession to the train at Bukit Kuda, and thence to sandwiches and champagne on the *Mena*, at Klang, till the couple eventually departed at 3:00 p.m. The *Singapore Free Press* concluded its account of the event with the following informative paragraphs:

Never demonstratively popular, the Resident has managed to make it keenly felt that for quiet impartiality, strict integrity, and a prompt encouragement of zeal and energy, the quieter virtues may be far preferable to showy insincerity and cheap popularity.

The winning beauty, the cordial cheerfulness and ready sympathy of "Our Queen" with all that concerned the interests of her subjects has made it a lugubrious task to chronicle the mournful history of the day.¹⁰

Maxwell was to cast major doubts on Swettenham's integrity, but the passage, for all its fulsome style is remarkable for showing that Swettenham had certainly earned the respect of his European colleagues. More interesting is the indication that any lack of ability to inspire affection on his part was well compensated for by his wife. When not afflicted by bouts of manic depression, Sydney Swettenham acquitted herself well as the Resident's wife, fully earning the nickname 'Our Queen.' The official records tell the same story:

Mr Swettenham, having already acquired an extensive knowledge of the native states, was made British Resident of Selangor in 1882. The revenue of the State in that year was \$300,423. Its indebtedness amounted to \$291,074. He leaves it with a revenue of over \$1,500,000 and entirely free from debt. The material prosperity of the country is patent on all sides, evidencing the increased attention he has devoted to its administration in every branch. The people of all races and all nationalities in the state will long regret the departure of Mr. Swettenham, whose ability and energy have been untiringly devoted, for so many years, often in times of bad health, to their best interests.¹¹

Even Maxwell paid gracious tribute to his predecessor in his own first annual report on the state, praising 'the machinery of a civilized government given to the state by Mr Swettenham and Mr Rodger.'¹²

Meantime Mrs Rome disappeared from view, except as nominee for Swettenham's land transactions¹³ till the mid-1890s. At this time, on two occasions we find Swettenham instructing his publisher to return a manuscript of his, if found unsuitable for publication, to the same Mrs Rome, living first in Ayrshire, and then in Edinburgh. From this we may conclude that Meta Rome was more than a casual acquaintance. At the 1938 divorce, almost half a

century later, Sydney was convinced she was her husband's mistress.¹⁴

It is not clear whether she accompanied the Swettenhams to Perak. They were given a suitable reception on arrival in Taiping on 1 June 1889, by the government officers, with a Guard of Honour provided by the Perak Sikhs. At the comparatively early age of thirty-nine, Swettenham was the most senior and highly paid Resident in the country. It was a considerable responsibility. For the first two months, Swettenham himself was preoccupied with the problems of his new fiefdom: there was little sign of any social life, apart from two cricket matches in which Swettenham played during the first half of June.¹⁵

If Meta Rome was in the household, Sydney still had the support of her two brothers who were now in government service: Henry Carlyle Holmes, serving in Selangor paid her a visit in June, while Marcus Edward Holmes was by then already serving in Perak as first assistant to the Collector and Magistrate in Kuala Kangsar. This post he combined as we have seen with acting as tutor in English to Sultan Idris. The fact that her brothers had been given jobs in this way, through Swettenham's own influence, indicates that he was not entirely oblivious of his wife's welfare.¹⁶

In early August Swettenham set out on a tour of familiarization. A grand itinerary was prepared by Treacher, as Secretary to the Government, and distributed to all government offices in the state. He started with a visit to attend a State Council meeting in Kuala Kangsar on the 5th, continuing through Kinta, Batang Padang and Lower Perak.¹⁷ Later accounts of Swettenham's visits in Perak indicated that at least when he reached Teluk Anson, he always preferred to stay alone at the rest house rather than with one of his colleagues. W.M. Young was of course based in Teluk Anson at this time and it would have been more convenient to transact private business with him from the rest house, rather than from a fellow-officer's private residence.¹⁸ Sydney Swettenham took the opportunity of her husband's absence to visit Singapore in August, where she played tennis. Such sporting activities certainly kept her busy till 14 August, after which she seems to have remained in Singapore till the end of the month, when she accompanied a boisterous party of Singapore officials to Selangor to officiate at the commencement of the railway extension. From there she returned to Singapore, and took the boat back to Penang on 9 September.¹⁹

This appears to have coincided with a flurry of activity on the part of her relations, for the newspapers reported two of her brothers, M.E. and H.C. Holmes, as well as a further unidentified J. Holmes shuttling between Taiping and Penang. The movements

are consistent with a family crisis, perhaps precipitated by the discovery that Swettenham was carrying on, or had had an affair with Meta Rome. It is unclear whether Sydney suffered a further mental relapse at this juncture. Swettenham was careful not to mention this period, and perhaps for good reason, in his lengthy summary of her mental troubles at the divorce in 1938. Certainly Sydney disappeared from view till the end of October, when she presided over amateur theatricals at the Residency in Taiping. In H.J. Bron's comedy *War to the Knife*, Swettenham played the part of Captain Thistleton, while his brother-in-law M.E. Holmes took the part of Mr Harcourt. Major Walker by now commanding officer of the Perak Sikhs directed, stage-managed and made up the cast: he was after all nothing if not a theatrical person. 'As for the hospitality which followed, it is enough to say that Mrs Swettenham dispensed it.'²⁰

Social life in Taiping, and in Kuala Lumpur, was very restricted within the European community. Visitors were chiefly government officials, mostly from Singapore, businessmen, who did not always socialize with the European administrators in the State, and, in the case of Perak, a galaxy of late nineteenth century European zoological and botanical collectors. The collectors, often men of private means, or employed by European patrons, were attracted to the new Perak Museum at Taiping which was making a name for itself in Europe at the time. Yet there is little evidence that visiting scientists were in any way drawn into Perak social life.

Arnot Reid, the editor of the *Straits Times*, visiting Taiping in 1893, spoke well of its social life, partly due, 'to the friendly consideration of the Resident and his wife. The pleasant social tone must of course be due largely to the head of the Government.'²¹ Nor were opportunities missed to pay tribute to Sydney's role. Elsewhere we find Victorian doggerel on the Perak social scene:

R the Resident we all have to thank

S Mrs Swettenham our popular Queen.²²

The enthusiasm for Sydney was more spontaneous than that for her husband. The small social community revolved round the club, amateur theatricals and 'smoking concerts:' informal evenings at the Club or a private residence, where those attending were expected, singly or in groups, to sing, play popular tunes or present a skit.²³ There were further amateur dramatics in the Taiping school hall in November, by a local troupe, the Taiping Snowdrops, with the Swettenhams in the audience. Whatever the problems of the autumn may have been, they had apparently been resolved, for the moment. Weekends provided opportunities for cricket matches, with meals provided by the ladies, including Sydney.²⁴

Christmas of 1889 was spent by the couple in Singapore on a cricketing expedition. They travelled down in the company of Captain Cameron, the Colonial Engineer of Penang, and played poker all evening after dinner on board ship. On arrival in Singapore, they stayed with the Shelfords, part of a large house party, which also included Cameron and Major Walker. The Swettenhams and Walker attended a dance at Tanglin on Christmas Eve, and the Shelfords gave a dinner party for thirty on Christmas Day. In addition there was a dance at Government House on 27 December.²⁵ When not celebrating, the men played cricket. The Perak team returned to Penang on 30 December, and were given a riotous send-off by their hosts, being pelted with oranges, as was the custom at the time.²⁶

There then seems to have been a further problem in relations between the couple, for on 12 January Sydney set out from Penang via Singapore, for Hong Kong, with the Straits cricket team which were going to play there. In the party of course were a number of other wives, but all with their husbands. Once again, the team's departure from Singapore was marked with high spirits, as the travellers pelted, and were pelted by their friends on the quayside with bread and fruit.²⁷ Accounts of festivities in Hong Kong make no mention of Sydney, but she did not return to Singapore with the main party in early February. Instead she returned in mid-March with a smaller group, which included Swettenham's friend Martin Lister. They had apparently spent the intervening time on a visit to China.²⁸ More remarkable still was the fact that Sydney did not stop any longer than the vessel needed to dock in Singapore, but continued straight on to Brindisi on 18 March.²⁹ Captain Cameron, back in Singapore, went down to the wharf to see them off, noting that Mrs Shelford was on board.³⁰ By 21 March the vessel had cleared Penang. Swettenham himself meanwhile had left Penang for a hastily arranged leave two weeks before.³¹

The couple's erratic movements suggest problems between them. Swettenham did not set foot in UK during this period of almost four months, and it is unlikely that his wife did either. They apparently spent their time together in Italy. Swettenham gave the holiday only a passing mention in *Footprints*, confined to a brief recital of the Italian nobility he had visited.³² The evidence suggests that Swettenham, already under considerable pressure in his fight with Maxwell, found it convenient to absent himself from the Peninsula for a few months. That he did so while his wife was absent in Hong Kong reinforces the likelihood that the relationship was strained. Her hasty pursuit of him to Italy suggests that she may have been the one most anxious for a reconciliation.³³

The couple arrived back in Penang towards the end of June 1890.³⁴ For the next four months they both participated in the social life of Perak. As before, the social round consisted of cricket, performances by the Taiping Snowdrops, and the races, marred no doubt for Swettenham by the arrival of the unpopular Sir Frederick Dickson, half-way through the proceedings, in his capacity as Acting Governor.³⁵

At the end of August, the *Pinang Gazette* reported, 'The Resident and his amiable and popular lady have gone to the Cottage on Caulfeild's Hill, where we believe they propose remaining till the end of the month.' The party included Mr and Mrs Hill of Hill and Rathborne, and the Caulfeilds. On the descent, Hill took a short cut, and got caught between two rocks. He was not found till 11:00 p.m. by Caulfeild. It then proved impossible to get him out in the dark, and he was obliged to remain wedged there till the following morning. He was a portly man.³⁶

Although Swettenham continued active in the Perak government, the following two months were apparently quiet for Sydney, suggesting further troubles. She cannot have been greatly heartened when her brother, M.E. Holmes, was sacked from the Perak government in mid-August for irregularities in the accounts of the Kuala Kangsar treasury.³⁷ Dickson, always hostile to Swettenham, and by extension to members of his family, took the opportunity to pontificate. It was, he noted, the only case he had encountered in thirty years of a gentleman in the cadet service bringing disgrace to his colleagues by irregularities in money matters. Not only had Holmes cashed his own cheques at the government treasury without making proper entries in the books, which as assistant treasurer he was required to do: he had even gone to the agent of one of the revenue farms for a financial advance to bail out his debit balance on the eve of an audit of the state accounts.³⁸

Swettenham must have been appallingly and publicly embarrassed at being let down thus by a brother-in-law. No doubt this unhappiness contributed to Sydney's decision to leave for Europe at the end of October.³⁹ Whatever the reasons for Sydney's departure, Swettenham must have been under considerable strain at the end of 1890, for Dickson's investigations into his land speculations were under way.⁴⁰ Meantime Swettenham was also at this time heavily involved in the Labour Commission.⁴¹

Swettenham's mortification was the greater when he discovered that the ever-hostile Dickson planned to visit Krian in July 1891 to inspect the water supply scheme. In desperation he took the opportunity to pay a quick two-day visit to Deli in Sumatra,

ostensibly to view the work on the railways there: his only visit to the Dutch East Indies throughout his career.⁴²

By October 1891, there were signs that Swettenham's health was again under strain. He was granted generous leave terms: almost three months' full leave to date from 23 October, followed by six and a half months on half pay, with the possibility of a further extension.⁴³ A farewell dinner was given for him in Taiping: 'Everyone here regrets his departure and hopes that his health will be soon established, and that he will return to the State that he, in most critical times, has so ably administered.' A later report of the same event, giving an account of Swettenham's speech, added: 'He will also endeavour to persuade Mrs Swettenham to return with him.' It was public knowledge that the marriage was under strain.⁴⁴

From the end of October 1891 till his return to Singapore in January 1893, the Swettenham trail becomes sparse. Very shortly before, or immediately after his arrival in UK, Sydney was certified as lunatic and admitted to Otto House, Hammersmith for eight days. The timing of the certification indicates that Swettenham's influence on his wife was not for the best.⁴⁵ Much of Swettenham's leave on this occasion was marred by a very severe bout of double pneumonia. Fairfield noted in September 1892, on an application by Swettenham for an extension of leave: 'Some months ago Mr Swettenham all but died of influenza and congestion of the lungs.'⁴⁶ Recuperation took him to Bournemouth, Trouville in France and for two weeks of the waters at Baden-Baden. The illness, as he noted, rather spoiled a season's hunting with his brother at Hurworth.⁴⁷ The divorce papers suggest that through some of this time he was nursed by Sydney.

With his energies clearly returning, and time perhaps weighing on his hands, he yet again attempted to reopen the question of his leave, and pay as representative at the Colonial Exhibition in 1887. Needless to say his application was refused, but it illustrates the tenacity with which he regularly pursued improvements in his remuneration.⁴⁸ It may or may not be coincidence that this long period of leave coincided with a similarly long leave granted to Walter MacKnight Young.⁴⁹

One further episode, which almost certainly relates to Swettenham's activities in 1892 is the indication that the Colonial Office were considering recommending him, in 1893, for the award of KCMG. His name was withdrawn, because the Colonial Office believed he was about to be involved in divorce proceedings. In view of his wife's later action, after the failure of his attempt to divorce her in 1903,⁵⁰ it seems likely either that he was contemplating divorcing her at this stage, or was about to be cited as co-respondent in another case.⁵¹

The Swettenhams returned to Singapore on 7 January 1893⁵² and he resumed duties in Perak the following day.⁵³ They threw themselves with gusto into the social life of Taiping. The newspapers reported breathlessly at the end of January 'we are to have a big "hop" given by Mrs Swettenham on Monday 6th, and a performance of the "Taiping Frivollers" on the following evening.'⁵⁴ A day or two later the couple were in Teluk Anson to view the new bridge over the Bidor River.⁵⁵ This was the only visit she made to the town while Swettenham was Resident. There was no danger of embarrassment on this occasion on account of any irregularities, for the McKnight Youngs were still safely on leave.

Sydney gave away school prizes in early February at a ceremony at the Perak Club. The prizes were 'all of a good and useful kind,' the newspaper noted approvingly.⁵⁶ H.B. Collinge, the Inspector of Schools, in thanking her, noted it was the first time she had been able to be present on such an occasion. Swettenham himself made a speech, urging not so much academic excellence as a high moral tone. E.W. Birch gave a word or two of thanks on Sydney's behalf: any form of public speaking must have been a considerable strain. The ceremonies concluded, after vociferous cheers for Sydney, with the dismissal of the pupils for one month's holiday.⁵⁷

The cabaret which was put on in March must have been a tense occasion, for none other than W.E. Maxwell was present.⁵⁸ Easter celebrations also involved a burlesque at the Residency. Sydney issued over one hundred invitations to a performance of 'Mr O'Kaya of Pahang, an up-to-date version of the game Hide & Sikh.' If the acting was as bad as the puns, it must have been a painful two and a half hours.⁵⁹

A further innovation in Perak in 1893 was the Agricultural Horticultural Show, held for the first time in Taiping in June. It became a major event in the Perak social calendar. Flowers, fruits, vegetables and livestock, including on occasions elephants were put on show. The Resident was invariably chairman or patron of the organizing committee, a judge, and a major exhibitor. It was scarcely surprising that he or his wife was also a major prize-winner. Sydney won or was placed in classes for a collection of plants, eucharis lily, orchid in flower, exotic ferns, basketwork, the best duck and the best cat.⁶⁰

There was also a steady flow of visitors from Singapore. Sir Cecil Smith had paid a farewell visit to Perak in May, when the opportunity was taken of arranging for Lady Smith to drive the last rivet into the Bidor railway bridge, so that Smith might declare open the first section of the Kinta railway. Smith's departure was marked

publicly by extensive celebrations, and a public eulogy by Swettenham in the 1892 Perak Annual Report:

If I may without impropriety, and in view of the approaching termination of His Excellency's service in the Straits, refer to the Governor's guidance of administration in Perak, I would say that there has been no important step taken, no post filled, no public work completed but which is due to His Excellency's influence and assistance. The extension of the Larut Railway and the construction of the Kinta Valley line, the most important and valuable work the state has ever attempted, are undertakings for which the state has specially to thank Sir Cecil Clementi Smith.⁶¹

Privately no doubt Swettenham viewed with some apprehension the departure of the man with whom he had worked so satisfactorily for many years: for in the months until Sir Charles Mitchell, the new governor, should take up his post, in early 1894, W.E. Maxwell was to be Officer Administering Government in Singapore. The main farewell banquet took place on 23 August 1893. Swettenham, as an old friend, was staying with the Governor at Government House. Care was taken to separate Maxwell and Swettenham at the banquet. Smith in his speech described Swettenham as one of his oldest, warmest and most trusted friends. Swettenham answered the toast, 'To the native states and the colonies,' with a ten-minute speech, 'speaking in a slow, cool, distinctly articulated voice, which caused every single word to tell.'⁶²

The *Pinang Gazette*, in a rare and grudging admission of approval, remarked of the speech, that Swettenham's 'ironical and sarcastic method of speech and minuting is one of the faults of that otherwise able administrator.' In his speech, Swettenham referred to his unpopularity with the Penang press, but pointed out that over the previous twenty years the prosperity of the Native States had increased enormously. Whereas in the early years, the Straits Settlements had helped the Native States financially, he was now in the happy position on behalf of those states, to offer to make a loan to the Straits Settlements.⁶³

This was not the only occasion when reference was made to Swettenham's sarcasm. Just over a year later, the Resident attended the Annual Prize Giving Day for the Taiping Girls School at the Perak Club. The headmistress, something of a busy-body, made impertinent comments about the Perak Government, 'Reflections made on itself' she remarked, 'must be nipped in the bud at once, even though they be true.' Swettenham made a sarcastic speech in reply. 'He is possessed of an abundance of wit and sarcasm, which are generally used in the wrong place and at the wrong time,' the

paper commented.⁶⁴ Back in Perak, after the farewell ceremonies for Smith, Swettenham was preoccupied with the wedding of one of the Sultan's daughters, which entailed a visit to Kuala Kangsar, and a dance held by the Sultan at the Residency.⁶⁵

The closing months of 1893 must have been equally busy for Sydney: they were marked by an unusual burst of energy, characteristic of manic depressives, and for which she was to pay dearly. In early October she was supporting the Church Workers Association by singing 'Beauty's Eyes' at an entertainment for their benefit.⁶⁶ Then there were the races in Taiping, when her brother, H.C. Holmes came to visit from Selangor. He took her back on a visit there, while Swettenham himself was away on a visit to Upper Perak.⁶⁷ In Selangor she was royally entertained, a dance being given in her honour at the Selangor Club by the Kapitan China.⁶⁸ There was a spill as well:

Mrs Swettenham, accompanied by Captain Lyons, paid Rawang a flying visit on Friday November 3rd. While being driven past the Police Station, the pony was frightened by the guard presenting arms and swerving suddenly to the right bolted straight towards the river. Mr Robson, who was driving, managed to turn the animal into a ditch by the roadside, and by allowing it to cannon against a grass bank was able to prevent what might have been a very serious accident; for had the pony continued on its course for a few yards further, it would have gone over the steep bank into the river. Mrs Swettenham, who showed great presence of mind, luckily escaped with a slight shaking.⁶⁹

She returned to Perak later in November, 'to the great regret of her many friends here,' having sung at a musical evening at the Selangor Club.⁷⁰ She had also been busy with the beautification of Taiping and the establishment of the Taiping Lake Gardens. The *Selangor Journal*, in an account of Perak social life of 1893, had this to relate of her:

The presence of this lady [Mrs Swettenham] always has a beneficial effect on Taiping society, as she is most energetic and spares no pains in getting up entertainments. She is an excellent hostess and interests herself in everything. Mrs Swettenham has interested herself since her return in reforming a large tract of waste land, which, with the assistance of convict labour and the supervision of Mr Scott [Inspector of Mines] under her direction and advice has been turned into charming pleasure grounds.⁷¹

The leading Chinese donated \$500 for a fountain to the newly landscaped Government Park (subsequently Lake Gardens) at Taiping which was opened in the presence of the Swettenhams: '...

and the thanks of the public are due to Mrs Swettenham, at whose special request and after whose design these gardens were laid out on land which at one time was nothing less than a wilderness.⁷²

The above passages emphasize not only Sydney's determination, but also the respect in which she was generally held. Her energy was noted even by her husband, who, in thanking the Chinese for their donation, gave public credit to his wife for her work: apparently the only occasion on which he publicly and officially acknowledged her activities.⁷³ For her good offices, she was given a silver model and a key. Swettenham made a suitable speech, tea was served at stalls, of which Sydney had one where she presided, '... and with her usual affability made the whole arrangements pass very pleasantly.' Thereafter, the party sat till dark listening to the Taiping band.⁷⁴

Yet the strain of all this, added to a St Andrew's ball in Penang at the end of the month was too much. As is often the case with manic depressives, a period of productive and frenetic activity is often followed by a bad attack and a collapse. Such occurred at the beginning of December, when Sydney, accompanied by Mrs Caulfeild, left Penang for Singapore by boat. The exact nature of the attack was not recorded, but it was regarded as sufficiently serious to cause the boat to turn back to Penang. Her brother, H.C. Holmes had to be summoned on emergency leave from Selangor.⁷⁵ Yet the illness was not mentioned in the summary of her medical history, presented to the divorce court in 1938. Nor is it evident that she returned to Europe.⁷⁶ It is more probable that she spent the next ten months between Penang and Singapore, for a newspaper commented that both Mr and Mrs Swettenham were unable to spend the Christmas of 1893 in Selangor, as planned, because of her ill-health. Swettenham presumably spent Christmas with her in Penang or Singapore.⁷⁷

At this stage, the account of Taiping social life is enlivened by the arrival of the *Perak Pioneer*, which commenced publication in July 1894. Printed on delicate pink paper, it devoted approximately half its news space to the activities of the small British community in Perak, and their visitors. Amongst these was Lord Sudeley, staying in July 1894 at the Residency, where the Resident was 'at home' most Tuesday afternoons at 4:45 p.m. to welcome visitors. The band of the Perak Sikhs was invariably in attendance.⁷⁸ Another visitor was Lady Randolph Churchill, who some years later recalled her first encounter with Swettenham in 1894 when she was on a world tour with her husband:

Mr Swettenham, as he then was, only went as far as Penang with us, which we regretted, as he proved a very entertaining companion. A man of exceptional intelligence, he was

virtually the ruler of the Straits Settlements, and certainly no one better understood the natives and how to treat them.⁷⁹

Swettenham's chief rival as the lion of Perak society was Colonel R.S.F. Walker, the commanding officer of the Perak Sikhs. Invariably when the two were in town, they were both listed as the luminaries of the social occasions. Early July 1894 saw the official opening of the New Club, under Colonel Walker, with a dance attended by Swettenham and Lord Sudeley; while the day after the same two attended a smoking concert at the Taiping Club, also attended by Sultan Idris.

Abdullah meantime had been released from exile in the Seychelles, and, with the British facility in such matters, was elected a member of the Royal Colonial Institute. Swettenham had been consulted on his fate: it was agreed he would be allowed to return to the Straits Settlements, but not, for the moment, to Perak.⁸⁰

There was also time for academic work. Swettenham and Clifford decided to work together to produce a Malay-English dictionary, which was to appear in several volumes. The preface, dated 28 March 1894, is signed by Clifford and Swettenham, in that order. It mentions that work on it had begun six years previously, in 1888, when Clifford had left Perak for Pahang. He had no executive duties in Pahang in 1889, when it is likely that he worked on it. Much of the preface is a review of earlier dictionaries, and includes a perceptive critique of the Malay language, apparently written by Clifford. In it he drew comparisons with French, '... essentially a diplomatic language, and one admirably adapted for concealing the feelings and cloaking the real thought.'

An analysis of the entries indicates that Clifford, with his detailed knowledge of idiomatic Malay, took Swettenham's vocabulary and greatly expanded it.⁸¹ The first volume appeared at this time, and was duly reviewed. The *Pioneer's* editorial staff must have relished the opportunity to quote from the *Free Press* an anonymous ditty which appeared at the time:

Two Civil Servant Johnnies who believed they knew Malay
Wrote a dictionary of it, and they published letter A.

They also called it No. 1 because they fondly thought it
Would appear A1 to all who paid two Mexicans and bought it.
But there was a wicked critic who would not give a ---
For the learning or authority of Mr Swettenham.

And as if that were not bad enough he actually differed

From the well-matured opinions of the knowing Mr Clifford.⁸²

The *Perak Pioneer* which then appeared twice a week always contained two pages of advertisements, so many of them the same in each issue that one wonders how it could have paid to advertise so frequently. Yet the advertisements give a flavour of the time: 'Mrs

Lee, late of Penang, Sole Proprietress of the Taiping Hotel: Tiffin sent to offices if boy and tiffin basket be sent.'

The Agri-Horticultural Show was held on 30 June 1894 in Taiping, and the reports showed Swettenham as before, chairman of the committee, also winning first prizes for the table decoration, Farleyense and Begonia classes. The award for the best plant in the exhibition was made jointly to the Resident and Colonel Walker. No doubt Swettenham had a good gardener.⁸³ The show was held in Kinta in 1895 on 12 and 13 July and was a very much grander affair. This was perhaps attributable to the presence of Swettenham's elder brother, James Alexander Swettenham, who came up from Singapore in his capacity as Deputy Governor, combining his visit to the show with business in Perak. Not only was the Sultan of Perak present: he was joined for the occasion by the Sultan of Kedah (Kudin's brother). The two brothers stayed in Ipoh, with parties each night. At the show itself, Swettenham won the Chrysanthemum class, the best saddle-horse, fourteen hands and over, with his Frank, the class for the saddle-pony under fourteen hands, a special first for his horse Snowdrop, and, again, joint first with Colonel Walker in the driving competition. Not only was he chairman of the organizing committee, but he was also one of the three judges in the horse show section.

Racing was a major feature of Perak social life. Young horses, or griffins as they were known, were regularly shipped up from Australia, and the newspapers paid inordinate attention before each race meeting to the form. Swettenham who invariably presided at, and judged the races, owned several horses, of which the two most successful were Locky and Snowdrop. Snowdrop won three races in Perak and Sungei Ujong, according to the advertisement putting the horse up for sale.⁸⁴ Locky, which appears to have been Swettenham's favourite rounded off Swettenham's racing career in Perak by winning the Maiden Plate in Singapore on 21 May 1895. Swettenham's figure was a familiar one on the racecourse at this time, and his sun-hat came in for particular comment: 'The Resident again sported the celebrated topee.' Many years' exposure to the tropical sunlight had made his skin sensitive, a problem which was to recur many years later with an apparent attack of skin cancer on his face in the 1930s.⁸⁵ *Straits Produce*, a light-hearted magazine in the style of *Punch*, published sporadically at the time, showed in its edition of Christmas 1893 a sketch of Swettenham in cricketing whites, blazer and the famous topi, with the caption: 'Perak Civil Service Uniform — First Class.'⁸⁶ The same issue also attested to his arrogant swagger, in the verses on the training of newly arrived administrative cadets, which included the following:

And standing by his side was one*

Swettenham

Who taught and not in vain
The true Colonial swagger
To his apprehensive brain.

*One - Some of the oldest Mss have *Frank*

Cricket played a crucial role in the expatriate community of the Protected Malay States. Swettenham himself was to receive adulatory notices, years later, in accounts of colonial cricket. He enjoyed the game, although evidence suggests he was no more than a modest player, and seldom scored more than ten runs as a batsman. In 1889, a newspaper commented on him: 'a good defence as a batter, but style somewhat cramped, is strong on the leg side, but as a rule a slow scorer. He is a very good field, taking wickets often with marked success, is also a very good change bowler.' His achievements on the cricket field were charitably summed up later in a report on a match between the Singapore and the Perak teams: 'A fair bat with a peculiar style of his own, occasionally makes a very good drive. He is a useful change bowler, bowling a good ball on the off ball, which comes across the wicket with his arm. A slow field.'⁸⁷ Due cognizance was taken of his limited abilities by the fact that Colonel Walker of the Perak Sikhs usually captained the Perak team, even when Swettenham was playing.

Swettenham's ambitions for the Perak cricket team were evident when he recruited Oliver Marks, a fine young cricketer from Ceylon, to be Superintendent of the Government Botanic Gardens. The papers noted: 'Mr Swettenham is evidently determined to make Perak, for its members, the finest cricketing civil service in the East.'⁸⁸ Robson recorded: 'It was jokingly said in Perak that a good bat or fast bowler could generally get a job in the Government Service, so long as Swettenham was Resident.'⁸⁹ Sydney's brother, H.C. Holmes was also a good cricketer and a regular member of the Selangor state team, which on occasion he captained.

Two years later, there was more than an element of bitterness in the cricket circles. F. Dickson-Thorold's resignation from the Perak government service, allegedly on the grounds that he was no cricketer, provoked spirited and hostile comment from the Penang press. Thorold maintained he had been posted away from Taiping because he was not a cricketer. It seems more likely that as son of the unpopular Sir Frederick Dickson, he was discriminated against after his father died.⁹⁰

Other sporting activities included billiards and golf: Swettenham had a mini-course built in the Residency grounds, where on one occasion he played in a foursome with the Governor, Sir Charles Mitchell.⁹¹ The other partners were Helen Caulfeild, wife of the State Engineer, and Miss Voules. The same day the *Pioneer* spitefully reported:

The following effusion was found on the Golf Links inscribed upon a fragment of a New Club chit. It was probably dropped by one of the distinguished party who were playing there this afternoon.

Wot cher Marthur
Ain't you a torff
Playing with the Governor
At a game of gorff.⁹²

The reference appears to refer to the unfortunate Miss Voules, sister of A.B. Voules, at that stage a junior member of the government. If the *Perak Pioneer* was correct in its report of this ditty, Helen Caufeild must have been the prime suspect. Repeated references in the paper to her departures to attend race meetings in Penang and Singapore conjure up the image of a woman with social aspirations. Her husband, Francis Caulfeild, the State Engineer, had tenuous links to an Irish title, while she herself was the daughter of a Berkshire JP, with the type of upper middle-class background which might foster such social pretensions. Given such spite and snobbery amongst the colonial ladies, it is difficult not to have some sympathy for poor Sydney Swettenham.

Finally, amongst the Resident's favourite pastimes, mention must be made of his shooting. Perak had a reputation for good shooting, which was publicized in an article on the subject in *The Field* in England.⁹³ Like many men of his time, Swettenham slaughtered wildlife with an enthusiasm which no longer appeals. He must have been a good shot, for in early October 1894 he shot 13-1/2 couple of snipe with 36 cartridges.⁹⁴ In November that year he and a colleague were reported to have bagged in total 111-1/2 couple of snipe at Krian, of which Swettenham himself was responsible for 51-1/2 couple.⁹⁵ However, his efforts at elephant shooting were less successful. A trip in search of elephants near Tapah in which he participated failed to find a single animal, let alone get a shot.⁹⁶ He wrote with pride of shooting seladang and a serow, the first ever shot in the Peninsula.⁹⁷ His serow caused ripples in the scientific community. It was originally assumed to be a species distinct from that originally described from Sumatra. It was therefore described as a new species by A.L. Butler, Curator of the Selangor Museum. Later it was relegated to sub-specific status, but bears Swettenham's name.⁹⁸

The year 1894 formed a watershed in Swettenham's personal life: Sydney had frequently been absent from Malaya during his time there. She had by the autumn recovered from her breakdown of the previous December, so her arrival on 28 September on the *Mena* from Penang, accompanied by Swettenham, provided grist for much gossip. This accounted for the large attendance the following

Tuesday when she was 'At Home' at the Residency. Swettenham missed his Saturday cricket the day after her return, but this did not prevent him paying an official visit to Lower Perak on the following day.⁹⁹ Then a crisis occurred.

On 6 October, Sydney's brother H.C. Holmes came up from Selangor, where he was by then Superintendent of the Police in Klang. He stayed a brief five days. Whatever occurred in this first fortnight was crucial for the marriage, for at the end of it there was a further announcement that Sydney would leave for home in early November. However appearances were maintained, doubtless under some strain, for Sydney was loyally 'At Home' to the Taiping community each Tuesday thereafter. Indeed on 16 October, 'A novelty at these functions was introduced in the shape of a cricket match between six ladies and an equal number of the sterner sex, the latter playing left-handed with broomsticks.' Elsewhere it was reported that Sydney was bowled out twice for no score. Her last 'At Home' was also 'very numerous attended' on 30 October. The same issue of the *Perak Pioneer* reported that the Resident, his wife and Mr and Mrs Belfield would leave the following night (1 November) for Penang.¹⁰⁰ In fact Swettenham and his wife departed separately for Penang. She and Mrs Belfield left on a special train, as previously announced, while Swettenham, accompanied by Belfield travelled to Penang by the *Mena*. The Swettenhams were no longer on speaking terms.

What then are we to make of this brief interlude? The divorce papers of 1938 indicate that in 1894 cohabitation ceased and was not resumed.¹⁰¹ Between the First and Second World Wars there were rumours that Lady Swettenham (as she by then was) had behaved abominably on a very public occasion. But on which occasion, and in what manner was not recorded.¹⁰² That she was not able to cope with her husband's full life of official duties was clear: and he more or less acknowledged the fact.¹⁰³ In a letter, written at the time of the 1904 divorce case, while he acknowledged that the 'fault' was his, by inference his refusal to put his private life before his public one, he refers to, '... mistakes which are more unpardonable than faults.' Although in that context, the 'mistake' would have been to go back and live with her, perhaps another memory was still fresh in his mind.

A tantalizing footnote to Sydney Swettenham's brief return to Perak came to light in 1895, with an announcement in the *Pinang Gazette* on 17 June that Mrs Swettenham, back in England had given birth to a son: 'stillborn and premature,' on 19 May.¹⁰⁴ Like so much in Swettenham's personal life, this piece of evidence raises more questions than it answers. Why should either of them have wished to record this pathetic postscript to their married life,

particularly when few if any of their acquaintances would have known of the pregnancy? They were after all together for little more than a month in the autumn of 1894. Sydney Swettenham's subsequent behaviour raises the further question of whether her husband was indeed the father of the stillborn son. The circumstances also suggest that there may have been a malicious element involved in the announcement. The son born on 19 May 1895 was premature, and could therefore have been conceived about eight months earlier, that is to say September or October 1894. As far as can be ascertained, between January and September 1894, Sydney was recovering from a severe breakdown in Penang and Singapore. She was later described as a nymphomaniac, and it is therefore quite possible that during the summer of 1894 she was having an adulterous affair and became pregnant. Rumours of these indiscretions reached the editor of the *Pinang Gazette* and the small European community at Taiping. So Swettenham went off to retrieve Sydney lest worse befall. Hence Taiping was all agog when the couple returned. Under the circumstances, the discovery that Sydney was pregnant could well have led to the final marital breakdown. Worse still, possibly the father was not even European. Under such circumstances, the child was often done away with at birth, and the birth recorded as 'stillborn' to avoid embarrassment. A malicious acquaintance in London might have sent word of the birth back to Malaya. The editor of the *Pinang Gazette* jumped to the conclusion that the child was not Swettenham's, and assumed that some of his readers would get the coded message. Even if the editor was wrong and Swettenham was the father, his publication of the news was consistent with his newspaper's sustained hostility towards Swettenham. It is only possible to note that the theory fits the facts. Whatever the full story, the tragic stillborn baby represented but the tip of an iceberg of matrimonial misery.

Swettenham's semi-public humiliation of his wife in this way had another consequence: embittered as she would have been by this treatment from a husband who in her view was already no less unfaithful, knowledge of indiscretions on his part would be dynamite. It put whoever had the proof of such misbehaviour in a stronger position and upped the blackmail stakes. Sydney Swettenham's return to England must have been miserable for other reasons. Her brother G.F. Holmes, one of the more stable in that unstable brood, and a stockbroker, died on 10 February 1895.¹⁰⁵ Such little support as the Holmes family had been able to give Sydney had now ended, and for the rest of her unhappy life Sydney was left to cope very largely on her own.

Swettenham

As Swettenham departed for leave at the end of September 1895, we may ask ourselves, 'What sort of a man was he to meet?' Tall and distinguished as ever, he now always wore the famous hat to protect his weathered skin from the sun. But as a person we get the best idea from a Valentine's Day poem, dated 1895, from a lady admirer:

Hamlet

You modern man, of modern times
With manner calmly cold
To choose you for a Valentine
Is surely somewhat bold.

No pretty trifling airy jests
Writ with a lover's pen,
Would come from you, most self-possessed
And cynical of men.

At most a courteous compliment
Iced with a careless smile
The sort of thing one says, and thinks
Of something else the while!

Would you a hundred years ago
In velvet silk and lace
Have praised with less disdainful air
Some pretty lady's face?

Have pressed her hand and sighed and sworn
That she was all divine
And prayed with courtly bow and smile
She'd be your Valentine?

Nay, e'en a century ago
Unmoved to outward view
You would have watched while others craved
Gifts given unasked to you.

A heart lies somewhere hid I ween
Beneath the frigid mask.
To win it, all a woman's joy,
To hold an arduous task!

You have for all your callous air
A charm I can't define:
I'd choose you from a world of men

The gushing admirer was far from anonymous, for Swettenham at least. Not content with adding the initials HIC, which Swettenham would have known well, she saw fit to send her poem on crested notepaper, the crest being that of the Viscountcy of Charlemont. She was none other than Helen Isabel Caulfeild, the wife of the State Engineer, Francis Caulfeild. 'Vivacious' was the epithet applied to her.¹⁰⁷ The tone of the poem suggests admiration from a distance, and she may well have felt some sympathy for her husband's superior. She was, as we have seen, socially ambitious, and it no doubt suited her husband as much as it suited her, to act on occasions as Swettenham's hostess.

NOTES

1. A.L. Keyser, 1922, *People and Places: a life in Five Continents*, London.
2. *Ibid*, p. 100.
3. *STD*, 12 March 1889.
4. The founder of today's large legal firm of Mallesons.
5. Major Rome, pers. comm.
6. See SSF 127/91 and *STD*, 28 March 1889. Wragge worked for the Eastern Extension Telegraph Co. at the time of his death in 1895: see *PGSC*, 5 March 1895. Mrs Rome died at Coombe Clive, Coombe Warren, Kingston-upon-Thames on 19 October 1945 at the age of 90, leaving no will. See also death announcement in *The Times*, 31 October 1945.
7. *SFP*, 5 April 1889.
8. *SFP*, 20 May 1889.
9. *SFP*, 4 June 1889. See Chapter 20 for the fate of this company.
10. *SFP*, 4 June 1889.
11. HC 5884:7-8 Smith to Knutsford, 11 June 1889.
12. HC 6576:61 SAR, 1890, para. 292.
13. See Chapter 30.
14. See Chapter 49.
15. *PGSC*, 14 and 28 June 1889.
16. *PGSC*, 5 July 1889 and *PGG*, No. 5, 1 March 1889. For H.C. Holmes' career see SSF KS5250/95.
17. *BPDO* 27/89.
18. See Chapter 24.
19. *STD*, 13 August, 29 August and 5 September 1889, and *PGSC*, 11 October 1889.
20. *PGSC*, 6 and 10 September 1889. *SFP*, 5 November 1889, reporting theatricals on 31 October 1889.
21. *STD*, 25 September 1893.
22. *PGSC*, 10 October 1893.

23. *STD*, 25 October 1883 reproduces an article from *The Times of India* on such concerts.
24. *STD*, 20 November 1889 and *SFP*, 20 November 1889.
25. The Cameron Papers now at Cambridge University Library.
26. *STD*, 31 December 1889.
27. *STD*, 11 and 15 January 1890.
28. *STD*, 17 March 1890.
29. *STD*, 18 March 1890.
30. Cameron Papers.
31. *PGSC* and *SFP*, 7 March 1890.
32. *Footprints*, p. 100.
33. This is supported by her attitude towards him at the time of his first attempt at divorce in 1904. See Chapter 42.
34. *PGSC*, 1 July 1890, *SFP*, 30 June 1890. The leave approvals are in *PGG*, 1890, No.7, 14 March 1890, p. 123: three months vacation leave granted w.e.f. 6 March, and No.18, 13 June 1890, p. 357, an extra 24 days granted.
35. See Chapter 30.
36. *PGSC*, 26 August 1890.
37. *SSF Misc.* 6315/90.
38. Circular on financial irregularities, clearly referring to this incident in *BPDO* 264/90.
39. *STD*, 5 November 1890 reported her departure on 29 October, *PGSC* of 14 November 1890 reported her departure on 7 November. It is possible she accompanied her husband to Singapore between the two dates.
40. See Chapter 30.
41. See Chapter 21.
42. *PGSC*, 14 and 18 July 1891, *SFP*, 21 July 1891 and *CO* 273/174:66.
43. *CO* 426/10:220 Smith's letter of 6 November 1891.
44. *PGSC*, 20 and 24 October 1891. Leave is covered in *PGG*, 1891, p. 991.
45. See Chapters 42 and 49.
46. *CO* 273/185:806 Swettenham to *CO*, 1 September 1892.
47. *Footprints*, p. 104.
48. *CO* 273/185:806 Fairfield on Swettenham to *CO*, 1 September 1892.
49. Young's leave is covered in *PGG*, 1892 p. 251, and *CO* 426/10:32 Letter of 31 May 1892. See also Chapters 30 and 32 below.
50. See Chapter 42.
51. See Thio, 1969, op. cit., p. 135. Dr Thio has confirmed to J.M. Gullick that she is no longer able to trace this reference. Nor have I been able to find it.
52. *PGSC*, 3 January 1893.
53. *PGG*, 1893, p. 37.
54. *PGSC*, 3 and 28 January 1893 and *PGG*, 1893, p. 37.
55. *PGSC*, 30 January 1893.
56. *PGSC*, 7 February 1893.
57. *PGSC*, 7, 11 and 22 February 1893.
58. *PGSC*, 17 March 1893 and *PGG*, 1893 p. 156.
59. *PGSC*, 6 April 1893. Mr O'Kaya appears to have been the nickname of John Rodger, perhaps because of his known personal wealth. *Kaya* means rich in Malay. See *SFP*, 8 August 1893.

60. *PGG*, 10 July 1893, p. 544.
61. HC 7228:26, PAR 1892.
62. *STD*, 24 August 1893.
63. *PGSC*, 29 August 1893, quoting *SFP* report, and *PGSC* of 1 September 1893. See Chapter 29 for origins of Swettenham's unpopularity with the Penang press.
64. *PGSC*, 21 December 1894.
65. *PGSC*, 22 August 1893.
66. *STD*, 7 October 1893.
67. SSF Pol. 6048/93.
68. *SJ*, 20 October and 3 November 1893.
69. *Ibid.*
70. *SJ*, 17 November 1893.
71. *SJ*, 12 January 1894.
72. *PGSC*, 21 November 1893.
73. *PGG*, 24 November 1893, p. 948. See also *BM*, May 1934, p. 10 'Perak Forty Years Ago described by one who knew it.' Anon.
74. *STD*, 27 November 1893 and *PGSC*, 21 November 1893.
75. *PGSC*, 1 December 1893, *STD*, 4, 11, 18 December 1893 and SSF Pol. 320/94.
76. Her name appears on no passenger lists for the period.
77. *SFP*, 9 January 1894.
78. *PP*, 11 July 1894.
79. *The Reminiscences of Lady Randolph Churchill*, 1908, p. 271. See Chapter 45.
80. *PGSC*, 19 July 1894, *STD*, 18 July 1894, CO 273/171:258, CO 273/173:98.
81. Hugh Clifford and F.A. Swettenham, *A Dictionary of the Malay Language* (incomplete) and J.M. Gullick, pers. comm., based on an analysis of the dictionary. The dictionary was never completed, reaching A-G only. See also Chapter 33.
82. Mexicans referred to Mexican dollars, which were widely used as currency at the time. *PP*, 21 July 1894.
83. *PP*, 7 July 1894. *Farleyense* was a type of fern.
84. *PP*, 4 September 1895.
85. *PP*, 9 February and 22 May 1895.
86. *Str. P.*, No. 3, Christmas 1893.
87. *SFP*, 26 December 1889. *PP*, 14 November 1894. For a more eulogistic account of Swettenham's contribution to the game, see *Imperial Cricket*, by P. F. Warner, London, 1912.
88. *SFP*, 2 April 1891. For Marks' own account of cricket then, see *Straits Times Annual*, 1939: 'Cricket's Heyday in the Native States,' pp. 141-2.
89. Robson, 1934, op. cit., p. 13.
90. *PGSC*, 20 April, 19 and 22 July 1893. Sir Frederick Dickson had died in UK on 21 December 1891. See CO 273/178:404 R.B. Dickson to CO, 29 December 1891, and CO 273/193:620 F.D. Thorold to CO, 22 September 1893. Also *PGG*, 14 April 1893, p. 257.
91. *PP*, 9 February 1895.

92. Ibid.
93. See E.W. Birch's letter to *The Field* on shooting in Perak, quoted in *PP*, 20 October 1894.
94. *PP*, 17 October 1894.
95. *PP*, 28 November 1894.
96. *PP*, 5 September 1894.
97. *Footprints*, pp. 112-3. *Seladang* is a wild bison, *serow* a wild goat, both now very rare.
98. A.L. Butler, 'On a new Scrow from the Malay Peninsula.' From *Proc. zool. Soc. Lond.*, 19 June 1900, reproduced in 1901 in the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*, 13: 689-91. See also *Sketch*, 26 April 1899.
99. *PP*, 29 September and 3 October 1894, *PGSC*, 28 September 1894.
100. *PP*, 13, 17 and 31 October 1894. Belfield was senior magistrate.
101. See Chapter 49.
102. The late T.B. Barlow, pers. comm.
103. See his chilling note to her on 6 May 1904, at the conclusion of his attempt to divorce her: Chapter 42.
104. *PGSC*, 17 June 1895. A similar announcement appeared in *SFPMA*, of 25 June 1895.
105. Harrow School records.
106. From the Swettenham Manuscript Papers, Stoodley Coll.
107. E.W. Birch's recollections, published in *MM*, 18 January 1919.

Maxwell and the Land Controversy

Swettenham's famous rivalry with W.E. Maxwell is so closely connected with problems of land administration that it is scarcely possible to separate the two. W.E. Maxwell was one of the sons of Sir Peter Benson Maxwell, the first Chief Justice of the newly created colony of the Straits Settlements. Sir Peter retired in 1871, by which time his son was already established in the Straits Settlements, having been appointed as Clerk in the Supreme Court in Penang in 1865. W.E. Maxwell, born in 1846, was thus four years older than Swettenham, and five years senior to him in service in the Straits Settlements. He obtained his legal training after the Perak War, when he read law, and was called to the Bar in 1881.¹

The paths of Maxwell and Swettenham must have crossed socially on a number of occasions before the Perak War. In the aftermath of that war, as we have seen, Swettenham wrote his now notorious letter to Sir William Jervois, effectively accusing Maxwell of responsibility for the Panjang Meru incident.² There is no record that this letter was ever shown to Maxwell, whose reputation was vindicated by a subsequent inquiry. Yet Maxwell must have been aware of its contents. The stage was therefore set for a rivalry which was to become increasingly bitter in the years till 1895, when Maxwell was posted to be Governor of the Gold Coast. There he died of blackwater fever on 14 December 1897.³ Maxwell's formidable figure was enhanced by the use of a monocle:

When he focussed his single eye-glass upon you, it was liable to recall memories of visits to the headmaster's study when one expected to be swished....The Malays said they would as soon face a hungry tiger than those stern, steel-blue eyes turned upon them in wrath.⁴

Not without reason was Maxwell known to all and sundry as Mata Rimau (The Eye of the Tiger).

Before we follow the Swettenham-Maxwell land controversy through the 1880s and into the turbulent years of the next decade, it

is necessary to look back briefly at earlier developments in land administration in the Peninsula. The chief problem, which was realized by Maxwell, but by few others, was that it was impossible to obtain any coherent oral or written account of the customs of land tenure amongst the Malay community. It was not until 1884 that Maxwell published an authoritative and scholarly account, originally prepared in 1877, based on scattered references in Malay literature, and supplemented by field observations. In this article Maxwell pointed out that a period of continuous cultivation of the land conferred a proprietary right on the cultivator. Unfortunately this work was totally disregarded, to the ultimate detriment of the Malay cultivators.⁵ From the time of the Pangkor Engagement, a series of rules, orders-in-council and regulations were issued which had the effect of imposing, with increasing authority, English land law based on mediaeval ideas in a country whose population was entirely alien to such concepts. The first important regulation was 'Rules Regarding the Disposal of Lands in the Trans-Krian District,' issued by the office of the Colonial Secretary in Singapore on 11 August 1875. This acknowledged the existence of a Malay title to land only so long as leases for 999 years remained unissued.⁶

The murder of Birch ended all land legislation for several years, and it was not till 1879 that the Perak government produced the Perak Land Regulations applicable to the whole state and passed by the State Council on 28 February 1879, drawn up by Maxwell while he was acting as Assistant Resident to Low. As we follow the history of land legislation in the Protected Malay States over the succeeding twenty years, it must be remembered that the die was cast by Maxwell himself, although he was later to refer to the 'pernicious imitation of the Colonial Land Office' which influenced them.⁷ The regulations envisaged the eventual survey of all land and the issue to Malay landholders of certificates indicating the revenue liability, and granting a lease of 999 years on payment of a quit rent to be fixed in perpetuity. Transitional provisions allowed land in Native Tenure to be retained until such time as it had been surveyed, and could be converted to the 999-year lease mentioned above.⁸ The system was unsatisfactory, for it attempted to transpose English land law, with its medieval accretions, to the Malay States, where conditions were completely different.

Shortly thereafter, while Swettenham was involved in the investigations which resulted in the dismissal of Bloomfield Douglas, Maxwell visited Australia to familiarize himself with the system of land registration devised and implemented in South Australia by Sir Robert Torrens. The system 'aimed at and succeeded in combining the maximum security of tenure with the minimum formality in establishing or transferring rightful

ownership.' Maxwell implemented it, with slight modifications in Malacca in the mid-1880s.⁹ It has been ably summarized as follows: ... to define the native tenure and provide a simple system by which the rights of the landholders would be recorded, thereby dispensing with the necessity either for an expensive instrument of title, or accurate survey. A fixed assessment in money had also been substituted for the customary tithe, and in this manner the Malay system had been made the basis of land revenue. The result was a system of tenure which provided the cultivator with the right of perpetual occupancy and power of alienation, subject to the reassessment of land at regular intervals. This was an ingenious and practical marriage of Malay tenure to modern land principles. The system, was a considerable improvement over the [previous] lease one, with its elaborate paraphernalia of English legal procedure.¹⁰

Unfortunately for Maxwell, he was appointed in September 1882 to be Commissioner of Land Titles of the Straits Settlements only. This gave him no jurisdiction over land matters in the Protected States. He did however in various reports recommend that changes be introduced there as well. He was concerned in particular that the issue of leases was in the long term disadvantageous to the government, for it permanently severed the leaseholder from the government, by imposing a fixed quit rent in perpetuity, with no provision for any increase. 'The Government was therefore correspondingly less equipped with the means and the desire to assist the cultivator and administer to his needs.'¹¹

Maxwell's appointment as Commissioner of Lands of the Straits Settlements, a post created for his benefit, proved in one respect a disadvantage to his career, for it enabled Swettenham to obtain the key position of Resident in Selangor, even though Maxwell was technically the senior man. It was perhaps understandable that Weld, who had travelled so extensively in the Peninsula with Swettenham in the previous two years should prefer him for the job. The appointment marks the moment when Swettenham began to outpace his rival.¹² Maxwell's new position however carried one advantage: it qualified him for places on both the Legislative and Executive Councils of the Straits Settlements, a minor consolation for him, and, no doubt, a source of further jealousy for Swettenham.¹³ It also enabled him to travel further afield studying Colonial land registration systems. Thus by the end of 1883 he was already on the way back from such a visit to Rangoon, with a completed paper on 'Present and Future Land Systems of the Straits Settlements.'¹⁴

When Swettenham reached Selangor in 1882, the regulations governing land registration were essentially the same as those of which had been introduced in Perak by Low in 1879.¹⁵ Swettenham had of course been very critical of Douglas's administration, particularly the land registration. He remarked: '... in no single particular have the printed Land Regulations signed by Mr Douglas been followed... the rules were a dead letter.' Swettenham for the moment had a clear field on which to act.¹⁶

He had lost no time in doing so, for on 31 October 1882, the State Council passed a set of General Land Regulations, which were to form the basis for agricultural development till the arrival in Selangor of Maxwell, his successor, at the end of the decade.¹⁷ Thus in the 1883 Annual Report, Swettenham remarked '[The land] regulations enacting that all lands must be held by registered title derived from the Government were introduced, I will not say without trouble, but without anything like serious opposition, and with a minimum of inconvenience to occupiers of land.' The result was at least a twelvefold increase in land revenue.¹⁸

Rodger, who, after an interval, had succeeded Daly as Commissioner for Lands in Selangor, travelled up and down the state to ascertain for himself which areas were indeed occupied. He certainly made great advances in reducing the chaos which had characterized Daly's tenure of office. Although Maxwell was extremely critical of the position he found when he took over Selangor in 1889, it is unlikely that Swettenham, even had he been so inclined, could have implemented the Torrens system satisfactorily in Selangor. The speed of development was so great that it was quite impossible for the survey department to catch up on the enormous backlog of work. Titles had been granted without adequate surveys, which in some cases resulted in the same land being granted to two different individuals, while other titles were endorsed with plans from a different area:

... it must be admitted that land administration in Kuala Lumpur was one of the failures of the Swettenham regime. The root of the trouble was the over-rapid alienation (or registration of existing ownership) of land. This rush in turn was due to the fact that for most of the period from 1882 to 1889 Kuala Lumpur was growing fast and enjoying a boom. Meticulous land administration, with the resources then available, would have held up economic progress.¹⁹

Swettenham's involvement in Perak land regulations dates from the period when he acted for Low in the mid-1880s. Towards the end of 1884 he introduced a new code of Land Regulations on Low's express instructions. These were approved by the State Council on 31 January 1885. While the 1879 regulations had at

least acknowledged if only as an interim measure, the existence of native tenure, the 1885 regulations, based on those which Swettenham had introduced in Selangor in 1882 abolished it entirely. The problems which had developed in Selangor were repeated in Perak. The surveys, which were so essential to a lease form of tenure were woefully behindhand, and when carried out, were poorly done and inaccurate. Preference was given to revenue-producing tin areas. In many cases the survey and demarcation fees absorbed the quit rent for the first one and a half years. Eventually Swettenham himself was bound to admit that there were cases when the survey fees exceeded the value of the land.²⁰ Swettenham thus succeeded in establishing in both Selangor and Perak land regulations which were unsatisfactory.

The Swettenham-Maxwell rivalry was further stimulated at the end of the 1880s by jockeying for the succession to the Perak Residency. As early as January 1888 Lucas in London, by now Swettenham's firm ally, was preparing the ground for Swettenham, in a minute remarking that he was obviously the right man for the job.²¹ Later that year, Maxwell wrote in requesting that he might be considered for the post, pointing out that during the Chinese riots in Singapore in the early 1870s he had been Swettenham's superior. The conclusion to his letter referred in pained terms to the possibility of his being passed over for Perak: 'a slight which I feel I have not deserved.'²² The Colonial Office wrote to ask Smith whom he would recommend. Smith strongly supported Swettenham: 'In my opinion Mr Swettenham is unquestionably the proper officer to succeed Sir Hugh Low. His experience of Perak is more extensive than that of any other officer in the service and I have entire confidence in his ability, powers of administration and discretion.'²³ Back in London, Lucas continued to press Swettenham's claims, and the appointment was in due course made. Knutsford in commenting on the latest annual reports from the Protected States, noted: 'The striking results which have been achieved during the period of Mr Swettenham's tenure of office as British Resident of Selangor give ground for hoping he will prove no unworthy successor of Sir Hugh Low in Perak.'²⁴ It was difficult to argue against Lucas' point that Swettenham's two years in Perak in the mid-1880s qualified him for the job. But there was no doubt that it sharpened the bitterness between the two rivals. In 1889 an embittered Maxwell was appointed to succeed Swettenham as Resident, Selangor. Partly from vindictiveness, and partly because he more clearly understood, from his scholarly research, the problems of Malay land tenure, he hastened to appoint E.W. Birch to report on the Land Department in the State.

Birch prepared two reports. His thorough and detailed survey provided Maxwell with all the ammunition he required. Birch attributed the muddle which he found in the Land Office to Swettenham's regulations of 1882. However he added that the position was not irretrievable, provided a new land code was swiftly introduced. Amongst other things he criticized an amendment introduced in 1886 under which a quit rent of 50 cents per acre was imposed on all kampong and padi land, and further criticized the lenient regulations introduced in 1884 to encourage pepper and gambier cultivation. These he felt should be dropped, since they did the state out of land revenue at a time when there was no shortage of potential investors. His report also contained recommendations for the collection of duty on timber. On a more sinister note, Birch expressed disapproval of the blatant land-jobbing by state officials, which had come to his attention.²⁵

Interest in land codes had alerted the Colonial Office to the need to look closely at taxation in the Malay States. Sir Frederick Dickson, the Colonial Secretary was therefore instructed in 1890 to obtain reports, and in his covering memorandum, possibly working in collaboration with Maxwell urged that quit rents be reassessed periodically. Maxwell wrote echoing Birch's report of Selangor: 'The land system of the state now is, in one word, bad, but it has not gone so far as not to be easily recovered if the old system is at once put a stop to, and the new Code speedily introduced.'²⁶ Smith, who cordially disliked Dickson, saw in this a criticism of his own earlier policy of liberal land alienation. The Perak government officials, reliable allies for this purpose, were invoked to argue that in Perak at least, the lack of population was such a serious impediment to the development of the state, that there was no alternative to fixed quit rents in perpetuity.²⁷ Even Sir Hugh Low was consulted in his retirement, and confirmed that he knew of no tithing system.²⁸

The Colonial Office officials in London were only too well aware of the antipathies that were building up, and took sides, Lucas in his customary stance, supporting Swettenham, Fairfield for Maxwell. An illuminating moment occurred when the design of the famous Straits Settlements postage stamp, showing a tiger springing, was submitted to London. Lucas approved: 'The tiger rampant will be emblematic of the existing relations between the leading officials.' 'Yes,' added Fairfield sourly, 'the Agents might be told to add a snake in the grass to the design.'²⁹ There can be no doubt about whom Fairfield identified as the snake.

Maxwell's reaction to the deplorable state of affairs he found in the Land Department in Selangor was to introduce a new land code. This was passed by the State Council on 9 April 1891. For

the first time in the Protected States Maxwell was able to incorporate the basic principles of Malay customary land tenure, on which he had become so expert. This was fourteen years after he had first recommended the system in a minute of 1877. The regulations also provided for the establishment of *mukim* (local district) land registers, to record Malay landholdings. The regulations contained one provision however that was to prove highly contentious. While they provided for a reassessment of quit rent for areas of less than one hundred acres, there was no provision for the reassessment of larger acreages. This was in furtherance of the agreed policy in the Native States to encourage plantation agriculture in every way possible.³⁰

In his 1891 Annual Report, Maxwell recorded that he had found, 'Almost all the elements of confusion which have caused such trouble in the Land Offices of the Straits Settlements.' He spelt out the three principles which were to be observed: the English land tenure system by grant or lease was to be avoided except in town areas and peasant holdings were to be subject to proprietary tenure, on payment of assessment, as with customary tenure in Malacca. Finally the state was to be entitled to a share in future prosperity. This meant that the annual assessment on land, payable at a fixed rate, in perpetuity, was to be replaced by measures allowing the assessment to be reviewed, and if necessary raised as land became more productive and valuable, thanks to both the industry of the cultivator, and expenditure incurred by the government in opening up the country. The point about reviewing the assessment was to be crucial to the Swettenham-Maxwell controversy. Maxwell was to maintain that in Islamic jurisprudence, a tithe of the revenue should go to the state, and Islamic tradition could be conveniently matched with modern administration by providing for a periodic review and increase in assessments. Swettenham in response claimed that there had never been any tradition of handing a tenth of the produce to the state, and argued furthermore that a provision allowing the assessment to be increased would discourage potential cultivators, both local and foreign. Maxwell concluded his 1891 report on this aspect of his work by hoping that the changes introduced in Selangor might be adopted in the other states.³¹

The introduction of the new land code in Selangor by Maxwell provoked Swettenham in Perak to reassure London that the Perak land regulations were working satisfactorily. There was in Perak, he reiterated, an urgent need to promote settlement:

The present object of the Government is to give the greatest encouragement possible to agriculturalists and miners of all nationalities. The unoccupied lands (especially those distant from lines of communication) are really of very little actual

value, and it is of more importance to get in capital and labour, especially a fixed agricultural population, than to worry people who are easily frightened away and do not understand European methods, by a quantity of regulations that under other conditions would be not only excellent but necessary. For these reasons I am of the opinion that the existing land regulations, modified from time to time as our experience increases, are sufficient for our purpose, and will better secure the true interests of the state than an elaborate code which may be excellent in theory, but would require an expensive, trained staff to put in practice. From the Land Officer's point of view, the latter plan would be preferable, but the land-holders would be less satisfied, and their interests and feelings are too important to be disregarded.³²

Such points were reiterated by Swettenham in his later Perak Annual Reports. He no doubt had Maxwell, amongst others, in mind when he wrote in the 1890 report: '...having been connected with the Native States ever since the inception of the Residential system, I am averse to that excessive organisation which tends to degenerate into circumlocution and what is known as red-tapeism.'³³

Maxwell paid an unexplained visit to the Swettenhams over Chinese New Year on 17-18 February 1893. There is unfortunately no record of what transpired during the discussions, which took place in part at least during a cricket match at Parit Buntar. It is possible that the discussions, which must have been extremely delicate after the earlier investigations of land speculation in Selangor, by Maxwell, involved plans to post E.W. Birch to Perak as Chief Secretary to the Government. Birch had assisted Maxwell in implementing land reforms in both Malacca and Singapore.³⁴

In August 1893 a new code was submitted to the Governor, with a covering letter by Swettenham which admitted that outside Taiping the 1885 regulations had never been implemented. This letter is remarkable for while it stresses the need for a quick approval, it cannot readily be reconciled with Swettenham's earlier, strenuous defence of the Perak system of 1885.³⁵ It would thus appear that Swettenham, in addition to being anxious to get the new code approved before Smith's departure, was also subordinating major issues of land policy and legislation to personal rivalries within the government. Swettenham at this time discreetly referred in the briefest possible terms to land tenure in *About Perak*: 'Nothing has been said of the nature of land tenure in Perak, because even a brief description would only weary the general reader, and would not satisfy the intending planter, who can obtain all the information he wants by applying to the Government.'³⁶ Swettenham knew he was treading on thin ice.

All the ammunition at Swettenham's disposal was brought to bear. Even the *Perak Government Gazette* was required in August 1893 to publish an article prepared apparently in March that year. It was a preview of battles still to be fought, and took the form of a critique of Dickson's deliberations in 1891 on the incidence of taxation in the Native States. Dickson, by now safely dead, was the individual attacked by name, but it would have been obvious to all observers of the Straits scene that the real target was Maxwell. In the article he denied the existence of any 'immemorial Oriental usage' under which periodical reassessments of one-tenth of agricultural produce could be levied. To him such ideas were impractical, and would not be accepted by the Malays.³⁷

He then moved on to a direct attack on Maxwell, who had recently written to him on the question of encouraging rice cultivation. In this memo, Maxwell had rashly suggested a reform of the Perak land system, which, in Swettenham's view involved prohibition of all the means by which successful agricultural colonies had been formed in Perak. 'Such decided condemnation from such authorities is guaranteed to embarrass the action of the Perak Government in land matters.' Justifying the existing system, he commented sarcastically: '... such system as we have pretends neither to completeness nor finality; ... so far it has served us fairly well and given time to look round the question and consider how best we could improve our own methods by taking advantage of the great experience of the Colonial Secretary and others qualified to give an opinion.' He concluded by refuting Maxwell's allegation that the Perak Land Department's expenses exceeded their income, by quoting figures.³⁸

There was an inconsistency here: on the one hand Swettenham argued vehemently for his own cause, yet simultaneously submitted proposals to the Governor which by implication accepted the arguments of the opposition. The justification, it should be noted appeared in the *Perak Government Gazette*, likely to have little circulation outside Perak. The impression is left that Swettenham was endeavouring to change course on land matters without in any way having to admit that Maxwell was right.

Swettenham's worst apprehensions were justified, for Smith left on 29 August 1893 before giving final approval to the new draft Perak Land Code. He was succeeded as Officer Administering Government, in the interregnum till Mitchell's arrival, by none other than Maxwell himself, the Colonial Secretary.³⁹ For once Maxwell had a clear field of fire: 'Its [the Code's] chief defect — and one that seems to me to be absolutely fatal to a measure which aims at

being the Land Code of a Native State — is that it is altogether silent about the national tenure of the country.’⁴⁰

Swettenham replied that before the British moved into Perak, the Malay cultivator was no more than tenant at will. The rulers never admitted any claim to the land by the people, nor did the people advance such a claim. The battle raged on through the autumn of 1893 in exchanges of letters between the two men.⁴¹ At a time when he was most severely embattled with Maxwell, and when Maxwell, as Officer Administering Government, had the upper hand, Swettenham chose to produce his series of articles *About Perak* in the *Straits Times*. The first article appeared on 28 August 1893, and the total of ten articles published over the following two weeks were subsequently put together in a small book. They were the public propaganda side of Swettenham’s war of attrition with Maxwell. The *Straits Times* was enthusiastic, referring to Swettenham’s instalment entitled ‘The Real Malay:’ ‘No such excellent monograph on the Malay has been written, and we do not know of any available author who could write so understandingly on such a subject, except perhaps Mr Clifford, when he has gained the experience of maturity and left behind him the sadness of youth.’⁴²

On completion of these articles, Arnot Reid as editor, weighed in with a further series of articles, ‘More About Perak.’ He warmly endorsed all Swettenham had said of Perak, and went out of his way, as we have seen, to write approvingly of the Resident.⁴³ Reid went even further in his support of Swettenham, as Clifford later recollected:

Reid was at considerable pains to give to *The Straits Times* special local colour and interest, and it was in pursuance of this purpose that, in 1893, he had persuaded Mr, afterwards Sir Frank, Swettenham, then British Resident of Perak, to write for him a set of tales and sketches similar to that which he was now asking from me, dealing with the Malays of the Western seaboard. These formed the nucleus of Sir Frank’s first book — *The Real Malay* — which had just then been published by the late Mr John Lane at the sign of the Bodley Head.⁴⁴

When the hostile Penang press began to criticize Perak and Swettenham personally, the *Straits Times* remarked loftily that the attitudes of Penangites to Perak were ‘scarcely gracious,’ when they maintained: ‘The state is run solely in the interests of officials.’⁴⁵ The difficult years of 1893 and 1894 were marked by very considerable press hostility from Penang. In mid-1893 the *Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle* remarked on the way in which the wives of Perak government officers received gifts at Christmas.⁴⁶

This report produced an extremely hostile reaction from Swettenham, who was alleged to have conducted such a vendetta in Perak against all those who took this newspaper that the paper itself threatened not to report Perak news: 'If Perak Agri-Horticultural Shows and other news that Perak people would like to see in this newspaper do not appear or are delayed, they have to thank the Residential system, and the gentleman to whom our correspondent refers as 'King of Perak!''⁴⁷ The paper found further grounds for complaint in a leading article almost two months later, accusing the Perak Government of hostility to any criticism of it.⁴⁸ The same month also saw the *Pinang Gazette's* hostile reaction to Swettenham's speech at the farewell to Sir Cecil Smith.⁴⁹ In early 1894 the paper resumed its attack with a very critical account of the Perak Survey Department in Kinta. Allegations of gross mismanagement were coupled with suggestions that part of the trouble lay in the monopoly of survey work enjoyed by one Mr Alma Baker. The allegation was supported by a letter in the paper a few days later.⁵⁰

The culmination of this campaign of sniping criticism came in April 1894, with the publication by the same paper of an article alleging that the wives of certain Perak officials had received as many as fifty hams at Christmas. The report concluded that the Resident was not incompetent, and must therefore be encouraging such activity, as he did nothing to correct the position. '...bribery, corruption and favouritism have daily become more and more shameless, till now they are so obtrusive that the merest visitor for a few days at a race meeting comes back to Penang with a budget of such news.'⁵¹ This time Swettenham was fully roused. He set his lawyers to work, in a manner worthy of a modern tycoon who believes he has been slandered by *Private Eye*. The result was an abject apology published by the newspaper, retracting all statements which suggested that Swettenham knew of any bribery, and apologizing for giving publicity to other newspapers' comments on the matter. No smoke without fire?⁵² The paper explained that the delay in publishing the apology had occurred because Swettenham was absent from Perak at the time.⁵³

Maxwell of course had allies in Penang, where he had worked for long periods, and the row occurred at the most bitter moment in the Swettenham-Maxwell rivalry. A further explanation for the sustained hostility over these years of the Penang press towards Swettenham up to his retirement could lie in a marriage between a relation of Walter McKnight Young, and one of the Kennedy's who were part-proprietors of the *Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle*. The paper was purchased from Logan in 1887 by James Young Kennedy: the middle name is significant. He retained a major share

till January 1901 and possibly longer. Robert Young, perhaps a nephew became a shareholder in 1901 and editor in 1902. A relation of Kennedy, it is possible that his mother was a Young, related to W.M. Young. Kennedy would thus have been familiar with the scandal concerning Swettenham, and ready in the 1890s to seize every opportunity of criticising him.⁵⁴ The paper's hostility to Swettenham extended beyond his appointment as Resident-General, and attracted the attention of the pro-Swettenham *Malay Mail*.⁵⁵

With a grovelling apology safely behind it, the *Pinang Gazette* continued its vendetta. In early 1895, it reported gleefully on a fancy-dress party at Kinta, in Perak, where the Collector, W.P. Hume appeared dressed as 'Bribery in Perak.' Round his waist were slung four large hams, on the front of his shirt was printed 'Bribery in Perak,' with 'Cricket Promotion' down one leg and 'Contract Surveys' down the other. The seat of his breeches was ornamented with two photographs 'of the Editor of a Penang paper.' 'Will Mr Hume be threatened with prosecution for libel?', mused the paper. '[These issues] seem to be recognized public scandals when an officer of Mr Hume's undoubted integrity thus pointedly refers to them.'⁵⁶ The Survey Department in Perak was hard pressed throughout the early 1890's to keep up with the volume of work, as successive Residents' Reports attest. Eventually it proved necessary to put some of the survey work out to contract in 1895, with Alma Baker, a New Zealander.⁵⁷ Alma Baker profited greatly by this exercise, but the episode produced problems, which were only eventually resolved by Swettenham's intervention. The exact nature of his intervention was not specified, but it seems likely that he felt obliged to resolve issues which had originated during his tenure of the Perak Residency.⁵⁸ Others also joined in. *Straits Produce*, in a skit on Swettenham's *About Perak*, entitled 'More About Perak' referred to that state's 'natural curiosity, unequalled by the monstrosities of all other lands ... the Lady-with-fifty hams.' It also made caustic remarks about Swettenham's placing of Sydney's relatives in government service, and Raja Idris' elevation from judge to Sultan.⁵⁹

Yet another instance of press hostility enamating from Penang was provided in June 1894. The Eurasians in government service had, like the Europeans, agitated for Exchange Compensation, a financial compensation to make up in sterling terms for the depreciation in the international value of the Straits dollar. The Eurasians claimed that they were as much entitled to Exchange Compensation as the Europeans in government service, and also complained of inequitable leave treatment. Swettenham himself, it should be noted, was a vociferous supporter of Exchange Compensation for Europeans. When the matter was raised in the

Pinang Gazette, it was described as 'the natural outcome of that favouritism and bullying which Mr Swettenham in his pamphlet *About Perak* refers to Petitions and memorials like these are only the signs of the approach of a terrible harvest that awaits the Native States if not immediately put under a sound and liberal administration.'⁶⁰

Whether or not Maxwell was in any way behind this devastating hostility in the Penang press, he had his own method of attack, for in May 1894 he produced a *Memorandum on the Introduction of a Land Code in the Native States of the Malay Peninsula*. This consisted of a 36-page introduction, repeating his claim that tithes were an inherent part of Muslim land law, and losing no opportunity of pointing out Swettenham's errors. The main arguments used by Maxwell were supported by voluminous additional material, running to 104 printed pages including Swettenham's own letters on the subject.⁶¹

The document, written in cold, dispassionate prose, in contrast to Swettenham's irony and sarcasm constitutes a major indictment of land policy in the Protected Malay States. In most cases Swettenham was held directly responsible for the failings. Every inconsistency in Swettenham's arguments in earlier years was highlighted, and his lack of scholarship in Islamic matters revealed. In discussing whether a tithe of 10 per cent was known in the Peninsula, he noted a discrepancy between Swettenham and colleagues who denied the existence of such taxes, and others who acknowledged them:

I believe the explanation of this discrepancy to be that one body of witnesses are speaking of the law, or the right of a State to claim a tenth, while the others are concerning themselves only with the practice. Because Mr Swettenham and Mr Rodger have not seen in the Malay Peninsula a Mohammedan government sufficiently civilized and well-organized to collect its taxes properly, they have assumed that the recognized Mohammedan taxes are not leviable. This is an entire mistake. It is also an error to suppose that the Malay cultivator is a serf with no proprietary interest in the land which he cultivates, merely because a Malay Raja may be a tyrant.... Mr Swettenham in his description of the uncertainty of rights under Malay Government has mistaken these exactions and this oppression for the law, instead of regarding them, as Malays do, as invasions of it, to be submitted to of necessity when the perpetrator is the supreme ruler, and this is all the more remarkable because, under some circumstances, he finds that, their interests and feelings are too important to be disregarded.⁶²

No opportunity was lost to turn knives in wounds. Swettenham replied promptly, in a memorandum dated 12 June 1894. Here, he argued with his customary trenchancy on the basis of expediency, and the urgent need to open the state up for agriculture:

It happens that my views on this Perak land question are in great accord with the Sultan's. I do not regard the whole duty of Government as that of a machine for extracting the greatest possible amount of taxation from the people, and specially I think, it is the policy of wisdom in such a state as this to first attract settlers and capital to the country and that will give the means of raising such taxes as are wanted We are living on the produce of our tin mines, and the wealth of the country is going out of it. A time will come when the tin will be exhausted, and if then there are no important agricultural interests in existence, it will be a bad day for the Malay States.⁶³

Mitchell, sending the memo back to London admitted plaintively he did not understand the position, and asked for advice.

Maxwell continued to argue: 'We have to settle the principles upon which a land-revenue is to be raised in the Malay Peninsula: for what may be a comparatively small matter now may be a very important one fifty years hence.'⁶⁴ The Colonial Office became exasperated: 'Whatever Mr Maxwell says acts like a red rag on a bull in the case of Mr Swettenham,' Fairfield minuted in 1895.

The Colonial Office delayed any definitive reply for a year, by which time Maxwell had been posted to the Gold Coast. With the sting removed, the Colonial Office decided cautiously in favour of Maxwell.⁶⁵ Thus the controversy ended: Maxwell won out on the principle, Swettenham saved face. Two years later, in a review of Swettenham's 1897 Resident-General's Report, the *Malay Mail* made the following comparison between the two men:

One [Maxwell] was the dogmatic man of blood and iron who stamped his vigorous and masterful personality on a country and its people who were mostly afraid of him. The other, [Swettenham] is the thoughtful and intellectual force, which, more prone to recognizing human fallibility, will rank rather as the strategist than the drill sergeant.⁶⁶

Despite the report above, Maxwell was the better scholar, while Swettenham showed that when he was cornered expediency took precedence over principle.

NOTES

1. For a summary of the Maxwell family, see 'The Career of Sir George Maxwell in Malaysia, 1891-1926' by Tan Song Chuan, 1966. *Journal of the South Seas Society* 21:62-85. For a detailed examination of W.E. Maxwell's

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- career, see J.M. Gullick, 1991, 'William Maxwell and the Study of Malay Society'. *JMBRAS*, 64 (2):7-46.
2. See Chapter 13.
3. Tan Song Chuan, 1966, op. cit., p. 62.
4. Cyril Baxendale, 1930, *Personalities of Old Malaya*, Chapter 3, The Pinang Gazette Press Ltd.
5. W.E. Maxwell, 1884, 'The Law and Customs of the Malays with reference to the Tenure of Land.' *JSBRAS*, 13:77-220.
6. The regulations are given in Lim Teck Ghee, *Origins of a Colonial Economy: Land and Agriculture in Perak, 1874-1897*, Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, 1976, App. A. This work has been extensively used in this chapter. Trans-Krian formed part of the Straits Settlements.
7. Sadka, 1968, op. cit., p. 341 and Maxwell in 'Memorandum on the Introduction of a Land Code,' p. iv. Published in Singapore, 1894, it includes 'Perak Land Regulations.' Singapore National Library, NL11193 Positive.
8. Lim Teck Ghee, 1976, op. cit., p. 11 and App. B.
9. *STD*, 13 March 1883.
10. Lim Teck Ghee, 1976, op. cit., p. 16. For a detailed account of Maxwell's report on his Australia visit, see *STD*, 23-25 April 1883.
11. Lim Teck Ghee, 1976, op. cit., p. 15.
12. CO 273/115:397 Weld to Kimberley, Telegram of 23 August 1882.
13. *STD*, 9 June 1883.
14. *STD*, 18 December 1883, discussed in *STD* on 20 December 1883 and 10 January 1884.
15. Gullick, 1955, op. cit., p. 77.
16. SSF 84/82 of 1 November 1882, para 4.
17. The Selangor Regulations formed the basis for the Perak Regulations of 1885, excerpts of which are cited in Lim Teck Ghee, 1976, op. cit., App. D.
18. HC 4192:53, SAR 1883.
19. Gullick, 1955, op. cit., p. 79.
20. See Lim Teck Ghee, 1976, op. cit., pp. 12-4 and App. D for relevant provisions of the 1885 Perak Land Code.
21. CO 273/152:75 ff. Gov. to CO, Telegram of 5 March 1888.
22. CO 273/157:391 ff. Maxwell to CO, 20 August 1888.
23. CO 273/155:429 ff. Gov. to CO, Confidential of 21 November 1888.
24. Quoted in *STD*, 16 October 1889.
25. Birch's Reports are to be found in SSF 6295/90, 27 September 1890, and SSF 1007/91, 27 January 1891.
26. CO 273/172:364-466 OAG to CO, 70 of 19 February 1891 for full documentation.
27. CO 273/176:218-60 OAG to CO, 405 of 28 October 1891.
28. CO 273/178:648 Low to CO, 15 December 1891.
29. CO 273/169:499 Governor to CO 23 December 1890 and Lucas' and Fairfield's comments, 29 January 1891.
30. Lim Teck Ghee, 1976, op. cit., pp. 17-21. The full Selangor Land Code is to be found in *Selangor Government Gazette*, 1891, pp. 149 ff. and reproduced in Lim Teck Ghee, 1976, op. cit., App. E.
31. HC 6858:55, SAR 1891.

32. HC 6576:22-3, PAR 1890.
33. HC 6576:24, PAR 1890.
34. *PGG*, 1893:156 and CO 273/180:310 Gov. to CO, 200 of 3 May 1892 and CO 273/80:608 Gov. to CO, 242 of 30 May 1892.
35. See Lim Teck Ghee, 1976, op. cit., App. D and F.
36. *About Perak*, pp. 43-4.
37. *PGG*, 9 August 1893, p. 685 ff.
38. *Ibid.*
39. Lim Teck Ghee, 1976, op. cit., p. 26.
40. Minute by Acting Governor, 14 September 1893 in Maxwell, *Perak Land Regulations*, p. 97 quoted by Lim Teck Ghee, 1976, op. cit., p. 28.
41. They are reproduced in Maxwell's *Perak Land Regulations*, pp. 99-103.
42. *STD*, 28 August 1893. 'The Real Malay' was subsequently reproduced in Swettenham's *Malay Sketches*, 1895, but not, confusingly, in his book *The Real Malay* of 1900.
43. *STD*, 25 September 1893.
44. Clifford's autobiographical preface to the 1927 edition of *Court and Kampong*, p. 43.
45. *STD*, 2 October 1893.
46. *PGSC*, 16 May 1893.
47. *PGSC*, 5 July 1893.
48. *PGSC*, 23 August 1893.
49. See Chapter 28.
50. *PGSC*, 20 and 30 January 1894.
51. *PGSC*, 20 April 1894, also quoted in *STD*, 23 April 1894.
52. *PGSC*, 19 May 1894.
53. It was also printed in *STD*, 21 May 1894.
54. *PGSC*, 7 and 11 January, 28 May 1901, 7 March 1902. A further sign of editorial support for W.M.Young was the report, carried only in *PGSC*, that W.M.Young was in 1902 the highest subscriber to the expansion of the Church of the Assumption in Penang. *PGSC*, 5 March 1902: the only sign of charity ever recorded of him.
55. *MM*, 13 March 1897 and 10 June 1897 quoting *PGSC* article. See also *PP*, 5 March 1898, and Chapter 31.
56. *PGSC*, 11 January 1895.
57. HC 8257:9 PAR 1895 para. 12.
58. *PGSC*, 24 July 1897 and *ST*, 26 August 1898.
59. *Str. P.*, No. 3.
60. *PGSC*, 5 June 1894.
61. Maxwell, 1894, op. cit.
62. *Ibid.*, p. xvii.
63. CO 273/196:646-650 In Gov. to CO, 211 of 11 July 1893.
64. *Ibid.*, letter dd. 7 July 1894.
65. CO 273/197:22-55 Gov. to CO, 241 of 4 August 1894. For Ripon's cautious dispatch dd. 28 June 1895 generally favouring Maxwell's arguments, see f.32. Ripon had by then taken over at the CO.
66. *MM*, 18 January 1900.

Land Speculation

Both during his official career, and more frequently after his death when he was no longer able to refute the allegations, Swettenham was accused of corrupt practices, chiefly in relation to land transactions. The allegations, which stretched back to the early 1880s were investigated in some detail in 1890. They contributed substantially to the unpleasant atmosphere of suspicion and distrust which prevailed among the senior Colonial officials in Singapore at that period.

In the climate of opinion at the time, a degree of involvement in commercial activities by government servants was not always considered reprehensible. In particular, in the Selangor context, the first Resident, J.G. Davidson, was known to have extensive business interests in the state, in partnership with Tunku Kudin at the time of his appointment. There were however standing instructions, in the form of a circular of 24 April 1875 by Lord Carnarvon, in the Colonial Office, prohibiting all salaried public officials '...from engaging in trade or connecting themselves with any commercial undertaking without leave from the Governor approved by the Secretary of State.'¹ This prohibition had not prevented Douglas, as Resident of Selangor, from purchasing town lots from the government at a public auction conducted by Daly, the head of the Lands Department who was his son-in-law. This cost Daly, and ultimately Douglas, their jobs. The opportunity was taken by Lord Kimberley to renew the prohibition on government servants holding land.²

While Low welcomed these regulations, Swettenham certainly did not. In a letter from the Selangor Residency in early January 1883 he requested guidance on whether government officers might be allowed to purchase land and shares. He recommended that provided they made full disclosure, they should be allowed to do so.³ Weld, minuting on this in March that year indicated that he did not think a set of rules was the answer: Residents should be free to decide on the merits of the case. However the Resident should not personally buy land without the Governor's permission. This did

not prevent Swettenham on at least two occasions obtaining permission from Weld for just such business transactions. On 23 May 1883, Weld in a private note gave Swettenham permission to purchase land. Five days later he wrote again to Swettenham giving him permission to buy land, and for Sydney Swettenham to hold shares 'in the Brick-making company,' registered in her name.⁴ These land transactions for which Weld gave permission were apparently in part for land purchased later in the year. It turned out that certain leases were issued to Yap Ah Loy on 12 September 1883, and these were transferred to Swettenham on the same day. In another instance leases issued on 24 July 1883 to one Sum Ah Peng were also transferred to Swettenham 'with the buildings, thereon on 12 September 1883'. This entry, which did not give Swettenham's name, was signed by J.P. Rodger.⁵ It seems likely that this individual was the San Ah Peng who worked closely with Loke Yew.⁶ If so, it is noteworthy that Swettenham should on the same day have concluded land deals, directly or indirectly with the two most powerful businessmen in the Chinese community.

Swettenham was by no means the only person to be involved in such land transactions. Subsequent investigations showed that almost every senior European official in Selangor at the period, and not a few of the local government staff were also involved. The former included Syers, of the Police, Spence-Moss, the railway engineer, and Venning.⁷

In 1888, Sir Frederick Dickson, the Colonial Secretary in Singapore wrote somewhat officiously as was his wont, to Swettenham as Resident, stating that on all future promotions, the Governor would require a statement of all land or house property within the state owned by government officers. Meantime a return was required. Swettenham accordingly issued a circular asking for returns. In the case of the Resident's own department, the clerk left a blank against Swettenham's name, on which Swettenham himself inscribed an ambiguous hieroglyph, which might be read as 'nil'.⁸ He was apparently reduced to such ambiguity, because he still held certain lots he had bought in 1883. From this it appears that the lots referred to in Weld's letters, and those purchases which came to light in later investigations were not entirely the same, and some of them had not been disclosed to the Governor.

Swettenham was disturbed by this circular, for he asked Belfield, Commissioner of Lands and a barrister, his opinion on a number of points concerning the prohibition of government officers from owning land. In the course of this memorandum he made it clear that he felt in some cases government officers had done the state a service by buying land. In a long reply, Belfield concluded that the interests of government were best served by interfering as

little as possible in its employees' private affairs, although he agreed it was undesirable for officers to hold land in the Straits Settlements, or the Native States. He added that they could not be forced to sell it, if they had acquired it.⁹ The enquiry was motivated by a desire on Swettenham's part to ascertain how strong a case he had personally. The answers cannot have encouraged him, for by mid-1889 he had disposed of most of these pieces of land, at a profit of several hundred dollars, some, via Sword and Mühlhnghaus to the Straits Trading Company.¹⁰

Whether this sudden desire to impose further restrictions genuinely came from the Governor, Smith, whose attitude on such matters was generally relaxed, is unclear. His dispatch to Lord Knutsford in December 1888 shows an uncharacteristic enthusiasm to pursue the problem:

Several cases have come to my notice which indicate the necessity of precluding such officers from acquiring land, directly or indirectly, whether in the town or in the country districts of the State in which they are serving.... I have quite recently had before me an instance in which one public officer in Perak had purchased some town lots, on which he had built houses, and a scandalous discussion has arisen as to whether a road was not diverted to benefit his property.

Elsewhere in Perak, he noted, government officers had gone shares with natives on land '... [This] must ultimately affect their position and render it almost impossible that they should honestly perform the duties with which they are entrusted.'¹¹

Smith went on to advocate that government officers should be completely precluded from holding land. With this policy, he reported, Low was in agreement. Swettenham however disagreed: '[He] raises objections, which I do not think should prevail.'¹² Swettenham's objections ran to thirteen and a half pages. He did not know of any case where public interests had been prejudiced by officials owning land, though he did know of several occasions when the state had considerably benefitted by the example set by government officials as landowners. He also suggested impudently that if a government servant, 'whose services were great, whose ability was undoubted and whose honesty was unimpeachable' refused to give up land, it might be rather difficult for the Colonial Office to remove him.¹³

Fairfield in the Colonial Office commented: 'Mr Swettenham's minute contains a good deal of perverse cleverness.' Meade added: 'I wish Mr Swettenham's cleverness had been enlisted on the side of abstention from land and other speculation; especially as the Straits Civil Service has been rather exceptionally conspicuous as taking a lax and easy view of such matters.' As a result, the Colonial Office

wrote to Smith approving the idea of a set of rules proposed by him, with certain clarifications, and a clear explanation to Swettenham.¹⁴

In the light of Smith's subsequent lax attitude, it seems possible that the correspondence was prompted chiefly by Sir Frederick Dickson, the Colonial Secretary between 1885 and 1892. He proved to be an unpopular busybody, and, for reasons which will shortly become obvious, was loathed by Smith and Swettenham in particular. Dickson bided his time, waiting till Smith was out of the country on leave before he took any further steps. He cannot therefore have been a very welcome visitor when he announced to Swettenham in August 1890 his intention of visiting Perak, in his capacity as Acting Governor, during Smith's absence. Dickson was met by Swettenham, accompanied by Dickson's step-son, Dickson-Thorold, off Kuala Larut. From there they went to Port Weld and Taiping, where they were met by Sultan Idris at the railway station. After a day at the races (the party arrived half-way through the race meeting, which would not have improved their popularity,) Sydney Swettenham gave a dance for them at the Residency.¹⁵

However when Dickson returned to Singapore, he became involved in an acrimonious correspondence with Rodger in Pahang. Rodger had wished to go on leave, but Dickson said he could not be spared at that time. When pressed by London, in support of Rodger, Dickson nominated J.B.M. Leech, District Officer of Kinta, in Perak, to replace Rodger temporarily. Rodger retorted that Leech was well known as a land-jobber, and therefore not suitable: his investments and those of his sister had been disclosed to Hugh Low in 1888. Dickson was trapped, for it was he who had reported these transactions to the Colonial Office in a far from friendly manner: 'in a way which no public servant should do.' Leech had moreover been 'whitewashed on the recommendation of an officer who is not supposed to have been himself altogether clear of land-jobbing, i.e. Mr Swettenham.' The Colonial Office felt that if Rodger had committed an offence by referring to the proven land-jobbing of Mr Leech, Dickson had followed suit by referring to Swettenham's suspected land-jobbing.¹⁶

Smith was back in Singapore, and resumed the Governorship on 12 November 1890. His return must have been a source of relief for many, Swettenham included. Indeed, Dickson's activities had been criticized in the papers only the day before.¹⁷ Dickson's well-advertised trips round Malaya while acting as Governor earned him a rebuke from the Colonial Office, which considered that an Officer Administering Government should just 'mind the shop' in Singapore while the boss was away.¹⁸ Dickson had struck just in time, if impetuously, by ordering the Acting Colonial Secretary to send a curt note to Swettenham, enclosing copies of deeds to town

lots in Kuala Lumpur, and demanding full details of the transactions. The letter was couched in terms which strongly suggested that Swettenham had acted discredibly. It included an extract of E.W. Birch's report on the Land Department in Selangor, and, as a further insult, a report by J.W. Bonsor, the Attorney-General, who had been consulted, as a private practitioner, on the validity of the titles under discussion.¹⁹

Smith spotted this when he reviewed the files on his return, and asked Dickson why he had reported the matter to London on 4 October, before asking for an explanation from Swettenham himself on 31 October.²⁰ Dickson gave a perfunctory reply, and the Colonial Office decided to await Swettenham's own letter of explanation. Swettenham replied icily on 18 November 1890, providing the information requested, and pointing out that he had Weld's approval for the purchases. Weld had indeed suggested that the land be registered in Sydney Swettenham's name. The land had traditionally belonged to Yap Ah Loy, who, in view of its swampy character, maintained it was worthless. Yap was therefore perfectly happy to accept Swettenham's offer of \$50 per acre. Swettenham admitted in his letter that the purchase of land was an error of judgement, open to misinterpretation. But he recorded that when he went to Selangor in 1882, government officers were encouraged to purchase land, to give a lead for the local inhabitants. Swettenham concluded his letter with a pained expression regretting that he should ever be treated in this manner.²¹

Dickson commented on Swettenham's reply, making it clear that he felt there was more dirt to be dug up: 'It should be ascertained what further transactions in land (if any) Mr Swettenham has had in his own name or by inmates of his house.' The last phrase is significant. He concluded sanctimoniously:

A perusal of these papers leaves in my mind a very painful impression and a feeling of deep regret that a public servant of Mr Swettenham's character and experience had not profited by the teaching of the papers which passed through his hands in the State Secretariat, and acted in accordance with the teaching and example of Sir Hugh Low, who kept himself clear of all suspicion of helping himself to a good investment!²²

Smith, in his dispatch to London stoutly defended Swettenham and strongly criticized Dickson, who, with Maxwell's assistance, and by requesting the Attorney-General's views, had implied that Swettenham had acted discredibly. Meade in London remarked that Swettenham had acted imprudently, although with the approval of his superiors. Fairfield, critical as ever, minuted:

His [Swettenham's] services have nothing to do with the matter, which is one of conduct; and capacity for affairs is not

always conjoined with a high standard of private conduct. At best, his defence is that he and his superior officer confederated to set at nought the very positive instructions of the Secretary of State. If the transaction had come to light at the time, it would have gone hard with them both, and Mr Swettenham might have been cleared out of Selangor, just as 'the Daly company' had been the year before.²³

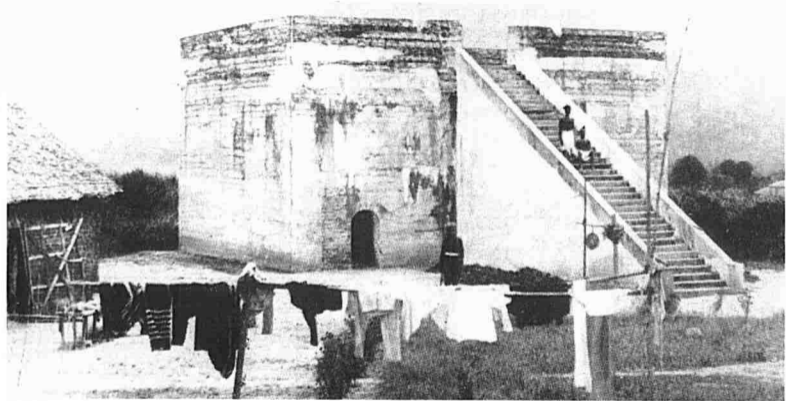
Sir R. Herbert, noting the tactless language of Dickson's letter to Swettenham, commented: 'the transaction is very fishy.' He added: 'It is necessary moreover to bear in mind that Sir C. Smith hates Sir F. Dickson, who in turn hates Sir C. Smith and Mr Swettenham.'²⁴ There the matter was allowed to rest for the moment, with Swettenham no doubt angry and upset that his transactions eight years earlier should have been made a subject for investigation. Some years later there was a retrospective investigation into the resignation of Dickson's step-son, who alleged he had been victimized by Swettenham. Swettenham, in forwarding the papers, minuted waspishly: 'I can only say that I personally showed Mr [Dickson-] Thorold ... a consideration that was very unusual, because his father, Sir F. Dickson, had invariably made himself particularly unpleasant to me.' The inquiry cleared Swettenham's name.²⁵

The Selangor investigations, spearheaded by Maxwell, were not by any means complete. E.W. Birch had been commissioned to investigate the speculative transactions by Spence-Moss on land adjacent to areas required for railway extensions almost as soon as Maxwell assumed his post as Resident, Selangor. Spence-Moss eventually lost his job as a result of the revelations, which included his borrowing money from Thamboosamy Pillai, the leading Indian resident. Swettenham as we have seen, was later alleged to have been involved in similar transactions over the extension of the Klang Railway.²⁶ Swettenham's name was mentioned incidentally in these investigations, but in circumstances which indicated, on certain occasions at least that he gave Spence-Moss permission to buy land. He must in any case have been well aware of what was happening. The papers, which contain comments apparently added later in Swettenham's own hand, show omissions of key pages: evidence unfavourable to Swettenham may have been removed by him, or on his behalf later. Had allegations against Swettenham been proved at the time, the position could have been extremely embarrassing for him. Others ran for cover: Arthur Keyser, Swettenham's private secretary, anticipating trouble, took steps in 1889 to divide up a block of land held jointly by himself and Spence-Moss.²⁷

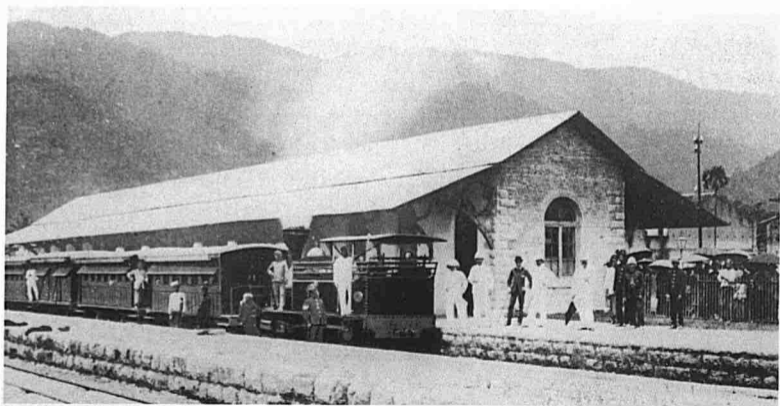
Furthermore there is evidence in the surviving papers to suggest that a cover-up exercise took place towards the end of 1888



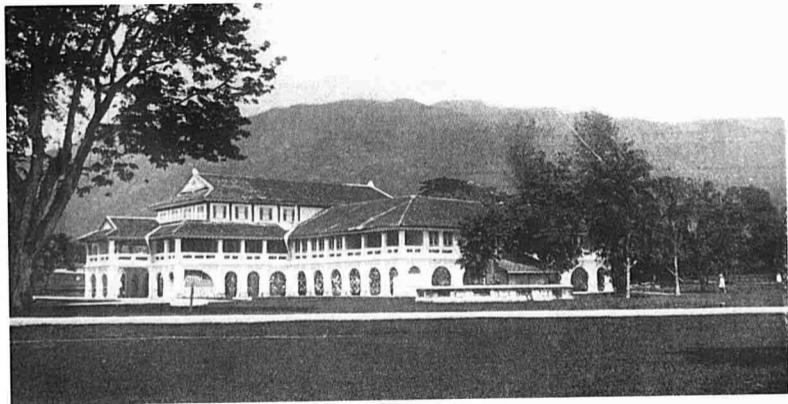
48. General view of Taiping, late 1880s with the Residency on the hill, and tin workings in the foreground.



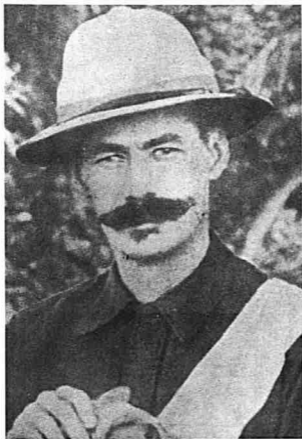
49. The fort at Taiping, probably late 1880s.



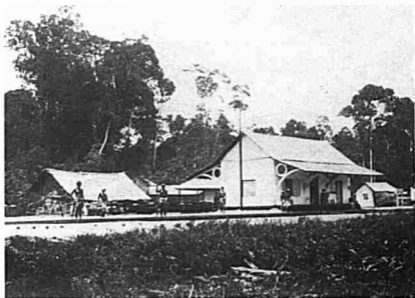
50. Taiping station, 1885.



51. Government Offices at Taiping constructed by Swettenham, mid-1880s.



52. Frank Swettenham in the 1880s.



53. Simpang Station, Port Weld, 1886.



54. Group with Regent of Perak, later Sultan Yusof, seated second from left, Sir Hugh Low, standing right and Raja, later Sultan Idris, seated left. Perak, mid-1880s.



55. Frank Swettenham, 1886.

56. Colonel R.S.F. Walker of the Perak Pioneers.





57. Perak State Uniform: Cartoon of Swettenham in cricketing gear.

58. M e t a Rome, detail from a portrait.



and in early 1889, both to provide paper documentation of earlier transactions, and to clear up outstanding titles before Swettenham's departure for Perak. Birch's investigations into land matters in Selangor had not directly implicated Swettenham. However Maxwell certainly knew that Swettenham's involvement was greater than had been revealed officially. Since the subject of Spence-Moss' land speculation had been raised, the time was clearly appropriate, from Maxwell's point of view, to commission a detailed analysis of land transactions by members of the Selangor government. Spence-Moss had not yet been sacked, but it must have been evident to Maxwell that there was a fair chance he would shortly lose his job. If such was to be the fate of Spence-Moss, perhaps Swettenham could be unseated in the same manner.²⁸

In early 1891 Maxwell struck. He ordered that a tabular statement be prepared, 'showing every case of dealing in land by Govt. officials.'²⁹ Having initiated the investigation, Maxwell prudently retired from the fray, at least so far as the official minutes were concerned. His secretary, G.W. Welman instructed Capper, a junior clerk in the Land Office to prepare the details, referring on the front of the minute paper, as if to give standing to the investigation, to Sir Frederick Dickson's inquisition in the autumn of 1890. Capper duly prepared three pages of details, omitting Swettenham's name, only to have his exercise sent back with the terse minute at the end of March 1891, 'Include Mrs Rome in this list.'

Capper, embarrassed at the implications of this instruction, duly prepared a fourth page of highly revealing information, and returned the file four days later. This provoked a long minute from Welman, no doubt with Maxwell's approval. In it, he deplored the widespread land-jobbing that Capper's papers had revealed, noting *en passant* that the names of Rodger and Belfield were honourably missing from the list. In his third paragraph he got into his stride:

3. It is also right to call attention to the foregoing [land dealing] with which the name of Mrs Rome appears in this list as a transferee from Mr F.A. Swettenham and others. It is strange that this lady, a stranger here, — residing in Selangor only for a few months as an inmate of Mr Swettenham's house, should thus appear so often in this list, and the date, 4-12-88 just after orders relating to public servants holding land were issued is probably significant.

He continued his minute by calling for a full inquiry by an independent committee. There seems little doubt that Welman was acting as proxy for Maxwell. A glance at his career, in Perak from 1883 to 1890 suggests that it may well have been Swettenham's promotion to the Residency there which provoked him to seek a transfer to Selangor.³⁰

The crucial page of the memorandum had revealed one further batch of transactions by Swettenham. These were six town leases in 'Kuala Gombak,' leased by the government to Hill, partner in the contracting firm of Hill and Rathborne, on 1 September 1883 for \$50 each. They had been transferred to Swettenham on 21 March 1884, and eventually transferred to Mrs Margaret Maria Rome on 4 December 1888. Hill, as we have seen, was a close friend of Swettenham. It seems likely that this referred to land towards the city-centre end of Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman: 'At a point where the Batu Road School now stands, the houses gave way to a coffee plantation, owned by Mr Heslop Hill, and a few hundred yards beyond, to jungle.'³¹ More intriguing still were no less than twenty leases, 'for town lots at Batu' (presumably Batu Road) leased by the government at a premium of \$25 each on 1 July 1886, transferred to R.W.B. Narayanan Chetty on 28 January 1888 for \$100 each, and then on to Mrs Rome on 4 January 1889.

This explosive document was forwarded to Singapore at the end of March 1891, for consideration by the Governor, Smith. The fury of his comments was remarkable. He took exception to the inclusion of Mrs Rome's name, and wanted to know 'why it is strange that her name should appear so often in that list, and of what it is probably significant.' When it is considered that Smith was described as 'a tall stately personage, dignified and a fine debater', his fury becomes even more remarkable. Welman was guarded in his reply, writing that he had nothing to add to paragraph 3 of his minute quoted above. He noted however that that minute 'will I have no doubt be sufficiently suggestive for the Committee of Enquiry to ascertain how things really stood in this matter.'³²

Smith in reply hastened to assure him that he had no intention of appointing such a committee, and repeated his challenge to be provided with further information, adding disingenuously, 'as at present I am wholly in the dark in the matter.' Welman continued to prevaricate in his reply, leading Smith to minute angrily:

If I am not to get any further elucidation as to why Mrs Rome's name was included in the list [and] on the other points alluded to in my minute of 27th instant, I can only say that in my opinion her name has been introduced in a very needless and gratuitous manner, and I regret that it must remain on an official paper.

2. Refer the papers to the Ag. Resident. Mr Maxwell did not apparently think it necessary to make any comment on the lists.

By now it was the end of April 1891, and Swettenham's ally, Rodger, had taken over from Maxwell. He showed consummate skill on a very delicate issue affecting his superior, with whom he

had worked so successfully for many years. His tactic was to raise a number of subsidiary matters with his subordinates, so that the whole issue was quietly run into the ground. First he asked for details of minutes prohibiting land owning by government servants. A lengthy reply was produced from the Land Office, which made no mention of the pertinent transactions, but included copies of recent prohibitions on land dealings. Three such documents were produced. The first was a copy of the Secretary of State's (Lord Derby's) circular of 2 February 1885 prohibiting land transactions by public officers except through an attorney or agent, for more than twenty acres. The second was Swettenham's own circular, dated 21 February 1889 prohibiting land acquisitions by government officers in Selangor except with the Governor's permission, obtained through the Resident. The third was the Government Notification 173 of 29 March 1889, applicable only to expatriate officers, preventing them or members of their families in the Colony or the Protected Malay States from buying land for commercial purposes.

On these Rodger commented at length, explaining, in answer to earlier queries as to why no consideration was given to certain of the records, that such was not necessary before 1 April 1889, the date on which transfer fees were introduced. He knew of no case in which government regulations had not been followed by government officers on the purchase of land, and added, delicately skirting the real issues, 'I presume that this is the sole case on which I am called to report.' He further pointed out that the Selangor regulations were issued by Swettenham himself, and added that Swettenham, had on one occasion shown him, in his capacity as Commissioner for Lands, Weld's written approval 'to purchase and hold certain land in Selangor, I believe in the neighbourhood of the Parade Ground.' He concluded therefore that any malfeasance must be attributable to Weld himself, in authorizing government officers to hold land. By this time it was the end of May 1891, and the paper was put aside till the end of the year. Matters outstanding must have been reviewed in early December, for he added 'Bring up on Mr Maxwell's return.' Maxwell chose not to reopen old wounds. 'Seen. Put by,' he minuted on 30 December 1891.³³

This episode is remarkable for a number of reasons. First, it shows a high degree of calculated vindictiveness on the part of Maxwell. Having initiated the investigation, he withdrew to the sidelines, acting entirely through his secretary, Welman. That Smith realized this may be seen from his barbed minute to the effect that Maxwell did not see fit to comment on the revelations. Secondly, if indeed Mrs Rome's position in the Swettenham household was ostensibly as companion to the unpredictable Sydney, but in fact, as Sydney was later to allege, that of mistress to Swettenham himself,

disclosure of her involvement in land transactions was a very convenient way in which Maxwell could draw official attention to the situation. Swettenham's embarrassment would be maximized when otherwise he could claim to have acted correctly in transferring the land out of his own name before issuing his circular of February 1889.

Mrs Rome's position had been painfully spelt out by Welman, in terms which suggested that she was something more than a casual visitor, or friend of the family. Yet on a strict interpretation of the regulations subsequently cited by Rodger, no offence had been committed, especially if there was some doubt as to exactly which of Swettenham's transactions had been covered by the approval from Weld, mentioned by Rodger in his minute. The prohibitions on landowning were confined to government servants and their families. Mistresses were not included.

What Maxwell almost certainly had not anticipated was the extent of Smith's fury when confronted by the details, and by Mrs Rome's name. Smith had grounds to be angry over evidence of vindictive and spiteful squabbling between two senior subordinates, and he also had grounds for anger that his personal friend and colleague, Swettenham, should be embarrassed in this manner. No doubt he was also irritated at the prospect of possible irregularities in Swettenham's private life becoming a subject of official debate. Whether these three grounds adequately account for the degree of suppressed fury in his minutes is unclear.

There remains a final possibility. The second transaction noted by Capper involved Mrs Rome, but not Swettenham. The most straightforward explanation is that Swettenham, despite advance knowledge of the prohibition which he was to issue six weeks later, was still determined to carry on with his speculative activities, using Mrs Rome as a nominee. There was no need for his name to appear at all. But it is just possible that Smith himself was involved in land speculation. What more convenient nominee than Mrs Swettenham's lady companion? If such was the case, fear of disclosure would certainly account for the white-hot anger of his comments: for his frantic attempts to goad Welman into ill-considered allegations about Mrs Rome, thus drawing attention away from the name behind the front, and for his obvious reluctance to allow a full inquiry, which would attract unwelcome attention from London. There is evidence to suggest that Smith was not averse to such activities, for in the same year it was disclosed that both he himself and Swettenham held shares in the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company. Smith's shares had, in all fairness been bought when he was leaving to take up the job of Colonial Secretary in Ceylon, not expecting to return to the Straits. The Colonial Office

insisted they be sold, and they were. Fairfield in London, remarked that they went to Spence-Moss, at a time when his future was under discussion, and added that his suspicions were aroused.³⁴

This fine example of a Victorian colonial cover-up reverberated faintly a year or two later. It will be recollected that one of the pieces of land which Swettenham acquired from San [Sum] Ah Peng in 1883 was noted as having buildings on it. This must also have been the piece of land 'near the Parade Ground' to which Rodger referred in his minute cited above. Swettenham's justification, when queried about these purchases, was that the land was marshy, and that it had belonged to Yap Ah Loy. San Ah Peng was acting as his, or possibly Loke Yew's nominee. The 1880 Selangor Secretariat files show that when the capital was moved from Klang to Kuala Lumpur, Yap Ah Loy laid claim to some land on the West bank of the river. As far as is known, there were no other buildings on this side of the river when the state capital was established in 1880. Moreover Yap would not have bothered to claim vacant land of no value. Yet by the date of his death in 1885, he had apparently disposed of it, for no mention of it occurs in the details of the protracted settlement of his estate.

If Swettenham purchased land from Yap Ah Loy or Loke Yew (via San Ah Peng) on which there were buildings, it seems not improbable that the site was that where now stands the old Selangor Secretariat Buildings (Bangunan Abdul Samad). Certainly there were buildings on this land in 1882. This point was confirmed in an article twelve years later, when memories were still fresh.³⁵ It was later alleged that in 1889, W.E. Maxwell ordered all government servants to sell their land in Selangor. The allegation, some sixty years after the event, may simply reflect the turmoil that Maxwell produced by his enquiries in 1889 to 1891 on land dealings in Selangor.³⁶

A further anonymous article discussing what is now the site of the Abdul Samad Building, indicated, 'the land was cheap, the plots of land (perhaps tin-bearing) were purchased from a private person for only a few hundred dollars each, but the cost of the building was high for those days.' Furthermore E.W. Birch in his 1892 Annual Report noted that, 'some lands that will become very valuable after being filled in were resumed.'³⁷ Whether this item in fact refers to the land between the Parade Ground and the Klang River may be disputed: 'The site of the new government offices was handed over to this department [PWD] on 1 June [1894] when the demolition of 15 brick houses that encumbered the space was immediately commenced ... The site was purchased for \$29,919.80.'³⁸ When the buildings were eventually opened, a newspaper reported: 'It was found that by spending a sum of about \$30,000 in buying out the

owners of some dilapidated shophouse property on the Gombak Road on the side of the Parade Ground, a most excellent site was obtainable.³⁹

Furthermore there is a reference to Treacher in the negotiations over the forced sale of the land. Treacher took over as Resident in Selangor from Birch in 1893:

He [Treacher] played a considerable part in the rebuilding of the Secretariat, probably negotiating the purchase of the land from a Government officer who was put into difficulties by an order from Sir William Maxwell that government officers should not have private dealings in land.⁴⁰

Treacher was a faithful ally of Swettenham, described as the 'long time subordinate', who would never 'trifle with the master' [Swettenham]. The fact that none of these delicate negotiations are mentioned in the Selangor State Secretariat files for the period lends weight to the supposition that Treacher arranged the whole matter privately, to cause Swettenham the least further embarrassment, at a time when the furore arising from Maxwell's investigations had scarcely subsided.⁴¹ The evidence is almost, but not quite, conclusive that Swettenham, through a nominee, was forced to sell the site for the Abdul Samad Building at a cheap price. The involvement of both Maxwell and Birch indicate that plans for such a building were in contemplation by late 1889 or early 1890.

From the transactions by Swettenham which came to light in the course of investigations at this time, it is difficult to dissent from the official Colonial Office verdict. Most of them were approved by the Governor, and therefore above-board. At the same time they were undoubtedly unwise and open to misinterpretation, as Swettenham himself admitted: circumstantial evidence suggests that there were further undisclosed transactions. These include a memo note in his 1883 diary which indicates that in September of that year he spent \$2,189.31 on 'Land:' a far larger sum than could be accounted for by the transactions mentioned above.⁴²

In 1895 new police offices were required in the centre of the town, for what is now the Jalan Bandar Police Station. A plan was prepared showing the land and adjacent lots, which disclosed that one of Swettenham's elder brothers, R.P.A. Swettenham owned Nos. 35-37 Sultan Street. It is unlikely that this land was acquired after the troubles of 1891, and one can only assume that it had been acquired before, and, for some reason, escaped detection. Significantly there was no mention of it in the brother's will, drawn up hurriedly just before his death in 1899; possibly it was held under blank transfer in favour of Swettenham.⁴³

1891 must have been a very tough year for Swettenham, for not only was he embattled with Maxwell on land speculation issues

which could have cost him his career. A further problem was created by Walter McKnight Young, who saw fit, at the height of the row in Selangor over Swettenham's land transactions, to apply through Treacher in Taiping for a transfer to the Protectorate of Chinese in Selangor. No indication was given of the reasons for such a request. In his reply, Swettenham as British Resident in Perak indicated not only that Young was bound by his contract to the Perak government till November 1891, but also that Swettenham himself would prefer him to remain in the state. Moreover he would be prepared to match the Selangor government's offer in respect of salary to keep him there. Swettenham had very strong reasons for keeping W.M. Young in Perak: stronger than Young's position in the Perak government service would suggest: so strong in fact that they might be interpreted as blackmail on the part of Young.⁴⁴

This of course could readily be explained if Young was dissatisfied for any reason with the arrangements Swettenham had made with him to conceal his earlier misdemeanour. Walter McKnight Young, in his mid-twenties, had developed into a knowing, and none too pleasant young man. In Selangor at the time the Chinese Secretary was H.C. Ridges, who must have known both Young and Swettenham. There would have been little sympathy for Swettenham's plight from Maxwell, and it is possible that Ridges helped Swettenham out of yet another potentially embarrassing situation.⁴⁵

In conclusion, it seems that Walter McKnight Young was in all probability handsomely bought off by Swettenham, for in 1892 he was on leave in London. Writing to the Colonial Office from North Kensington, at the time a prosperous part of London, he stated that he had passed his Grays Inn examinations in all but Latin, and requested that the Colonial Office should write to Grays Inn asking that he might be exempted. This they did. It can be argued that a leave in UK lasting fifteen months, twelve of which were on half salary which included sitting Bar examinations presupposes an income greatly in excess of that drawn by a junior clerk in the Perak Chinese Protectorate.⁴⁶

NOTES

1. SSF SS107/75 of 8 August 1875.
2. CO 273/114:311-2 Kimberley to Weld, 179 of 25 July 1882, with Weld to Kimberley, 169 of 3 May 1882.
3. CO 273/169:458 Swettenham to Weld, 6 January 1883 in Weld to CO, 460 of 24 November 1890. See also CO 273/267 ff. OAG to CO, 460 of 24 November 1890.
4. CO 273/169:450-4 Weld to Swettenham, 23 and 28 May 1883.

5. CO 273/169:436-7 Birch's Report on the Land Department of Selangor.
6. *TOM*, 19 November 1918. Obituary of San Ah Peng, also known as San Peng, father of San Ah Wing and Sum Ah Peng.
7. See for example SSF 877/83, 2237/86, KL 2988/88, KL 3104/88, KL 3503/88.
8. SSF CS 3468/88.
9. SSF KL 3499/88.
10. CO 273/169:437-8 Birch's Report on the Land Department, Selangor, 1890.
11. CO 273/156:49 ff. Smith to Knutsford, 536 of 5 December 1888. Taken in conjunction with the Rodger/Dickson correspondence, CO 273/168:406 ff. OAG to CO, Confidential of 28 October 1890, this almost certainly identifies J.B.M. Leech as the culprit. See below.
12. CO 273/156:49 ff. Smith to Knutsford, 536 of 5 December 1888.
13. CO 273/156:62-8. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *SFP*, 13 August 1890.
16. CO 273/168:406 ff. Rodger/Dickson correspondence in OAG to CO, Confidential of 28 October 1890.
17. See critical article in *SFP*, 11 November 1890.
18. CO 273/169:272 ff. Governor to CO, 460 of 24 November 1890.
19. CO 273/169:434-5 Ag. Col. Sec's letter of 31 October 1890. The extracts from Birch's report, para. 38, frames 439-40 are undated. Bonsor's report was dated 8 October 1890, frames 436-38.
20. CO 273/169:267 ff. Smith to Knutsford, 460 of 24 November 1890.
21. CO 273/169:441-9.
22. Dickson's comments were dated 3 December 1890, and related to Swettenham's letter of explanation of 18 November 1890. These were forwarded to London in Smith to Knutsford, 688 of 16 December 1890: See CO 426/10:158.
23. *Ibid.*
24. CO 273/169:424-33 Gov. to CO, 460 of 16 December 1890.
25. CO 273/228:422 Mitchell to CO, Confidential of 30 March 1897.
26. See Chapter 19. Details of Spence-Moss' activities are in SSF CS 669/89A and SSF Misc. 2599/89. See also CO 273/173:415-604 Gov. to CO, Confidential of 1 July 1891.
27. SSF 652/89.
28. Ernest Birch in his autobiography recalls that Maxwell came to see him more than once in his office in KL 'and gave me much good advice.'
29. SSF 127/91.
30. See SSF Res. 6345/94 for details of Welman's career.
31. Anon. *Twelve Under Fours* (History of the Selangor Golf Club), 1954. The Batu Road School must have been the Malay School, off Gombak Lane.
32. The description of Smith is in Makepiece, Brooke and Braddell, 1921, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
33. All documentation of this case is in SSF 127/91.
34. CO 273/172:727 Gov. to CO, Confidential of 31 March 1891 and CO 273/176:25 Gov. to CO, Confidential of 9 September 1891. SSF Misc.

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- 2473/89. The disposal was complete by 8 October 1891. CO 426/10:216 Letter dd. 8 October 1891.
35. *SJ*, 4 May 1894. See also the photographs reproduced in A. Wright and H.A. Cartwright, (eds.), 1908, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya*, p. 845.
36. Part of an anonymous article by 'an old resident whose memory today is as fresh as ever' included in *MM* Supplement, '50 Years of Progress, 1904-1954,' published 1954.
37. *SJ*, 4 May 1894 and *MM* Supplement as above. PPC 7228, SAR 1892.
38. CO 273/294:430 ff. Governor to CO, 348 of 25 July 1903, quoting the PWD Annual Report for 1894.
39. *STD*, 1 April 1897.
40. *MM* Supplement, 1954, quoted above.
41. See Heussler, 1981, op. cit., pp. 128 and 237.
42. *SD*, 1883.
43. SSF Res. 4918/95.
44. SSF 1940/91 and 2763/91.
45. See W. Blythe, 1969, op. cit., p. 259. Later Swettenham gave Ridges a job at the Press Bureau in London when he was in need: Robson, 1934, op. cit., p. 39.
46. CO 273/185:859 ff. W.M.K. Young to CO, 21 November 1892. Leave details in *PGG*, 6 May 1892.

Federation: One High Officer

The origins of the federation of the Protected Malay States lay in the success achieved, chiefly by Selangor and Perak, in the twenty years since the Perak War. Swettenham had played a considerable part in this, initially in the Colonial Secretary's Office in Singapore, and later as Resident in both states. In the early 1870s, the options had been annexation, for which Swettenham himself had on occasion argued,¹ or the handing back of the states to their traditional rulers. The latter prospect had never seriously been considered, so great were the commercial pressures in Singapore and Penang, not to mention the personal ambitions of Swettenham and his colleagues.

The Perak War had effectively impressed on both Whitehall and Singapore the importance of caution in their dealings with the states. Swettenham has swiftly realized, as soon as he became Resident himself, that the constitutional anomaly of the residential system brought with it a number of administrative advantages to the incumbent. Not least of these was the independence of the Protected States, so long as they were profitable, from scrutiny by the Singapore Legislative and Executive Councils.²

The fiction of 'advice' was preserved as assiduously in London as in the Protected States themselves: in fact the Resident ruled. Although Weld might protest that the arrangement was not one of 'veiled annexation,' such in fact was the case. Successive governors and Residents preferred not to use such a word. Moreover, London, by agreeing to the fiction of 'advice', as Swettenham himself astutely noted, 'could not well interfere If the advisers exceeded their functions, there was no reason to complain, so long as every one concerned appeared to be satisfied, and the states found means to meet all their liabilities.'³

However, annexation remained the cry of the less perceptive for many years.⁴ Throughout this time the two leading states were expanding in economic terms under able if autocratic Residents. There was no uniformity in the administration, except in broadest outline, for Swettenham and Low by force of their personalities both

dealt directly with the Governor. Moreover increasing interchangeability between colonial officers in the states raised administrative problems. There was for example the problem of how to allocate Clifford's language bonus between Perak and Pahang.⁵ The first hint of changes in the administration came in Low's last annual report on Perak, where he concluded that the Protected States must be looked on no longer as isolated governments, but one great whole.⁶

The question came into sharper focus in 1891 as a result of Pahang's financial problems. Difficulties had arisen in the Singapore Legislative Council over objections by Shelford to a proposed loan of \$200,000 to finance the development of Pahang. Lucas, pointing out in a minute that the Governors were jealous of Legco interference in the states, urged that state budgets should not be submitted to that body. Fairfield disagreed in cases like Pahang, where some form of financial assistance was needed.⁷

Discussion on the administration of the Protected Malay States continued throughout that year, with Swettenham contributing some magisterial comments in his annual report on Perak for 1890:

When the Pangkor Engagement was signed in 1874, there were, in the Councils of the Colony, men having experience of Malays, whose constant advice was not to go too fast to try to do too much in the Native States. They have left us, and the common complaint now appears to be that the situation is anomalous and absurd, and should be replaced by annexation in order that British interests may flourish under British law and British subjects get British justice. Perhaps it is a trifling detail that in carrying out this programme the owners of the soil would receive somewhat less than poetic justice. I mention these views because they have been publicly expressed rather often recently and they are likely to have an injurious effect on the minds of young officers in this service, who, appreciating the conditions which bind us as little as those who invite the British Government to take advantage of its material power, will be inclined to show scant consideration for the rights of the Malays.⁸

While the *London & China Express* was still publishing letters recommending annexation,⁹ the *Calcutta Statesman* was downright hostile to Swettenham. In an article entitled 'The Native States from an Indian Point of View,' and quoted in the *Straits Times*, it urged that the Residents' powers be clipped. The Singapore government, it argued, was totally in the hands of officials who knew more about the states than the Governor. The result had been the promotion of personal ambition at the expense of the Native States. It had been suggested that an Imperial

Commission be appointed to investigate the powers of Residents: 'In any such independent enquiry, Mr Frank Swettenham, who has been a centre of intrigue in regard to appointments to the Native States and is reputed to be a mine of information on their politics and internal administration would doubtless be able to explain any enigmas which are usually characteristic of Oriental rather than British rule.' The writer added that despotism was particularly exercised in the administration of law in the Native States, with no regard for law in the Straits Settlements. The article concluded with vehemence if not style: 'Clearly there is something very rotten in the state of the Protected Malay States: and the sooner the Colonial Office interferes, the better will it be for the English reputation for integrity and justice, and for the development of the Golden Chersonese under our rule.'¹⁰

Such trenchant criticism had scarcely been seen in the Straits since the days of Ord. Unfortunately there is no hint as to the author of this article. E.W. Birch, in his autobiographical memoir written many years later had this to say on the origins of Federation:

I will not enter into a fruitless discussion as to who first thought of Federation. I know that Sir Frederick Dickson - the Colonial Secretary - conceived the wish to create for himself an appointment as Administrator of the Malay States. I also know that the thought was not altogether absent from Sir William Maxwell's mind. I know that Sir Cecil Smith, without any personal aims was strongly in favour of appointing one man to oversee the administration of all four States, then under British Protection.

Sir Frank Swettenham first put the idea into a more definite form. The new Governor, Sir Charles Mitchell 1893-1900, after lengthy consideration [deleted 'considerable delay'] recommended its adoption.¹¹

This was an accurate enough general account. However Swettenham considered he had played a much larger role in formulating the idea of Federation.

He had left the Straits on leave at the end of October 1891, and it is likely that during this long leave, which stretched into 1892, he mulled over and put up proposals for a scheme of Federation. He had after all proved himself as a successful Resident in both Selangor and Perak and, in his early forties was too young to be considered for a Governorship. Far too ambitious to view with equanimity the prospect of a further decade as Resident, it was not surprising that he should be considering his own future as well as that of the Protected Malay States. Here was a splendid opportunity to combine the two for mutual benefit. The only direct evidence of this work which survives is a draft: 'A proposal for the better

administration of the Malay States under British Protection.¹² Written in pencil, and bearing no date, it shows signs of extensive alteration: some of the paragraphs are on small separate pieces of paper, which adds credibility to, though it does not prove later allegations that it was written after the event, to justify Swettenham's contention that he was the first to have thought of the idea. It was certainly to generate much heat in the years immediately after Swettenham's retirement, as we shall see. Attached to it are two typed fair copies and a typed memo by Swettenham dated 23 February 1917, to be considered later.¹³

When read in the light of the swingeing attack in the *Calcutta Statesman*, it proves to be a remarkable example of how a vicious attack may be turned to good advantage. In it, Swettenham admitted that the powers of the Residents were excessive, particularly when the Governor in Singapore lacked experience of the Peninsula. The solution, Swettenham considered, was the appointment of a Resident-General. Under the circumstances, there could be no doubt in the minds of those reading the memorandum that Swettenham himself was the only candidate for the job. He had in fact written his own job description.

He opened with a description of the current position: 'There are five Protected States, each with a British Resident theoretically advising the Native Ruler, but actually administering the Government of the State under the instructions of the Governor of the S.S.' After dwelling on the problems caused by the diversity of these states and the difficulty which the Governor must have in finding time to cope with them, he pointed out that, failing adequate time, 'The only other course is for the Governor to rely on the advice of some officer at his hand who is able to criticize the Residents from his own knowledge.'

Inevitably therefore the knowledge of the Residents about their own states would increase more rapidly than that of the Governor or his supervising officer. He spelled out the falsity of the Resident's position, at the end of the Perak War: 'If he goes beyond advice, he will do so at his peril! These instructions appear to be framed principally with the object of making the Resident wrong, whatever he does, either he will fail in determination, or he will exceed his authority.' There was, he continued, little chance that a Governor, particularly one new to the Straits would be able to handle this. 'My proposal is then to relieve the Governor of much of the routine work and to place it in the hands of an officer who might be called Resident-General and who would correspond with the Governor on questions affecting the Malay States.'¹⁴

He stressed the importance of procuring a knowledgeable and experienced man for this job. Having listed and justified the

advantages of standardization of the civil service throughout the states, he continued, on the subject of conflicts of interest: 'It would only be fair to these states, where such great success has crowned a novel and most interesting experiment in administration that an officer whose sympathies are mainly with the native states should be able to represent their case as against that of the Colony, for the decision of the Secretary of State.' After defining the powers of the Resident-General, Swettenham added: 'Many recent signs point to the fact that a time has arrived when there must be a new departure in the administration of the Malay States, and if the immediate circumstances do not force the question to the front, it is better calmly to consider the matter now rather than wait till reason may be clouded or biased by personal feeling and recrimination.' Lest the Governor be inclined to forget Swettenham's qualifications: 'If any excuse be necessary for my addressing Your Excellency on this subject and venturing to make these proposals, it is to be found in the facts I have already stated, in my own intimate acquaintance with all those states on both West and East of the Peninsula, and my uninterrupted connection with the Residential system since its inception.' Among further reasons given were Smith's imminent departure, the uncertainties surrounding relations between Resident and ruler, referred to earlier, and problems with the Pahang loan.

Swettenham concluded his memorandum with a spirited defence of the Malay cause:

I have said nothing of the peculiar characteristics of Malays, of the absolute necessity of considering their prejudices There are over 100,000 Malays in Perak alone, they are satisfied and they are grateful, but they have to be counted with, and when it is remembered what trouble a very handful of discontented people recently gave in Pahang, what expense they can put the Government to at small cost to themselves, it would be a serious mistake to overlook the fact that the Malays and their interests are still the first consideration.¹⁵

Swettenham, in the memo attached dated 23 February 1917 maintained that this paper was written in January 1893, immediately on his return from leave, and that a fair copy was sent to Smith at the time. The fair copy has never been traced, and Swettenham claimed to have lost the draft for some twenty-three years. Only conveniently after Smith's death did it turn up in a bundle of old papers, providing, in Swettenham's view, conclusive evidence that he was the first to have proposed Federation. Swettenham's dating rests on the initials of two clerks and a date on the cover of the original memorandum. These are by no means conclusive. Swettenham's own account many years later recorded discussions

with Lucas in 1891, and summed up the issues in much the same terms as outlined in his memo quoted above.¹⁶

There was discussion of a further loan to Pahang towards the end of 1892.¹⁷ This was in part prompted by a memorandum submitted on the subject by Swettenham on 24 November 1892, somewhat unexpectedly as far as Lucas was concerned: 'I suppose I asked him for his views on Pahang some time back.' In it he quoted Low as saying that Pahang ought to be attached to and financed by the western Native States. Low believed that the rulers would be inclined to accept a general federation.¹⁸ By May the following year the Colonial Secretary was writing from London to Smith inviting him to consider the relations of the Protected States to the Straits Settlements and each other along the lines set out in a memorandum enclosed, apparently drafted by Lucas, perhaps with Swettenham's notes in front of him.¹⁹ Here it was suggested that the Governor should 'consider what modifications if any, might with advantage be made in the present system with a view to drawing these states closer together for the benefit of each and all alike.'

The memorandum further suggests: 'The Governor's general control over these states and their administration might probably be made more effective than at present if there were directly subordinate and directly responsible to him, one high officer, who, as his representative, would, under some such title as Resident-General, visit, inspect, and supervise all of these states.' Annexation, the memorandum continued, would upset the Malays, and should be discarded. It went on to outline, in more general terms, suggestions for a system of federation as proposed by Swettenham.²⁰

Smith, on his final visit to Perak towards the end of May had spent at least three days with Swettenham in The Cottage up in the hills, where they had talked of Federation. Swettenham badgered him yet again about an increase in salary.²¹ Lucas in London shrewdly advised that no commitment on salary should be made until the result of the scheme of Federation was known. He added, significantly, that Smith had written in about a Resident-General scheme 'long before the memorandum on the subject reached him.' Lucas also noted, 'If a Resident-General were to be appointed, Mr Swettenham would be the obvious man.'²²

By the end of June 1893, Smith was endorsing the idea of Federation: 'There is no doubt in my mind that the time has arrived for putting the administration of the Native States on a sounder footing, and for relieving the Governor of a great deal of work which now devolves upon him.' In generally agreeing Swettenham's and Lucas' proposals, he added, of the Resident-General: 'The appointment will require great tact, discretion and administrative ability. It is absolutely necessary that it should be

made if confederation is to be brought about.²³ Lucas in London promoted Swettenham's cause:

I should move Mr Swettenham down to Selangor, I should make him Resident for Selangor as he was before, and Resident-General for the Native States, for which he is beyond question eminently qualified as knowing all the officers and being a friend of all the Sultans.Mr Swettenham's personal and intimate knowledge of these Malay chiefs is an important factor in the matter, and on both personal and public grounds, as already stated, I would not subordinate him to Mr Maxwell, but to the Governor alone.²⁴

As if foreseeing the acrimony which was later caused by arguments over who first had the idea of Federation, Lucas added in brackets: 'I should like to say that there has been no "friendly collusion" between Sir Cecil Smith and myself on the subject of federation. He told me he was writing a dispatch on the subject before the Colonial Office memorandum was sent, but I knew nothing of what he would recommend.'²⁵

At this stage the focus of attention shifted to the officials at the Colonial Office. Smith had left Singapore at the end of August, where Maxwell was temporarily in charge until the arrival of Sir Charles Mitchell, the next Governor. The rivalry between Swettenham and Maxwell was continued by their regular proxies in the Colonial Office: for Swettenham, Lucas; for Maxwell, Fairfield and Meade. Fairfield commented:

He [Swettenham] is [? illegible] and looks at this creation of a big office as a means of getting himself more clout. He is a headstrong man and I think the new office would turn his head, so we should find him a trouble. He was, like other officers, unfortunately encouraged to speculate in local investments and is an owner of town-lots and other property in Selangor, and for this reason and many others I should deprecate sending him back to Kuala Lumpur. He has made himself the champion of the party among the civil servants who wish the system of land speculation to go on. Mr Maxwell on the other hand has risked and received raps on the knuckles from Sir Cecil Smith by making himself the champion of the opposite view, that civil servants should be free of the temptation and discredit of these local land speculations. The proposal to take native affairs out of the hands of the Colonial Secretary would suit Mr Swettenham admirably, as it would free him of the criticism of his rival Mr Maxwell, which is what he wants above all things, — or rather above everything except an increase in salary.

Fairfield accurately pointed out that Maxwell had 'a much more extensive grasp of the principles of land tenure and settlement than Mr Swettenham.'²⁶ The war of minutes swept back and forth in Whitehall in the second half of 1893. It was suggested Swettenham be sent to broach the subject with the Sultans, and report back to Mitchell. Meade disapproved of this idea: 'Neither do I like the idea of sending round Mr Swettenham to talk over the Sultans. These unhappy dummies will of course agree to anything they are told to accept. To employ Mr Swettenham on this job means that he would probably be the first new head of the federated states, and I am not satisfied that this would be a desirable arrangement.' Mitchell, he felt should be allowed to go out and make up his own mind on Federation.²⁷

The press in Singapore was also warming to the idea. Arnot Reid noted: 'That some changes must be made in the method of administering the Native States of the Malay Peninsula may perhaps be taken as admitted, since change is advocated by two persons so deeply committed to the matter as Sir Cecil Smith and Mr Swettenham.'²⁸ Whether such changes would ultimately be to Swettenham's benefit was for a time an open question.

Maxwell, by now Officer Administering Government in Singapore, wrote to Fairfield with a suggestion of joining together the Straits Settlements and the Native States. 'The idea,' he noted 'would not of course be agreeable to ambitious Residents, but it would tend to good, uniform, harmonious government.' It would also have had distinct advantages for Maxwell in his position at that time. If the States were to be administered under the Straits Settlements, the Colonial Secretary in the Straits Settlements would gain overall control, especially if the Governor was new to Malaya.²⁹ This was just what Fairfield had wanted:

This larger plan is certainly rather taking, though it may be premature and seems preferable to a "barbaric" federation of the Sultans under Mr Swettenham. I think it would be difficult to pass over Mr Swettenham for the post of Resident-General after sending him on the suggested circular mission, and I do not feel confident that we could trust him in a post of such independence as this would be. It is his ambition to be under the Governor personally, and not under the Colonial staff, and it is a matter of argument whether he is the kind of man to be left uncontrolled by skilled critics knowing his past career and tendencies.³⁰

Despite this, Maxwell had little chance, and a memo prepared at the time, initialled by Lucas, on the advantages of Federation proposed that Swettenham, 'clearly the fittest man for the place' should be sent round to consult the Sultans and the Residents. The

same memorandum took cognizance of the bitter rivalry between Swettenham and Maxwell, concluding that the posts of Resident General and Colonial Secretary should be of equal standing.³¹

As if to tweak the tiger's tail, Swettenham from prosperous Perak, saw fit in August 1893 to offer a small loan to Pahang. More could be made available if needed. Maxwell, as Colonial Secretary in Singapore, and Officer Administering Government, would be bound to refer the matter to London, however distasteful such a course might be: it would underline as starkly as was possible, the financial strength of Swettenham's case for Federation.³²

The new Governor, Sir Charles Mitchell, with no previous experience in the Straits, arrived in early 1894. One of his first jobs was to assess for himself the arguments for and against Federation. He took his time in this assessment, even though he made it his business to visit Swettenham in Perak shortly after his arrival. The visit was crucial for Swettenham. If Mitchell were to be impressed, he would be that much more likely to support Swettenham on Federation. Impressed he was. The visit involved the usual visits, dinner with the Sultan and a parade of elephants. Mitchell confessed himself: '...altogether unprepared for such evidence of successful progress as I found in the state of Perak....That such is the present state of affairs may, I think, be mainly attributed to the system which has accorded to Sir Hugh Low and Mr Swettenham a considerable amount of freedom in the advice they have tendered to the Sultan. Those two able administrators by their wisdom and foresight appear to have entirely justified the adoption of the altogether exceptional system which they have been called upon to administer.'³³

Swettenham himself years later recorded Mitchell's wry comment on his warm reception in Perak: 'I am glad you have given me such a cordial welcome, for I am sure you will not repeat it when I leave.' He was to develop a reputation for financial tight-fistedness.³⁴ Fairfield gave the dispatch no more than a sour acknowledgement. Indeed the hostility between Fairfield and Swettenham almost rivalled that between Swettenham and Maxwell. When, later in the year, Swettenham saw fit to recommend, for the Sultan, a substantial increase in his emoluments, Fairfield was furious:

\$50,000 is I believe more than the President of the United States gets. Mr Swettenham and the Sultan form a sort of Spenloe and Jorkins firm. Mr Swettenham is always doing his best to get the Sultan more money, and the Sultan is always willing to come up to the scratch and express repugnance to anything proposed by the Secretary of State which Mr Swettenham does not wish to see done.³⁵

Swettenham had indeed served Sultan Idris well in financial matters, for early in his posting to Perak, he had arranged to demarcate the Sultan's traditional mining lands at Kampar. This was not easy 'owing to the elastic nature of the Malay ancestral mines.' Nevertheless the royalty payments in subsequent years secured for the Sultan a substantial annual income.³⁶

At last, towards the end of 1894, the impasse between Maxwell and Swettenham was resolved by Maxwell's taking leave before a posting to the Gold Coast. This was anticipated when Mitchell sent to the Colonial Office a letter indicating how useful and valuable a government servant Maxwell had proved to be. Lucas, perceiving a resolution to Swettenham's problem, minuted: 'Mr Maxwell's long and able service well merits promotion, and at the same time I am inclined to think that he has been long enough at the Straits Settlements and that new blood in the Colonial Secretaryship would not be amiss.'³⁷ It is hard to believe that Swettenham was not involved, through the good offices of Lucas, in having Maxwell promoted.

The removal of Maxwell raised a further immediate problem: who should be chosen to succeed him? Mitchell was only too well aware of problems in the past between Maxwell and Swettenham, which had poisoned the atmosphere in the administration for the last six years. The prospect that Swettenham would become the first Resident-General, answerable admittedly to the Governor, yet in close contact and on equal standing with the Colonial Secretary in Singapore, raised in Mitchell's mind the unhappy prospect of endless further years of rivalry between Swettenham and whoever filled the post of Colonial Secretary. The appointment of Maxwell's successor therefore required very careful consideration.

Extensive eastern experience and a knowledge of finance were the criteria officially cited in choosing the man for the job. A further requirement, if never officially stated but tacitly understood between the Colonial Office and Mitchell, was that the candidate should ideally both get on well with Swettenham, and be in a position to exercise some influence on him. Of the two candidates mentioned by Mitchell, there was no question in the minds of the Colonial Office officials that the most suitable was James Alexander Swettenham, who had earlier been considered for a posting to Perak.³⁸ He had served in Ceylon for many years, latterly as auditor general. Smith, significantly, on his return to Europe from Singapore had stopped briefly in Colombo and met him.³⁹ Were anyone to question the advisability of posting two brothers into senior positions of administrative, if not physical proximity, the agreement, for once, of Lucas and Fairfield on the appointment must have seemed conclusive. Lucas described J.A. Swettenham as a

man who, '...would take a pride in immolating the whole of himself and his family on the altar of public duty,' while Fairfield described him as 'a dragon in point of public virtue.' Even Frank Swettenham agreed, referring later in life to 'my overscrupulous elder brother.'⁴⁰

Mitchell was fully aware of what he termed J.A. Swettenham's 'angularities', and perhaps inwardly sighed with relief at the prospect of a Colonial Secretary with whom his swashbuckling, able and ambitious prospective Resident-General could scarcely quarrel in public. The appointment had all the hallmarks of having been carefully fixed between the Colonial Office officials, Smith and Mitchell.⁴¹

Meantime public interest in the issue of Federation had developed. In August 1893, there had been further discussion of a loan to Pahang, which had been proposed by the government in Singapore, and turned down by the unofficial members of the Legislative Council.⁴² Almost simultaneously Swettenham himself publicly stirred the controversy in his final article in the *Straits Times* series, later published in his book, *About Perak*:

A feeling is gaining ground that the direction should be not annexation, but the federation of all the Protected States under one control without deliberately breaking faith with the Malays, annexation is impossible such a step would be exceedingly unpopular It may be asked, if not annexation, why federation? The reply is that federation, while it disturbs no existing arrangement, breaks no promises, does not alter the status of the Malay Rulers and chiefs, may be made to clearly define the positions of the Residents to give them a controlling chief and will thus enable him, or through him the Governor, to exercise a closer supervision over the affairs of each State.

But federation means a great deal more than this. If intelligently brought about with due consideration shewn for the feelings of the Native Rulers, and prudently worked in cordial accord with all the Residents, it would mean that these States united would possess resources enough to deal with rebellious Malays or turbulent Chinese without any extraneous help....

Hostile as ever, the *Pinang Gazette* hastened into attack, suggesting that a confederation of the Straits Settlements and the Protected Malay States was the solution. The newspaper was under no illusions as to Swettenham's motives for writing his series of articles, 'About Perak:' 'We are probably not far wrong in saying that the object of the series of articles is personal and political — to show that the Native States should be confederated under the Governor, with a Secretary for the Malay States (presumably Mr

Swettenham) ranking equally with the Colonial Secretary.' Having enumerated the ways in which the Residents had obtained excessive personal authority, as, in all fairness Swettenham himself had done in an earlier article in the series, the article concluded: 'Mr Swettenham's proposal to give the Residents a controlling chief working under the Governor does not seem to us to diminish the dangers arising from the "rock of personal authority". It seems to us to raise up a new and bigger rock among the rocks that now exist, one in each Residency.'⁴³

From the same time dates an altercation on the gambling farm in Perak. The Sultan was allegedly dissatisfied that the renewal of the gambling farms were only to be for a year: he wanted a longer period, and apparently requested Swettenham to write in and complain. This included an allegation, totally unfounded, that the action was outwith the terms of the Pangkor Engagement. Swettenham obliged and Fairfield fulminated again: 'I think Mr. Swettenham's alleged letter from the Sultan, of which he testifies to give the effect, is a bogus piece of impertinence, mainly his own invention Mr Swettenham is getting rather above himself and will have to be taken down.'⁴⁴ The Sultan of Perak remained dissatisfied with the proposals gradually to phase out such farms. In this he continued to receive the support of Swettenham, who, in a separate memorandum went so far as to state that he refused to take any responsibility for the consequences if change were forced on the state in this matter.⁴⁵

Mitchell, in letters to Lord Ripon, indicated he was considering sending an emissary to the Sultans to obtain approval for Federation, and referring to proposals for the gambling farms added, '... if for no other reason the necessity to convince these suspicious men that HM Govt. means to respect their privileges and rights would make this the most unfortunate time to choose for altering a system which they regard as a good one.'⁴⁶

Maxwell meantime, on board the *Batangas* commented sourly on Federation: he noted that his views differed 'from those of Colonial Officers who would like to see the creation of a new and highly paid office — that of Resident-General.' Interestingly, he also drew attention to his earlier mention of this possibility in his address to the Royal Colonial Institute when on leave in 1891.⁴⁷

Back in UK, Swettenham's views were given a further airing, this time in Henry Norman's book, published in mid-March 1895, entitled *The People and Politics of the Far East*. It was later established that Norman had stayed with Swettenham in Perak, to whom he offered 'special thanks' in the Preface. The section on the Protected Malay States was loud in his praise.⁴⁸ Evidently reflecting Swettenham's views, he remarked that the states had outgrown the

Residential system.⁴⁹ The solution was pure Swettenham: 'The Protected States, therefore, must be governed by a man whose position enables him to deal direct with the Secretary of State at home, and with much more authority than at present.'⁵⁰ It was all very timely, and no doubt influential, for the book appears to have sold over 2,000 copies in the first month.⁵¹ John Dill Ross, another writer and commentator on the South East Asian scene, immediately perceived and commented on the Swettenham connection: 'It is easy to surmise what may have been the matter with Mr Norman when he wrote these particular pages of his book. He may or may not have been lurching or dining with a gentleman of the name of Swettenham. He may or may not have been "got at" by that master of Malayan politics.' Later in the book, Ross accurately foresaw the tussles over power-sharing which were to develop between the Governor and the Resident-General.⁵²

In mid-April, Rodger, Lister and Swettenham paid a visit to Singapore, apparently to discuss Federation, and, in Swettenham's case, to greet his brother. The hostility of the Penang press for the Swettenham brothers was nothing if not impartial: 'A Colonial Secretary who should imagine that life is to be read only into the contents of dispatch boxes might become rather an affliction.' J.A. Swettenham rapidly lived up to his reputation for being a martinet. Within ten days of his arrival, it was reported that he wore a white top-hat every day to the office, 'dressed for Piccadilly in warm weather.'⁵³

By 1 May, the draft scheme of Federation was ready, prepared by Mitchell, together with instructions for Swettenham. Given Swettenham's visit to Singapore in mid-April, it is clear that he himself must have had a major hand in their drafting. The importance of these documents was such that Mitchell sent them all back to London for approval, ultimately by Chamberlain. In his covering letter, Mitchell, in indicating that he considered Swettenham should visit the Sultans, noted that Swettenham's health was failing. Since Swettenham wanted to go on leave in September 1895, Mitchell requested a quick approval from London, so that matters could be put in hand.⁵⁴

The proposals, which will be considered in more detail later, provided for the Resident-General to organize the Federation and be the chief British officer in it under the Governor of the Straits Settlements. It was justified on the grounds that it financed Pahang and provided for a uniform administration.⁵⁵ A review of the comments of the Colonial Office officials on this crucial dispatch reveals that Lucas was at pains to ensure that the opposition within the Colonial Office was limited, and that the final memorandum submitted for Chamberlain's approval left no doubt that

Chamberlain would be obliged to agree. Lucas commented predictably:

As to the person selected, I do not think there can be any reasonable doubt that Mr Swettenham is far the best man to send. All the Sultans, including I believe the Sultan of Pahang, like him, and no-one will be inclined to dispute that he stands far ahead of any other officer in the Peninsula as to dealing with and administering Malays ... it need not follow, though it would be a natural consequence, that he should be resident general; but he is in bad health, and I should doubt whether if appointed to the office, he would hold it for long.

He also referred to the Swettenham-Maxwell rivalry: 'It has been necessary before, in connexion with these papers, to allow for the personal element, the rivalry between the two best officers in the Peninsula.'⁵⁶

Fairfield approved, though he could not resist a parthian shot: 'A federation will supply a decent means of financing the permanently bankrupt state of Pahang, which is one advantage; but I suppose all the numerous advocates of the measure on the spot will take occasion to increase their own salaries.'⁵⁷ The whole plan for Federation was approved in London by a cable signed by Ripon and dispatched on 6 June 1895.⁵⁸

As a result of the cable, Swettenham received his instructions to proceed on 15 June 1895. These requested him, 'if it be possible, with the full consent and approval of the different rulers, to constitute a federation of these states, while preserving intact the privileges they possess, including the right of each state to pass its own laws' Swettenham was to be responsible for 'a most careful' translation of the document of Federation into Malay: 'a task which I feel that I can with perfect safety commit to your care in the full certainty that all ambiguities or doubtful renderings of the English text which may give rise to future difficulty will be by you avoided.' Memories of inaccuracies in the translation of the Pangkor Engagement remained.⁵⁹

Swettenham headed first for the Sultan of Perak: the ruler of the senior Residency, and by far the most prosperous. His support was crucial if the others were to sign. The mutual backscratching of earlier years, which had so irritated Fairfield, was not in vain. The Sultan signed at once. However, many years later, an interesting light was thrown on this episode by E.W. Birch, writing to Taylor on Federation: '... the Sultan of Perak [in] an interview of half an hour ... would tell you what had been said to him when he was asked to sign the agreement (when everything depended upon his signature,) and how, in his opinion, what was then laid down, has been altered.'⁶⁰ Birch refused to disclose any further details.

Swettenham then proceeded to Singapore and, collecting Hugh Clifford en route, made his way up the east coast to Pekan. The going was less easy here and the Sultan of Pahang took four hours to sign and return the document. Thereafter there was no trouble with his old friend the Sultan of Selangor, or the chiefs of Negeri Sembilan.⁶¹ That they signed so quickly, Swettenham indicated, was evidence of their confidence in British officers. He recollected the problems of Pangkor, almost quarter of a century before: 'The cheerful readiness with which they have in this instance accepted Your Excellency's advice is as remarkable as the ease and rapidity with which it is now possible to travel in the Malay States and obtain interviews with all their Chiefs.'⁶²

Swettenham never expanded on this account of what in retrospect must have seemed to him almost his finest hour. Mitchell reported back to London, acknowledging Swettenham's 'valuable service.' He attributed the rapidity with which Swettenham got the approvals of the rulers 'entirely to his great influence with the Malay Chiefs of the Peninsula.'⁶³ That we may also endorse: but it should not be forgotten that Swettenham's future career depended on the success or otherwise of this mission: he knew more about the weak spots in the characters of the rulers involved than any other European. It would be surprising indeed if he did not, on this occasion at least, use every device at his disposal to ensure the outcome he desired. It was perhaps a recollection of such strong-arm tactics which prevented his writing in more detail on the subject.

Strangely, in view of the importance of Swettenham's mission, Mitchell took the opportunity of going on six weeks' leave in Java. In his absence, the Officer Administering Government was none other than Swettenham's elder brother, J.A. Swettenham, the newly appointed Colonial Secretary. On completion of his successful mission, Swettenham returned briefly to Perak, for a round of farewell parties, leaving for Singapore on 21 September. A salute of thirteen guns was fired as he left the Residency and several hundred people saw him off from the railway station.⁶⁴

Mitchell was however back from leave by 23 September 1895, when Swettenham reached Singapore. There he spent a night with his brother before leaving the following day on a long and well deserved leave in UK.⁶⁵ Mitchell may also have heaved a sigh of relief, at the departure, if only temporarily, of his forceful subordinate, always so ready to take up the cudgels on remuneration. *Straits Produce* carried the following:

His Excellency's Exceedingly Bitter Cry

Compensation is vexation

Their pensions twice as bad.

The Malay States — they agitates

But S-t-m drives me mad.⁶⁶

Back in the UK Joseph Chamberlain consulted Sir Andrew Clarke about the implications of the sultans' consents. Clarke, taking a flippant view, 'rolled with laughter,' made derogatory remarks about the Sultans and concluded: 'But for the life of me I cannot see that there is any ground for questioning the consents given in this case. The Sultan Idris of Perak is a warm friend of Mr F.A. Swettenham, our negotiator, who has procured many favours for him, such as an increase of Civil list, a new palace and a house full of furniture from Maples.'⁶⁷ The final approval of Swettenham as the first Resident-General came while Swettenham was on leave, as a result of strong support from Mitchell:

He is head and shoulders above any other man in the Peninsula in knowledge of the Malays and Chinese, in energy and resource When one gets to know him well one learns that his sarcastic and sneering method of talking is merely superficial and that underneath it there is a good heart and a generous, justice-loving disposition. His chief fault is a tendency to extravagant expenditure I have however not the slightest doubt that he is the ablest and best man at your disposal for the post, if indeed he be not the only one fit for it.⁶⁸

While in UK Swettenham received notification from No. 10 Downing Street that Chamberlain had appointed him to be the first Resident-General. His ambition had been realized thanks in no small part to Lucas' assiduous lobbying.⁶⁹

There will be opportunity enough in the following chapters to consider the implications of Federation for all concerned and how it worked in practice. Meantime, Swettenham's leave coincided with the hunting season, and he lost no time in making the best use of it, both to hunt, and to cultivate influential acquaintances.⁷⁰

NOTES

1. See Chapter 15
2. See Chapter 18.
3. CO 273/121:320 Gov. to CO, 280 of 4 July 1883, *British Malaya*, p. 338.
4. CO 273/101:364-87 Robinson to CO, 19 March 1879, *PGSC*, 9 July 1889 discussing an article in the *Whitehall Review*, which suggested the possibility of annexation, and *STD*, 11 November 1889.
5. SSF 149/88.
6. HC 5884:50 PAR 1888 dd. 2 April 1889.
7. CO 273/172:446 ff. Gov. to CO, 103 of 9 March 1891. Full details were given in *STD* of 16 and 30 January 1891.
8. HC 6576:25 PAR 1890 dd. 5 May 1891.

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9. *STD*, 2 November 1891.
10. *STD*, 7 December 1891, quoting the *Calcutta Statesman*.
11. Birch, 1920, unpublished autobiography. Rhodes House Library MSS 1 d Ocn 242/3. Mitchell died in 1899, not 1900.
12. SP14.
13. The latter subsequently appeared in substantially the same form as Appendix 1 in later editions of *British Malaya*. See Chapter 37 below.
14. SP14.
15. *Ibid*.
16. *Footprints*, pp. 104-5.
17. CO 273/183:461 Smith to SS, 455 of 29 November 1892.
18. CO 273/185:813 ff. Swettenham to CO, March 1892.
19. CO 273/183:491 ff. Gov. to CO, 455 of 29 November 1892 enclosing Colonial Secretary to Smith, 19 May 1893.
20. *Ibid*.
21. CO 273/187:501 ff. Smith to CO, Confidential of 29 May 1893.
22. *Ibid*. Smith's letter to which Lucas refers is apparently no longer extant. It was perhaps a private communication.
23. CO 273/188:304-42 Gov. to CO, Confidential of 30 June 1893.
24. *Ibid*. Maxwell was of course Colonial Secretary.
25. *Ibid*.
26. *Ibid*.
27. *Ibid*.
28. *STD*, 2 October 1893. 'More About Perak.'
29. He had made his first tentative suggestion on these lines in his talk to the Royal Colonial Institute in November 1891. See Kratoska, (ed.), 1983, op. cit., p.154.
30. CO 273/188:321-3 Minutes dd 11 December 1893 on Maxwell's proposal of 14 November 1893.
31. CO 273/188:327-332 Memorandum on Federation initialled by Lucas.
32. CO 273/189:327 ff. Maxwell to CO, 289 of 4 September 1893.
33. CO 273/194:348-58 Mitchell to CO, 79 of 22 March 1894.
34. *Footprints*, p. 106 and *MM*, 16 January 1920.
35. CO 273/198:216 ff. Minute by Fairfield dd. 16 November 1894 on Mitchell to Ripon, Confidential, 12 October 1894. Spenlow (Fairfield spelt it incorrectly) and Jorkins were a firm of proctors in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, Chapter 23. Jorkins, a mild, unassuming man is attributed by Spenlow as being difficult and uncompromising, thus giving Spenlow grounds for refusing inconvenient requests.
36. Monthly report from Kinta, March 1890, *PGG*, 1890, p. 247. *Birch Journals*, p. 327, n.2 reports that by 1900 the Sultan's mines in Kampar earned him \$68,768.31.
37. CO 273/198:311 ff. Governor to CO, 366 of 6 November 1894.
38. See Chapter 24.
39. *SFP*, 19 September 1893.
40. The late T.B. Barlow, pers. comm.
41. CO 273/198:341 ff. Minutes on Mitchell to CO, 372 of 6 November 1894 discussing J.A. Swettenham's appointment.

One High Officer

42. *STD*, 18 August 1893.
43. *PGSC*, 5 October 1893.
44. CO 273/198:84 ff. Governor to CO, Confidential of 12 October 1894.
45. CO 273/202:299 ff. Mitchell to CO, Confidential of 8 February 1895.
46. *Ibid*.
47. CO 273/211:260 Maxwell to CO, 20 March 1895. In his talk to the Royal Colonial Institute he said 'Confederation may be a feasible scheme some day.' See Kratoska (ed.), 1983, op. cit., p. 154.
48. *The People and Politics of the Far East* by Henry Norman, published by T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1895, pp. 56-57, 61-62.
49. *Ibid*, p. 61.
50. *Ibid*, p. 65. See also p. 67.
51. See also Chapter 40.
52. J.D. Ross, *The Capital of a Little Empire: a Descriptive Study of a British Crown Colony in the Far East*. Kelly and Walsh, Singapore, 1898.
53. *PGSC*, 18 and 25 April 1895.
54. CO 273/203:282 ff. Mitchell to CO, Confidential 1 May 1895. Filed with this dispatch are other important letters on Federation up to December 1895.
55. *Ibid*.
56. *Ibid*. Lucas' comments dd. 30 May.
57. *Ibid*. Fairfield's comments, 30 May 1895 up to 286. The complications arising from the death of the Sultan of Johore in London on 4 June 1895, and Swettenham's role in the subsequent scheming are considered in Chapter 40.
58. CO 273/203:282 Mitchell to CO, Confidential of 1 May 1895.
59. CO 273/203:331-3 Draft letter of instruction from the Governor to Swettenham, enclosed with Mitchell to CO, Confidential of 1 May 1895.
60. CO 273/320:94 ff. Birch to Taylor of 27 December 1905, enclosed with SSD, Confidential of 10 February 1906.
61. See CO 273/204:446 ff. for Swettenham's account of his Pahang visit, and Keyser's report in *PGSC* of 17 September 1895 of Swettenham's visit to Jelebu.
62. CO 273/205:371 Mitchell to CO, Confidential of 7 August 1895, enclosing Swettenham to Mitchell of 28 July 1895.
63. *Ibid*.
64. *PGSC*, 24 September 1895.
65. *STD*, 23 and 24 September 1895 and *PGG*, 23 September 1895, p. 573.
66. *Str. P.*, No. 5, April 1895, p. 20.
67. CO 273/203:287 ff. Fairfield, relating Chamberlain's account of his discussion with Clarke on Mitchell to CO, Confidential of 1 May 1895.
68. Mitchell to Chamberlain, private, 12 November 1895. CP 9/6.
69. CO 273/203:354-6 Draft letter of appointment dd. 27 December 1895, filed with Mitchell to CO, Confidential of 1 May 1895.
70. *Footprints*, pp. 109-10.

Resident-General

Swettenham departed on leave on 24 September 1895, travelling via Marseilles.¹ There is little trace of him on leave until the end of 1895, although for part of the time he was apparently again laid up by ill health.

The year was important for the publication in July of *Malay Sketches*, by John Lane. It was the first of several books directed at a wide British audience keen to hear of the romance and mysticism of the East, and it can be argued that it was the most successful. As noted in earlier chapters, Swettenham used episodes from his own experience during the early days of his service in Malaya as the basis for short vignettes, many of which even now, if the colonial bias is discounted, have a certain dated charm. The book was widely and favourably if not enthusiastically reviewed in the British press: it was convenient that a number of the reviewers saw fit to mention the author as the prime candidate for the new post of Resident-General.² The book was published, a trifle arrogantly in Malay royal yellow binding: '[It] gives the buyer jaundice to look at, but pleasure to read.' The assumption of Malay royal status in the colour of the binding was missed by the reviewers.³

However once plans for Federation crystallized at the end of the year, Swettenham emerged from the shadows conducting a spirited public relations campaign on his own behalf with a series of articles in the press. Starting at the top end of the market, *Blackwood's Magazine* ran an article written partly by him on 'England France and Siam.'⁴ This was followed by a fairly detailed write-up in the *Sketch* in April, accompanied by a photograph by Mayall & Co. of Piccadilly of a dapper Mr Swettenham in tail-coat and top-hat, and another of his pet tiger-cub. Obviously pleased with the reception accorded to his *Malay Sketches*, Swettenham showed the reporter a copy of the book bound between embossed silver plates of Malay workmanship, 200-300 years old. The plates were the ends of a traditional Malay pillow, between which many weird tales must have been enacted: a binding he considered not inappropriate for the book. Interestingly, he claimed in the

interview, conducted at the Sports Club, to be prouder of his *Malay Dictionary* on which he was working with Clifford.

After discussing Malay belief in the power of the kris, he accompanied the reporter to Tiffany's to show him the diamonds which he was having mounted for the Sultan of Perak. These, he said, were designed by the Sultan's wife, 'an exquisite testimony to that lady's skill as a decorative artist.'⁵ Additionally *The Review of Reviews* published a photograph by Swettenham in June 1896, while in July a photograph of him bending over his pet tiger-cub appeared in the same paper. Other photographs by Swettenham subsequently appeared in the *Sketch* of 31 August 1898.⁶ Perhaps most important and prestigious of all Swettenham's publicity ventures in this period was the talk which he gave to the Royal Colonial Institute on 31 March 1896, under the chairmanship of Sir Cecil Smith. Favourable remarks were made after the talk by Sir Hugh Low, Lord Sudeley and others connected with the Peninsula. The text formed a refinement of Swettenham's earlier writings, and much of what he said was elaborated more fully in his *British Malaya*, published a decade later.⁷

From the end of 1895, arrangements for the future Federation and discussions with the Colonial Office together with further requests for increments in his salary absorbed his time. When in London he stayed at the Sports Club, St James's Square, and for much of the remainder of the time, either with his brother William at Hurworth on Tees, or hunting from Whilton Lodge, near Rugby. He was regularly in touch with the Colonial Office.⁸

Swettenham's representations on his salary followed a familiar pattern. Writing on 1 December 1895, before he had been officially appointed, he noted that he had been given to understand the offer would be made, and appealed for a generous salary. In this he was supported by Lucas.⁹ Just over a month later, in a further letter, the atmosphere had noticeably soured. The salary offered, \$12,600 a year, was entirely inadequate, and he added that his health after twenty-five years in a trying tropical climate would shortly force him to take early retirement. The tenor of this letter came close to suggesting that if the Colonial Office were not more generous, he would indeed retire. On this occasion even Lucas was unsympathetic, writing to Mitchell that no increment would be given. Fairfield added, with satisfaction, 'Yes, he is very grasping.'¹⁰ The salary problems were apparently resolved by the end of the month, when he wrote again asking that his appointment be gazetted, and that he might be allowed to wear second-class civil service uniform. Furthermore he enquired about the appointments of the heads of various federal departments.¹¹ In fact, he was paid his new salary from 1 January 1896, the date when his appointment

as Resident-General was gazetted, in recognition of the work he had put in on Federation while still on leave.¹² However lest the Colonial Office should not take seriously his protestations of ill health, he produced a medical certificate earlier in the month, confirming that he was not to spend further long periods in the tropics, and reminding the Colonial Office that on his last visit he had suffered from severe double pneumonia and constant catarrh. The Colonial Office responded with the suggestion that he take short leave in two years' time.¹³

Swettenham's appointment as Resident-General was effectively beyond doubt, although it was not confirmed until April 1896. In June the appointment was backdated to 1 January 1896, on the suggestion of Mitchell.¹⁴ Swettenham spent much of the remainder of his leave in correspondence with the Colonial Office on his future plans and dispositions. There was more than a touch of obsequiousness in his opening communication: 'I trust I may be permitted to say that the instructions to show consideration to the Native Rulers and to extend the roads and railways on a uniform system appeal in a special degree to my own sympathies.' Indeed, he went on to claim that he had already stood up on occasion for the rulers against anti-Malay legislation.¹⁵

By this time there had been changes in the British government, and towards the end of 1895 Joseph Chamberlain had taken over from Ripon as Secretary of State for the Colonies. Swettenham and Chamberlain had much in common in outlook and attitude including a shared enthusiasm for the development of roads and railways. Swettenham, with the assistance of Lucas, was to form a close working relationship with him: one which stood him in good stead after his retirement. Indeed, so strong was Chamberlain's support of Swettenham's policies that when it appeared possible in 1898 that Swettenham might retire on grounds of ill health, Chamberlain envisaged the possibility of his being employed at a senior level in the Colonial Department.¹⁶

A number of Federal positions needed to be filled. While there was of course a corps of well-trying officers in Selangor and Perak, whom Swettenham knew well, the legal posts posed problems. Swettenham's old colleague, Conway Belfield was one of the first to apply for the job of Legal Adviser, an application supported by Swettenham, still on leave, in March 1896.¹⁷ He did not however get the job, which went to Kershaw.¹⁸ He had more success however with the appointment of a Judicial Commissioner in the form of Lionel Jackson, made with the support of Smith. Swettenham had extensive Jackson relations on his father's side of the family, and a family connection seems probable, more particularly because his brother James Swettenham also supported

the proposal: a rare example of unanimity between the two men.¹⁹ Jackson appears to have been a somewhat naïve Chancery barrister.²⁰ By the end of February 1896, Swettenham already had a clear idea of the individuals he wanted to assist him at Federal level: Rodger to be Commissioner of Lands, Walker as head of the reorganized Perak Sikhs, Collinge as Inspector of Schools, and Caulfeild as Chief Engineer.²¹ Caulfeild was eventually promoted to head the Federal Public Works Department, an appointment facilitated by the prospect, where Swettenham was concerned, of the vivacious Helen in close attendance. Spooner was promoted to run the railways.²²

The key position of Commissioner of the FMS Police was not filled till Swettenham was back in Kuala Lumpur, when Syers was not unnaturally appointed.²³ He was first to visit Perak to resolve certain unspecified problems with the Perak Sikhs during Walker's absence. Reading between the lines, it is clear that Walker's command posed difficulties. The problem of what to do with Walker was resolved by making him Inspector of Prisons.²⁴

On his personal staff, Swettenham had as his official secretary A.G. Butler, who had served under him in Perak.²⁵ During 1898, Sir James Swettenham on two occasions supported his younger brother's claims that the Resident-General's Office was overworked. In September of that year he requested an assistant secretary, and, having failed in this bid, by November in the same year, he was endorsing a request that Butler's salary should be raised.²⁶ Butler continued to serve as Swettenham's official secretary till early 1900, when he was posted to Pahang and was succeeded by D.H. Wise.²⁷ In May 1897, Oliver Marks was made assistant secretary to the government,²⁸ being promoted to the more personal position as Swettenham's Assistant Secretary towards the end of 1898.²⁹ He became secretary to the High Commissioner in August 1903.³⁰ Amongst the personal staff, his brother Sir James Swettenham had as ADC Lieutenant T.D. Jackson, possibly yet another of the many Swettenham relatives offered jobs at this time.³¹ Jackson was replaced by G.A. Bosanquet, in early 1900.³² Bosanquet continued to serve Sir Frank Swettenham as private secretary when the latter took over from his elder brother in Singapore in 1901. 'A very nice little secretary' was Gertrude Bell's description of him, when she visited in 1903.³³ At the same time Swettenham also took over from his brother Captain F.D. Barry of the Fife Artillery, as ADC.³⁴ Of Barry, Gertrude Bell recorded, 'But he gets a little lost when the talk wanders into book land, which it does often.'³⁵ Barry and Bosanquet, served Swettenham till he left on his final leave in October 1903.³⁶

His confidential Chief Clerk was an Eurasian called G.E. Copley, who had served in Perak since 1883, and as chief clerk to the Resident since 1889. He would have known more about the Resident-General than most, and must have been an extremely discreet man. He was also allotted two mounted orderlies from the Perak Sikhs.³⁷

Having established that his new position as Resident-General entitled him to full second-class civil service uniform, Swettenham set off for Singapore, fully equipped, via Marseille. His arrival in Singapore on 3 June 1896 was followed by a swift, but brief visit to Selangor, before a rather longer visit to Perak.³⁸ There was a return visit to Singapore in mid-June, which must have coincided with the arrival of Spence-Moss there, on his way to take up in Bangkok a new job under a new name, Moss-Blundell. With Maxwell safely out of the way, and the furore over land speculation passed, there were doubtless some loose ends in the two men's financial transactions to be tidied up.³⁹ The final unravelling of Spence-Moss' property speculations was to take a further seven years, concluded significantly only days before Swettenham finally left, when problems over land owned by him in the Pudu Road area of Kuala Lumpur were resolved.⁴⁰ In the meantime the *Perak Pioneer* complained that Swettenham had not been knighted in the Queen's Birthday Honours that year. It hoped he would receive such an award when the FMS were officially inaugurated.⁴¹

Practical arrangements needed attention. The Resident-General's office in Kuala Lumpur was for the moment to be a modest building near the new Rest House, formerly used as the Rajah's School earlier in the decade. After purchase by the government it was used as quarters for a clerk. It was conveniently and centrally situated near the northern end of Jalan Raja.⁴² The Residency was not available for his use, so it was agreed that he should temporarily use the Government Secretary's house. It later came to be known as Old Carcosa.⁴³ This stood in the Lake Gardens, approximately on the site of the present War Memorial. Initially conditions were rough. The whole place was drenched every time it rained. But ultimately he was not to live in discomfort: \$8,000 was sanctioned for furniture. Nevertheless, it was cramped and unsuitable for entertaining: when Swettenham gave a dance there on 5 November 1896, supper had to be served in two shifts. Deluxe travel was now the norm: the Resident-General and his retinue were to be provided with a new private railway carriage.⁴⁴

By the end of June 1896 the site for the new house for the Resident-General had already been chosen, to the west of the Lake Gardens. A nicely graded gravel road, to give access to the site of what was to be Carcosa was already under construction.

Swettenham had lost no time in making his plans, and it seems likely that he had already given thought to the site of his official residence while still on leave.

The history of the site of Carcosa is shrouded in mystery. The land appears to have been owned initially by F.G. West, Manager of the Straits Trading Company and a leading figure in Kuala Lumpur expatriate society. It is unclear how he acquired it, but he put it up for auction in September 1893. Again, it is not clear whether it was purchased by the government at that stage, or passed through the hands of a third party before acquisition by the government no more than three years later.⁴⁵ Originally it was planned that the house should be lit by electricity, derived from water flowing through the lake in the Lake Gardens. This supply would also be sufficient for the Lake Club, with which the electricity supply would be shared.⁴⁶ Later the idea was dropped, chiefly on the insistence of Venning, who did not wish the attractive waterfall at the end of Sydney Lake to be replaced by a pipe and turbine. Moreover the town Sanitary Board was at that moment considering a much larger report commissioned through the Crown Agents to light the whole city.⁴⁷

A further report at the end of 1897 on the prospects for electricity at Carcosa provoked the fury of A.S. Baxendale, the head of the Telegraphs Department,⁴⁸ who greatly resented losing his position as local expert on electrical matters. Installations were fitted in Carcosa, but no regular electricity supply was possible until Kuala Lumpur's own electricity supply became available.⁴⁹ Meantime during his visits to Perak, Swettenham was to use as his residence, The Cottage, in the hills above Taiping when not staying in the Rajah's Rest House also in Taiping where Sultan Idris stayed, and which also served as his office.⁵⁰

Swettenham's constant insistence on his poor health, both at this time and later, in the face of his subsequent extreme longevity suggests that he was conscious that under certain circumstances a swift retirement on the grounds of ill health would be imperative. It is unclear what circumstances Swettenham may have had in mind, which could have dictated such a precipitate course of action. There was, one may presume, the continuing threat of embarrassment from Mrs Swettenham, for subsequent events were to show that she was living a promiscuous life in London, on a knife edge between sanity and insanity.

There may also have been continuing trouble and risks of embarrassing disclosures from Walter McKnight Young, for shortly after Swettenham's return to the Straits, Young departed on three months' leave to UK.⁵¹ There was more to this than met the eye, for Young was by this stage embroiled in an unseemly row with his superiors in the Perak State Government. The details, which in

themselves were of little significance, involved allegations that Young's signature had been forged by others on certain documents, allegations of perjury during an official examination, and that Young had misused his position in government to benefit a lawyer friend of his in Penang.⁵² The Acting Resident of Perak at the time, Conway Belfield, took the bleakest possible view of the position. Rather than recommending Young's dismissal, which would surely have been justified if Young had been found to have committed perjury under official examination, he took the unusual step of arranging that Mitchell should demote Young and reduce his salary. This must have caused maximum embarrassment to Young. He could not afford to survive without his government job, and was therefore unable to resign voluntarily. Had he been dismissed of course, he would have had nothing to lose by disclosing whatever scandal he had against Swettenham. On the facts of the case, Young was either guilty of serious offences, which would have given more than adequate grounds for dismissal, or he was guilty of nothing more than minor misdemeanours, which scarcely provided grounds for anything more than a reprimand. The fact that the Perak authorities, at Swettenham's prompting, took the most vindictive course open to them reveals an unpleasant trait in Swettenham's character. It also shows how deeply Swettenham loathed Young, strongly corroborating the proposal that Young had been, and almost certainly still was blackmailing Swettenham.⁵³

Eventually a solution was found: Young was to spend the next two and a half years in London reading law, on half pay from the Perak government. This would certainly not have sufficed to keep him in London and the suspicion must remain that Swettenham was blackmailed to pay the balance of Young's expenses, while encouraging the Perak government to continue to provide the modest financial support of half pay which he himself would otherwise have had to offer. From Swettenham's point of view, it ensured that Young was kept occupied on a legal training out of Malaya, paid for partly by the Perak government. It was the best Swettenham could do to prevent further blackmail or exposure.⁵⁴ In view of Smith's subsequent hostility to Swettenham, it may be noted that at this time his daughter, Mrs Brownrigg and her husband visited Teluk Anson, and were perhaps regaled with the full story of the row between Swettenham and McKnight Young.⁵⁵

Nor were Young's years in London trouble-free. In early 1897 the pressure of work for his examinations, and perhaps fears for his long-term livelihood, while Swettenham was still Resident-General, drove him to drink. Dr Gage Brown, the Colonial Office doctor who examined him, reported that he was suffering from liver problems and recommended further leave. These, together with his

other worries provoked something close to a nervous breakdown. Gage Brown indicated informally to the Colonial Office that he considered Young had become mentally incapable of further work as a result of his illness. Lucas who minuted on this medical report, enthusiastically supported Gage Brown, and clearly knew the full story.⁵⁶ By May 1897 Young was writing to the Colonial Office a craven letter begging for reinstatement. He concluded by pointing out that his health was poor, and asked the Resident-General to show some leniency towards him. The Colonial Office referred the matter to Mitchell, and the reply was not recorded.⁵⁷ Later in the year, Dr Manson, also acting for the Colonial Office, examined Young. He concluded that though Young was now physically fit, he was suffering from low morale. When the Colonial Office pressed him to certify that Young was unfit for further work, in accordance with the Perak Pension Law, he declined, although he did produce a letter from Young's private doctor confirming that Young was not fit to return to a tropical climate. Once again, the Colonial Office reluctantly agreed to a further four months' leave, on half pay.⁵⁸ By mid-November 1897 Swettenham was back in England on leave. It is possible that the two men had a painful confrontation.

Yet Young continued to be a thorn in the side of the government. By early 1898 Sir James Swettenham was involved: Young must either return to Perak or resign. Lucas enquired whether a loophole could not be found to pension him off.⁵⁹ This brought matters to a head. Manson did not feel that further leave would be of value: 'It is Mr Young's mind and nerves, not his physical condition that is at fault.' He was therefore instructed to return to Perak the following month.⁶⁰ The crisis was by now partially resolved, for Young had managed to pass his law exams. He had resigned on 15 February 1898, on grounds of ill health. The Colonial Office however informed him that if he were to retire, he would lose his pension. This caused him to withdraw his notice, for at the end of April he requested yet another twenty-seven days unpaid leave so that he might be called to the Bar. Thereafter he promised to return to Perak. Leave was thus granted.⁶¹

By August 1898, Young was back in Malaya, and reported about to leave government service. He was described as knowing almost all the native languages, an advantage for a barrister. However he still delayed his final resignation, partly perhaps because he anticipated, correctly, that steps might be taken to prevent him being admitted to the Penang Bar. There was indeed trouble from the Bar Council, which turned down his application. The matter went to court, where the judge ruled that the Bar Council's objection was frivolous: Young could be admitted after

two months. Again, it seems possible that Swettenham had a hand in hindering Young, who returned in dudgeon to Teluk Anson. The *Perak Pioneer* may have been referring to him when it recorded that someone in that town was helping the petition writers, and causing much trouble. Thus it was not till early 1899 that Young finally severed his connection with the Perak government, losing his pension rights in the process. He left for Penang to set up as a lawyer, no doubt at the rougher end of the professional spectrum.⁶²

Further circumstantial evidence suggests that Swettenham was suffering from undisclosed financial obligations, lending weight to the theory of blackmail. At this time Swettenham substantially reduced his racing commitments.⁶³ It was a vindictive and spiteful story. Yet Swettenham was at the same time keeping his own options open. He had made play with his own alleged ill-health in 1896. He did so again when he was back in UK in early 1898. He advised the Colonial Office that he was not to have an (unspecified) operation, that he would return to Malaya, but that if his health were to break down, rather than retire early, he would request a posting to a dry climate. Could a post be found for him in Lord Cromer's administration in Egypt? The Colonial Office commented that he was so senior that Chamberlain would have to raise the matter with Lord Salisbury. Lucas chimed in 'He has shown high administrative capacity ... [I] would be glad if a special note could be made of his wishes on the grounds of his proved capacity for administering among Eastern races.' Cromer when consulted replied that he had no freedom to make such senior appointments. Evidently if health, marital exigencies or possibly blackmail, made an escape necessary the ground had been prepared.⁶⁴

NOTES

1. *STD*, 24 September 1895. He was wrong, when he asserted in *Footprints*, p. 109 that he was on that occasion accompanied by Alang, the son of the Sultan of Perak. This occurred on his next visit to UK in 1897. See *PP*, 29 September 1897 and Chapter 36.
2. The reviews, carefully retained by Swettenham are to be found in Stoodley Papers, pp. 347-61.
3. *SFP*, 14 August 1895, and Stoodley Papers, p. 354.
4. *Blackwood's Magazine*, 159:461-70, March 1896. See Chapter 38. See also *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900*, W.E. Houghton (ed.), vol. 1, for the Swettenham attribution.
5. *The Sketch*, 22 April 1896. Their arrival was reported in *SFPMA*, 18 June 1896. The writer hoped they would not frighten the horses, as Idris' father-in-law, Yusof's diamonds had done, years back in Singapore.
6. In an illustrated article on elephants.
7. Kratoska (ed.), 1983, op. cit., pp. 170-211. See also Chapter 48.

8. See CO 273/211:488 ff. on railways, CO 273/211:491 ff. on the salary of the Resident General, CO 273/222:482 on the return of ex-Sultan Abdullah of Perak, CO 273/223:299 ff. again on salary, CO 273/223:313 on the appointment of a judicial commissioner, CO 273/223:323 on his own appointment, CO 273/223:31 on railways, CO 273/223:351 on Federation, CO 273/223:377 on his health.
9. CO 273/211:491 ff. Swettenham to CO, 1 December 1895.
10. CO 273/223:299 ff. Swettenham to CO, 11 January 1896.
11. CO 273/223:323 ff. Swettenham to CO, 31 January 1896.
12. CO 273/223:361 ff. Swettenham to CO, 12 April 1896, and CO 273/215:16 Mitchell to CO, 2 June 1896.
13. CO 273/223:377 ff. Swettenham to CO, 2 April 1896.
14. CO 273/215:16 Mitchell to CO, 242 of 2 June 1896.
15. CO 273/223:313 Swettenham to CO, 12 January 1896.
16. CO 273/245:459 Lucas' comments on Swettenham to CO of 16 February 1898.
17. CO 426/12:429 and CO 273/223:367 Swettenham to CO, 23 March 1896.
18. CO 273/223:313 ff. Swettenham to CO, 12 January 1896.
19. Ibid. CO, 273/241:19 Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, 130 of 2 September 1898, and SSF 674/96.
20. Gullick, 1992a, op. cit., p. 83, fn.136, and Winstedt, 1969, op. cit., p. 44.
21. CO 273/223:303 ff. Swettenham to CO, 31 January 1896, CO 273/223:351 Swettenham to CO, 23 February 1896 and CO 273/223:368 Swettenham to CO, 28 March 1896.
22. CO 273/261:363 Swettenham to CO, Confidential of 19 April 1900 and CO 273/282:264 Letter of approval, 28 February 1901.
23. CO 426/12:40 Letter dated 15 July 1896.
24. SSF 4456/96 with Swettenham's letter appointing Syers on 19 August 1896, and SSF 4945/96. See also *SFP*, 27 July 1896, and P. Morrah, 1968, 'The History of the Malayan Police,' *JMBRAS*, 36(2).
25. CO 273/228:459 Mitchell to CO, 57 of 10 April 1897, and *PGSC*, 3 August 1896. See also SSF 4511/96.
26. CO 273/241:138 Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, 144 of 16 September 1898. CO 273/241:416 Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, 177 of 11 November 1898.
27. CO 273/260:207 Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, Confidential of 20 January 1900, and CO 273/260:267 Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, Confidential of 25 January 1900. CO 273/261:135 Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, 140 of 12 April 1900 covers the appointment of D.H. Wise.
28. *PGSC*, 9 July 1897.
29. CO 273/241:447 Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, 184 of 25 November 1898, *STD*, 25 November 1898, *MM*, 23 November 1898.
30. *MM*, 16 July 1903, *PP*, 8 August 1903.
31. See Chapter 37.
32. *STD*, 8 February 1900.
33. Gertrude Bell's diary to her mother, 12 March 1903.
34. CO 426/13:91.
35. Gertrude Bell's diary to her mother, 12 March 1903.
36. *STD*, 21 February 1901. *PGSC*, 16 February 1901.

Governor. While an appeal was possible over the head of the Resident-General to the Governor, this was unthinkable during the time Swettenham held the post. Moreover Swettenham was to ensure consistency of administration in all the Federal departments which were created.

Clause 4 of the Treaty of Federation described the Resident General as 'agent and representative of HMG ...' To those untutored in the practice of the Residential system, this implied no executive powers. Yet the reality was that the Resident-General was to act as Chief Executive Officer, while the State Councils were for the moment to continue as legislative and advisory bodies, and each state was to handle its own finances, contributing their share of the Federal charges. Mitchell, as much as Swettenham, was keen that there should be a major annual consultation, opened by the Governor and supervised by the Resident-General:

The meeting of the Federal Council should be attended with as much pomp and circumstance as possible. It should draw up at the meeting its own rules for the conduct of business, and no effort should be spared to show the Malay Rulers that the Federal bond would not have the effect of lowering the dignity and prestige which now attaches to each Sultan and Chief.⁴

At the back of Mitchell's mind at least lay the idea of gradually moving towards a Federal Council with more than mere advisory powers.⁵ Swettenham, who was never enthusiastic about any type of formal supervision was anxious to retain his independent position as Resident-General, and therefore less keen on a Federal Council. It was an attitude which he rapidly abandoned once he reached Singapore as High Commissioner.⁶ Even the durbar raised many more problems than either Swettenham or Mitchell had anticipated. Swettenham's original plan was that a durbar should be held to inaugurate Federation on 1 July 1896.⁷ That the matter was already under discussion well before Swettenham's return from leave indicates that he must have been in unofficial correspondence from UK probably with Rodger, fairly soon after the new year. He hoped it would be attended by the rulers of all the Federated Malay States, and had already requested Rodger to start constructing quarters for the visitors.⁸ The first public intimation of these plans was carried in the newspapers.⁹ Even by then, the date had been deferred to August. There were to be considerable problems. On the surface, all was suave *bonhomie*: when Swettenham arrived by train at Taiping on his return from leave on 9 June 1896, the full Malay hierarchy as well as the leading Europeans were lined up to greet him. On behalf of the Malays, Dato Seri Adika Raja read an effusive welcoming address in Malay:

'You have gained in a degree that is known by none better than by ourselves, the esteem, the confidence and the affection of the Malays of these states.'¹⁰ Yet this was no more than an outward show. In negotiations, Sultan Idris evidently proved himself tough, for the date was deferred again to September a mere four days later.¹¹ The Sultan was rapidly establishing his reputation which later earned him the description, 'a rather troublesome person.'¹²

Discussions with the troublesome Idris no doubt accounted in part for Swettenham's frequent visits to Perak during August, with Idris arguing hard that as the senior state it was essential that the first durbar be held in his capital of Kuala Kangsar, despite the inconvenience which this would cause to the nonagenarian Sultan Abdul Samad. Notwithstanding signs of trouble, Rodger pressed ahead with the arrangements in Kuala Lumpur. A special committee was appointed, and it was noted that the Resident-General wished to have a personal hand in the arrangements.¹³ Initially Swettenham seems to have held his ground, even when Idris threatened not to attend if it was held in Kuala Lumpur, giving the somewhat flimsy excuse of his wife's health.¹⁴ The *Perak Pioneer* however maintained the durbar would be held in Perak, and accurately reflected Idris' views in its comment: 'The Premier State has much cause to grumble at the innumerable slights which Confederation has thrust on it.'¹⁵

By 25 August Swettenham conceded defeat, thus giving to Idris the first round in a series of skirmishes which were to last till Swettenham's premature retirement in 1903.¹⁶ Swettenham continued to shelter behind the excuse of the illness of Idris' wife. But few can have been deceived, and the deferment to 1897 was announced in the press a few days later, with the *Perak Pioneer* giving the true reason.¹⁷ Some \$6,500 had been spent on these abortive arrangements in Kuala Lumpur, and after deliberation it was decided that the buildings should be used to accommodate the Manila bandsmen.¹⁸ In his annual report, Swettenham referred to 'most cordial' relations between himself and the Sultan, and suavely attributed his failure to hold the durbar in 1896 to a shortage of time in which to make the arrangements. The only suggestion of a disagreement which was allowed to surface was Swettenham's report that the Sultan of Perak would have preferred that the Resident-General's headquarters and those of the Federal government should be in Perak rather than Selangor.¹⁹

Reading between the lines of this first fiasco, it is clear that Idris must have behaved with some truculence in private in his dealings with Swettenham. His ill-temper was no doubt partly occasioned by the first major indication that Federation was to curtail his rights, in direct contravention of the terms of the Pangkor

Engagement. This involved the abolition of the right of appeal from the Perak Courts to the Ruler in Council. It was replaced by a right of appeal from the Perak Magistrates' Courts to the newly created post of FMS Judicial Commissioner. The Sultan, as Raja Idris, had been appointed a 'judge' in Perak by Sultan Abdullah in 1875,²⁰ and had continued actively in that role till his accession as Sultan in 1887.²¹ He was therefore more familiar than most Malays with that aspect of the administration. The row had broken out within days of Swettenham's return from UK. Notice of this change would have been given to Idris in advance, and three days before his visit to Perak, Swettenham had indicated in a letter to Lucas that he expected problems.²² On arrival, Swettenham arranged for a meeting of the State Council to be summoned on 10 June. At this he explained fully to everyone the reasons for the measure. He must have been dismayed by the level of protests from the Council, including the pro-British Seri Adika Raja who 'raised a chorus by remarking that the draft Order appeared to set aside the country and the Sultan.'²³ The Sultan in particular was assured that all death sentences would be referred to him as previously, and his powers of pardon would not be curtailed. Lucas commented smugly, 'Mr Swettenham manages the natives very well.'²⁴ Swettenham got his way on this occasion, but he left Idris in no mood to brook any further slights on his position.²⁵

The opposition of Idris marked the beginning of a gradual process of disenchantment by the Sultan of Perak, followed by the other rulers, with Swettenham's behaviour over Federation. It is a theme which forms a strong undercurrent to the remainder of Swettenham's official career, and almost certainly contributed, together with other factors still to be considered, to his eventual decision to opt for early retirement. His brush with Sultan Idris made Swettenham particularly conscious of the need for caution on all matters concerning the Sultan. Thus in early 1897 there was an exchange of letters between Swettenham and Lucas over the precise phraseology to be used in appointing officers in the FMS. Lucas felt the formula, 'The Sultan with the consent of the Secretary of State, has been pleased' should be used for senior appointments, and, 'The Sultan with the consent of the High Commissioner' for lesser posts. Swettenham argued that to draw attention to the Secretary of State or High Commissioner would be unwise in view of the need to maintain there had been no diminution in the role of the rulers, as promised at the time of Federation.²⁶

Before Swettenham was able to organize the Kuala Kangsar durbar in 1897, there was a public event of some significance in Kuala Lumpur which demanded his attention. This was the

completion and opening of the new government offices facing the Selangor Club, across the Parade Ground. We have considered in Chapter 30 Swettenham's involvement with the site. His low-key reaction to the various planned festivities to celebrate the completion of these prestigious buildings may well indicate his displeasure at the circumstances under which he was obliged to part with the land and conceivably his embarrassment at the whispered comments of those who knew the story.

Detailed plans had apparently been drawn up in 1893, before Treacher succeeded Maxwell as Resident, Selangor. Despite Smith's indication that the cost of the state offices and post office should not exceed \$80,000, an estimate of \$152,000 was passed by Maxwell. This was perhaps another instance of Maxwell rubbing salt into Swettenham's wounds, for the grander the building, the greater would be the volume of the whispered comments on the history of the site. An initial provision of \$76,000 was provided for in the 1894 estimates.²⁷ A design by Norman and Bidwell which was originally Classical Renaissance was modified at the insistence of the State Engineer, C.E. Spooner to incorporate the Moorish facade which the buildings carry today.²⁸

The Governor, Sir Charles Mitchell, was in any case in Selangor on 6 October 1894 to open an extension of the railway to Ulu Selangor, and the opportunity was taken to lay the foundation stone. Swettenham was absent and relieved to miss the occasion: his wife had just returned to Perak after a serious breakdown, and he himself at that time had no official links with Selangor.²⁹

Perhaps the most symbolic feature of the new offices was the fact that they would have a central clock tower. The chimes of the clock would from now on replace the booming of the cannon fired daily at 5:00 p.m. from the Residency: that symbol of Colonial outposts.³⁰ By early 1897 the offices were approaching completion, and the fact received sporadic mentions in the press.³¹ A note of doubt was conveyed by the *Perak Pioneer*, which, having initially reported plans for major festivities, with tableaux vivants on the river, subsequently reported that the Selangor government was cutting down on the proposed festivities, almost certainly at Swettenham's insistence.³²

The Public Works Department gave a dinner for Spooner, the controversial and at times unpopular engineer in charge of the project. The main opening ceremony took place on Saturday 3 April, in the form of an 'At Home' in the new government offices, attended by some 250 guests, including Swettenham. Swettenham in his speech gave credit 'gracefully' — or rather sarcastically to Maxwell, whose idea it was. Spooner in his speech gave a summary of the history of the building:

Mr Norman ... drew out a ground plan and Mr Bidwell an elevation in Classic Renaissance of the building. Though I did not like the design, I adopted the arrangement of the offices and the general lines. I then decided on the Mahomedan style, and in due course sent it in with an estimate for \$152,000. I stood behind the chair of the Acting Governor, (Mr Maxwell) when he was examining the trial estimates, and I leave it to you to imagine my feelings when he did not put his pen through the \$76,000 put down as the first part of a vote for \$152,000.³³

A nicely carved easel, topped with silver, and containing a photo of the building had been made for presentation to Swettenham, but for reasons not specified, the presentation did not take place. Again, the impression is conveyed that Swettenham found the whole exercise embarrassing. There was little dancing, as the room was so hot, and the celebrations ended comparatively early, just after midnight.³⁴ The completion of the government offices did at least solve one problem for Swettenham, the accommodation for the new federal organisation. This pre-empted a planned move by the Sanitary Board, poorly housed in a shop-house in Batu Road.³⁵

After the fiasco of the durbar arrangements in 1896 Swettenham handled the arrangements the following year with very considerable care. There was no further doubt about the venue in Kuala Kangsar. Characteristically, Swettenham was later to suggest that such an arrangement was an achievement, not a concession on his part.³⁶ The whole-hearted support and co-operation of Sultan Idris was obviously essential. What better way of ensuring this than by building him a new palace? This was indeed duly put in hand, and the Sultan moved in before 1 July 1897. He was thus able to act as host to the other rulers.³⁷

With the venue agreed, and Sultan Idris suitably sweetened and ostensibly well disposed, the remaining problems associated with the durbar arrangements were the logistics. Some ten thousand visitors were expected: the rulers of the states which made up the Federation had never all met together before.³⁸ Although Swettenham claimed at the time, to boost his own standing, that Sultan Abdul Samad, by then in his nineties, had never left Selangor before, this was incorrect. He had visited Singapore, with the other rulers, in March 1890 to pay respects to the Duke of Connaught.³⁹ Moreover Sultan Ahmad of Pahang proved prickly in the extreme. This was scarcely surprising after the difficulties which we have seen between him and Swettenham a decade earlier.

Swettenham might have preferred to mastermind the show and hold it without Mitchell, but certain of the rulers made it clear

that unless he were invited, they would not attend. Proceedings were thus in Malay, with relevant parts at the opening and closing ceremonies translated for Mitchell's benefit. Finally there was the question of how the rulers and guests should be entertained, for the durbar was to last for five days.

The basic rules for the conduct of business had been set out the year before, shortly after the announcement that the 1896 durbar was to be postponed. They were reiterated, together with an outline timetable the following year. The first day was to be taken up with formalities: a welcome by the Sultan of Perak, Sultan Abdul Samad to invite Mitchell to preside, an inaugural address by Mitchell, and then the passing of formal rules of procedure. The second to fifth days were to be devoted to the discussion of matters of administration: finance, roads and railways, land and mining codes, irrigation and labour regulations. Significantly only the last day was to be devoted to a discussion of religious matters. Elaborate arrangements were needed to get all the rulers to Kuala Kangsar.⁴⁰

The rulers and members of the State Councils were to foregather at Teluk Anson on 12 July 1897 at 7:30 a.m., whence a train would leave for Ipoh at 9:00 a.m. Each state was to have a first- and second-class carriage, while the Resident's saloon carriage was to be available for visiting Residents and families. Tiffin arrangements at Ipoh involved splitting the passengers into three groups: the Malays to lunch with senior Perak Malay chiefs, the Chinese to be entertained to a Chinese meal provided by a leading Chinese citizen, while the Europeans were to use the Residency. After lunch, the train was to continue to Sungei Siput, where gharries would wait to convey the whole party to Kuala Kangsar.⁴¹

Two problems were encountered when these plans were implemented. First, Sultan Ahmad of Pahang refused to travel up the coast on the *Mena*, which he claimed was too unstable, and therefore had to travel with the Governor on the *Sea Belle*. Secondly, the vessel in which the Ruler of Negeri Sembilan was travelling ran aground in the entrance to the Perak River. As a result the Ruler arrived in Kuala Kangsar at midnight. It was a long day for Swettenham and Sultan Idris, who rode out from Kuala Kangsar to greet the guests, Swettenham resplendent in a white suit and spiked helmet.⁴² The two men were then responsible for seeing that the guests were properly looked after, with the aged Abdul Samad lodged in the new palace as Idris' chief guest.⁴³

The proceedings themselves, insofar as they concerned matters of civil administration, aroused little if any interest amongst the assembled sultans. Swettenham presided over the discussions, in Malay, 'with remarkable ease and fluency.'⁴⁴ However discussion became lively when the Ruler of Negeri Sembilan

unexpectedly, the day before the scheduled discussion of Malay and Muslim matters 'brought forward several questions concerning Mohammedan Law and Malay Custom.' He wished to put Mohammedan Law on a statutory basis. The issue was fully discussed, but of course since the conference was constituted only to debate and advise, without any binding authority, no firm decisions were possible. Swettenham must have been greatly relieved, but it was a lesson to him that gatherings of this nature were likely to raise Malay issues, and could run out of control, as happened again in 1903.

Sultan Idris made an excellent host. His horses and carriages were constantly at the disposal of his guests, and each night he gave a dinner party for twenty to twenty-four guests. He gave them all souvenirs of their visit, and when they went to see the various entertainments provided for their amusement, he made presents to the players, in accordance with Eastern custom, but in the names of his guests and not himself.⁴⁵

Indeed, reading the accounts of the proceedings it is difficult not to conclude that the social festivities were designed to take precedence over the formal sessions. Unfortunately the social events did not all turn out as planned. The fish-drive was a fiasco, because all the fish fled to deep waters, and boat races which had been planned could not be held because the boats were commandeered by the vast influx of visitors, as temporary accommodation. The firework display on the last night was also a failure because someone let off all the fireworks before the guests had gathered for the display. The only item of entertainment which succeeded was a rock slide (*menggelunchor*) combined with a picnic party. The activities took place at Kuala Dol, some three and a half miles out of Kuala Kangsar off the road to Taiping. Swettenham had vividly described an earlier occasion in *Malay Sketches*: a stream running down a smooth, sixty-foot-long granite incline, at an angle of forty-five degrees, with a natural splash-pool at the bottom. The whole area was surrounded by luxuriant forest. The participants, younger men, women and children, would sit on a piece of plantain fibre, and slide in the water over the rocks down into the splash-pool. The whole exercise was a source of much amusement and enjoyment. The sultans participated, with the exception of the aged Sultan Abdul Samad, who did not leave the Istana, as did both Mitchell and Swettenham. While it continued, others cooked a curry tiffin by the side of the stream. Elephants were provided for the return trip to Kuala Kangsar.⁴⁶ There were unofficial entertainments as well, the whole town being *en fête*. One evening Idris led his guests down into the town to witness the shows there.

There was however a slight *frisson* on the final evening, after the aborted firework display. Swettenham, dining at the Residency with the other British officials, learnt at about midnight that Sultan Idris and the chiefs at the Istana had invited in their advisers. Swettenham was apprehensive of a plot, for he rushed down to the Istana, but reported that he found no more than innocent entertainment by the Sultan of the minor chiefs. The episode illustrated that while all might be goodwill on the surface, Swettenham at least was aware that appearances could be deceptive.

He was perhaps also mindful that earlier in the same afternoon, he had been involved in a long interview with Mitchell, Clifford, who was the Resident of Pahang and Sultan Ahmad. Sultan Ahmad had never been well disposed towards the British, had been difficult about attending the durbar in the first place and had excused himself on grounds of illness from one day of the official durbar proceedings. Swettenham in his account of the meeting gave no indication of what particular items were discussed, merely noting that 'a number of matters in which the Sultan was interested were discussed and satisfactorily settled.' No public account was given of the proceedings of the durbar, causing one of the newspapers twice to call for more information.⁴⁷

After this experience, it was decided that such meetings should not be held annually, but only when so decided by the Resident-General with the support of the High Commissioner. Nonetheless, as Swettenham, having organized the show, was not slow to point out, the merits of bringing together all the rulers were considerable, even if the administrative problems were formidable, and the costs high. It brought home for the first time the realities of Federation. One such reality was spelt out by Swettenham: 'Nothing can be decided at the Council, which is only one of advice, for no Raja has any voice in the affairs of State, but his own; and this was carefully explained and is thoroughly understood.' There was perhaps a note of relief in this remark, for in the preceding paragraph Swettenham had described Sultan Idris as, 'extremely jealous of his rights as a ruler; and I was surprised to hear the frank way in which, at the Council, he spoke of British Protection, which he did not hesitate to describe as control.' It was a foretaste of worse to come. Swettenham himself characteristically provided a favourable summing up of the exercise:

From every point of view the meeting has been an unqualified success, and it is difficult to estimate now the present and prospective value of this unprecedented gathering of Malay Sultans, Rajas, and chiefs. Never in the history of Malaya has any such assemblage been even imagined The most important result of this meeting is

that it has brought home the reality of Federation to the Malays of the four States, and aroused, as nothing else could have done, an interest in the general weal of a Confederation that binds the Chiefs in a union of mutual interest and personal friendship.⁴⁸

The only casualty was the aged Sultan Abdul Samad of Selangor: he died four months later, his death undoubtedly hastened by the strain of the visit to Perak. Back in Selangor, a pall had been cast over the European community by the news that their popular Commissioner of Police, Syers, had died on 14 July of wounds inflicted by an enraged *seladang* in central Pahang.⁴⁹

Swettenham's writing meantime continued, if not apace, then steadily. The year 1897 saw the publication of the third part of his dictionary written in collaboration with but chiefly by Clifford. The second part had been less than enthusiastically reviewed, and the third was reviewed critically by all the local newspapers except the *Malay Mail*. The authors were criticized for their lack of knowledge of Dutch and Arabic, while the slow pace of production also aroused adverse comment.⁵⁰ Yet it was at the same time agreed that the dictionary was valuable, and that the compilers displayed a remarkable knowledge of the vocabulary of the village Malays.⁵¹ It was suggested that the government take over completion of the work. Swettenham and Clifford themselves were dispirited, writing to the *Straits Times* that they were thinking of abandoning the project.⁵² The final instalment, G, was published in 1902.⁵³ Swettenham reported gloomily to Clifford, at that time in UK, with details of the finances:

... I think copies sold have realised altogether about \$1,075, and the cost of printing to date has been about \$1,700 or \$1,750. The printer has sent me accounts but my table is in such a state of mess, covered in every direction with letters awaiting answer that I can't at the moment find it. In any case there is nothing for you to repay. H.I.J. is with the Printer. He began to set it up but as I may never be able to revise it I thought he had better stop. He is so slow too. I doubt whether we shall sell 20 copies of a new number. I don't like to do anything as Governor in a matter where I am presumably concerned, but you do whatever you think best as regards the rest of it.⁵⁴

A month later, Swettenham remarked that he could not write in daylight without government work suffering. Compilation had however proceeded to the end of 'O'. When the Colonial Office asked Clifford for an account of the costs of the project, Clifford suggested that Swettenham had lost between £200-300 on it. Further half-hearted proposals for government assistance to enable

Clifford to complete the work lapsed. The Colonial Office was scarcely encouraged by the tone of the note which Swettenham sent to accompany the latest fascicle to the Colonial Office: 'I regret to say that this will probably be the last number of a work of great labour which has met with small encouragement from the public and none at all from the Government.' The work had in fact already been superseded by Wilkinson's dictionary published in 1902.⁵⁵

The year 1898 saw the issue of a rather more controversial work by Swettenham, *Unaddressed Letters*.⁵⁶ This book was a compilation of letters purported to be from an old, unnamed friend which came into Swettenham's possession after that friend's death. No-one was taken in by this ploy, particularly as the book had as its frontispiece a fetching photograph, not of the deceased friend, but Swettenham himself, posed, dapper in one of his famous hats, at a rakish angle, in the open doorway of a timbered house. The somewhat contrived form of this publication allowed Swettenham the luxury of personal reflection. This was interspersed with sketches from his life in Malaya, and also drew further on experiences from his short visit to India in 1883-4. The high incidence of sketches featuring death in some form was maintained. Most of the sketches are of little interest, and some indeed are scarcely readable today, but one at least is revealing of Swettenham's personal preoccupation: the causes of the breakdown of his marriage in 1894. In 'Daughters and Despotism' he argued convincingly that many marital problems were attributable to lack of sympathy between parents and children, and many more to the failure in a boy's education to prepare him for dealing with the opposite sex. Surely he pin-pointed accurately Sydney's tragedy: '... home becomes so hateful to a girl that she seizes the first opportunity of leaving it, and makes her life a long misery or something worse.' He also spelt out the tragedy of his own life: for a young man with little experience of women to marry a lively, sympathetic and intelligent girl, repressed by herself, or her parents, from expressing that intelligence and sympathy, 'is not altogether an easy path to tread, with sure and willing feet, from the altar to the grave. Many would give much to be able to turn back, but there is no return.'⁵⁷ He may have discovered the hereditary nature of Sydney's manic depression: 'In the relations between parents and children, perhaps the most surprising point is the absolute disregard of the pitiless vengeance of heredity.'⁵⁸ The problems which Swettenham described here were recognized as closely autobiographical. An anonymous reviewer in the *Straits Times* noted, 'A majority [of the pieces] are emotional longings, broken by a subdued satire at the moving sentiment.'⁵⁹

Unaddressed Letters formed the theme of Swettenham's ceremonial opening of Carcosa, with a fancy-dress ball on 29 August 1898. The building was estimated to cost \$67,300 of which \$15,000 was needed for roads and outbuildings, the balance of \$52,300 being the construction costs estimated by the successful tenderers. Seven tenders were submitted for scrutiny to Spooner, who eventually chose Messrs Nicholas and Walsh to undertake the job, completion to be within fifteen months. The house was thus intended for completion in early 1898.⁶⁰ The Colonial Office appears to have been informed of Carcosa only as an afterthought in April 1897, when Mitchell forwarded a memo on the subject by Swettenham. The house, Swettenham noted, would not cost much more than the Selangor Residency, but would have more accommodation, and could house a Resident-General, his offices and staff. Despite earlier estimates of a cost of \$67,000, the Colonial Office was told it would cost little more than \$60,000.⁶¹

Preparations for moving into the house, and the ball itself were reported in detail in the local press: 'Mr. Swettenham's Palace' was the headline to one progress report.⁶² By the end of April 1898, there were at last indications that the house would shortly be complete, and Swettenham was reported to be particularly pleased with the chocolate- and cream-coloured tiles with which the ground floor verandah had been paved.⁶³ The *Malay Mail* gave details of the construction: the roof an open hammerbeam of oiled *merbau*, the staircase of carved *merbau*, with a *merbau* dado, while the Resident-General's private apartments were surrounded by a verandah laid with Minton Hollins ornamental floor tiles, imported from Switzerland.⁶⁴ A detailed critique of the house was provided some two months later. This article regretted that the house had been built on the edge of the hill, precluding the possibility of gardens on a gentle slope sweeping up to the entrance. The site had been completely cleared, for a further criticism was that it stood out uncomfortably on the skyline.⁶⁵

Technically Swettenham took over the house at the end of May or early June 1898. He entertained the Perak and Selangor cricket teams there to a lunch reception on 1 June. However for much of June, July and August he was away in Perak, thus allowing the workmen to add the finishing touches. A letter in the *Malay Mail* in early June revealed that the name Carcosa was already being used, and, incidentally that in the old days of the 1880s, it was customary when going out to dinner, to bring one's houseboy along, to assist the speedy serving of the meal. The author of the letter, disapproving of the custom, said that he only brought the boy when dining at the Residency, 'Old' Carcosa and when asked so to do.⁶⁶

Invitations for the ball were sent out early, to allow costumes to be ordered from Europe, and extensive details of the various arrangements were given in advance.⁶⁷ The day after the ball, the *Malay Mail* report was eulogistic: 'Carcosa of course lends itself admirably to the entertainment of a large number of guests, but it would indeed have to be a brilliant assembly to surpass the effect produced upon the mind by the gaily dressed and laughing throng which crowded the beautiful rooms and verandahs of the Resident-General's palatial house last night.'⁶⁸

The report carried a detailed list of those who attended, and their fancy dress. It was in effect the social register of expatriate Kuala Lumpur. Mrs Baxendale, wife of the head of the Public Works Department appeared as *Unaddressed Letters*, in a yellow dress, embroidered with white fleurs-de-lys, in imitation of the cover of the book. There were only three local participants, the Kapitan China, Thambusamy Pillai and Loke Yew, a comment on the social and racial barriers which had arisen in the previous twenty years. Music was provided by the Perak and Selangor massed bands. Even Swettenham's prickly brother from Singapore attended, although he seemed a trifle reserved: 'Sir Alexander Swettenham was present all the evening and chatted with various gentlemen and took a lively interest in the proceedings.'⁶⁹

The genial Dr Travers was dressed as Ally Sloper, the hero of a London weekly magazine, *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday*, which humorously chronicled Ally Sloper's escapades attempting to ascend the upper reaches of high society. Amidst considerable merriment, 'Ally Sloper' presented Swettenham with a 'Friend of Sloper' award, a reminder of the recipient's own social ambitions. 'Ally Sloper' who claimed to be the author of *Unaddressed Letters*, thanked Swettenham for having so ably edited them. Swettenham replied with a suitably jovial toast, and the party continued until dawn. Although from this time on Swettenham personally used Carcosa, the Resident-General's office was not moved to the building for another month.⁷⁰

There remained for many years considerable controversy over the name Carcosa, which was widely believed to be a derivation by Swettenham from the Italian Cara Casa or Dear House. Eventually, in 1936, he was asked to provide the explanation, and did so in a letter to *British Malaya*.⁷¹ At the time when he moved into Carcosa, he had been reading *The King in Yellow*, a book of horror stories by the American writer, Robert W. Chambers. The four dedicatory verses at the front of the book read as follows:

Along the shore the cloud waves break,
The twin suns sink beneath the lake,

Swettenham

The shadows lengthen in Carcosa.

Strange is the night where black stars rise,
And twin moons circle through the skies,
But stranger still is lost Carcosa.

Songs that the Hyades shall sing,
Where flap the tatters of the king,
Must die unheard in Dim Carcosa.

Song of my soul, my voice is dead,
Die thou unsung as tears unshed,
Shall dry and die in Lost Carcosa.

Cassilda's song in *The King in Yellow*, Act 1 Scene 2.⁷²

The text of the book makes few specific references to this rather sinister verse at the front, and none to the play referred to.⁷³ The stories contained in the book are today of no great interest. They deal to a large extent with the rich, slightly raffish society of New York, London and Paris of the 1890s. Yet it is easy to see why they interested Swettenham, for they contain references to the macabre and supernatural which so fascinated him. One in particular, 'The Mask' no doubt attracted him, with an account of a love-affair which ended when the girl plunged into a chemical bath and was instantly transformed into marble. Little did the Colonial ladies know the sinister background to the name as they trooped gaily into the fancy-dress party.

If there is one building in Kuala Lumpur which may stand as Swettenham's memorial, it is Carcosa: indeed, so closely did Swettenham identify himself with it that he used the name Carcosa as telegraphic code for Resident-General in subsequent years till his elevation to Governor of Singapore. Spooner claimed that his had been the guiding hand behind the design of both the government buildings in the town centre, and Carcosa. When in 1898 he applied for the job of Chief Engineer, FMS, Swettenham paid credit to this work, but noted that he was inclined to be extravagant. Swettenham personally preferred Caulfeild for the job, and he was eventually appointed.⁷⁴

Finally, at least for the period he was serving in Malaya and Singapore, Swettenham produced in 1900, a further volume of essays entitled *The Real Malaya*, not to be confused with the essay of the same title, which formed the first item in *Malay Sketches* of 1895. In *The Real Malaya*, Swettenham reverted to the successful formula of *Malay Sketches*: a series of vignettes taken from his own varied experiences, together with a longish, important introductory piece, 'A New Method' outlining the problems which beset the

Colonial administration as it endeavoured to grapple with the Malay States in the 1870s. The *Straits Times* pointed out that Swettenham had originally wished to give it the title of 'Pen Pictured Malaya,' a more apposite, if clumsier title. It was in fact subtitled 'Pen Pictures.'⁷⁵ While in general the reviews were exceedingly complimentary, Smith in a private letter was less so. He felt Swettenham had shown lack of taste in repeating, thinly disguised under the title, 'A Line Engraving,' the circumstances associated with the execution of Panjang Meru near Kota Lama during the Perak War.⁷⁶

NOTES

1. CO 273/320:94 ff. Anderson to CO, Confidential of 10 February 1906. See Chapter 41 below.
2. Thio, 1969, op. cit., p. 166.
3. CO 273/203:282 ff. Mitchell to CO, Confidential of 1 May 1895 contains this as an enclosure. It was accepted by Chamberlain in a response in the same dispatch: Chamberlain to Mitchell of 27 December 1895.
4. Ibid. Mitchell to Chamberlain.
5. This was to prove more difficult than had been anticipated, and it was only in October 1909, well after Swettenham's retirement, that such a council was established.
6. See CO 273/273:5 ff. Swettenham to CO, 172 of 10 May 1901, and Chapter 37 below.
7. SSF 1586/96.
8. SSF 748/96.
9. *STD*, 11 June 1896.
10. *PP*, 10 June 1896.
11. *STD*, 15 June 1896.
12. CO 273/331:328 Anderson to CO, Confidential of 27 November 1907.
13. SSF 4421/96.
14. *PGSC* and *PP*, 26 August 1896.
15. *PP*, 22 August 1896.
16. CO 273/217:329 ff. Mitchell to CO, 427 of 15 September 1896, enclosing Swettenham's letter of 25 August 1896.
17. *PGSC*, 4 September 1896; *STD*, 7 September 1896; *PP*, 2 September 1896.
18. SSF 4903 and 5277/96.
19. HC 8661: 10 FMS AR 1896, RG's Report, p. 10.
20. Sadka, 1968, op. cit., p. 89, n.3.
21. Gullick, 1992a, op. cit., p. 55.
22. CO 273/215:186 ff. Mitchell to CO, 263 of 10 June 1896 enclosing Swettenham to Lucas, 6 June 1896.
23. CO 273/215:324 ff. Mitchell to CO, 283 of 21 June 1896, enclosing Swettenham's letter of 13 June 1896 to his brother, James Swettenham, CS in Singapore.
24. Ibid.

25. CO 273/215:186 ff. Mitchell to CO, 263 of 10 June 1896.
26. CO 273/228:398 ff. Mitchell to CO, 43 of 26 March 1897.
27. *STD*, 1 April 1897.
28. Gullick, 1955, op. cit., p. 165 and *STD*, 22 March 1897. See also Gullick, 1992b, 'Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad.' *JMBRAS*, 65 (1):27-38.
29. Gullick, 1988, op. cit., pp. 165-7.
30. *PGSC*, 22 December 1896, SSF 1040/97. The clock came from Gillett & Johnstone, costing £356-10-0. Syers had requested that the noon cannon be discontinued (SSF 2584/96), but according to Mrs Stratton Brown, 1954, op. cit., writing half a century later, and perhaps in error, the midday gun was continued.
31. *MM*, 23 January, 8 February, 20 March 1897.
32. *PP*, 10 and 24 March 1897.
33. *MM*, 5, 6 and 7 April 1897. R.A.J. Bidwell was at that time the Chief Draughtsman in the PWD, Selangor, but before April 1897 joined the Singapore architects, Swan & Maclaren. He attended the festivities.
34. *MM*, 5 April 1897. A full account of the speeches is to be found in *SJ*, 5: 232 ff.
35. J.M. Gullick, pers. comm.
36. *Footprints*, p. 120. A full account of the durbar was given in CO Eastern Pamphlet 24A and CO 273/229:299 ff. Mitchell to CO, 123 of 20 August 1897, enclosing Swettenham's official account. These two sources have been used below, except where otherwise indicated.
37. *PP*, 9 and 26 June, *MM*, 15 June 1897.
38. *PP*, 26 June 1897.
39. See photo in 1948 edition of *British Malaya* facing p. 144, taken on 27 March 1890 at the back of Government House.
40. SSF 5517/96, 2915 and 3077/97.
41. SSF 3321/97.
42. *PP*, 17 July 1897.
43. CO 273/226:217-29 Mitchell to CO, 245 of 21 July 1897 with his account of the durbar, and CO 273/229:299 ff. Mitchell to CO, 123 of 20 August 1897 enclosing Swettenham's report on the durbar.
44. PPC 9108, AR Negeri Sembilan 1897 para. 48.
45. CO 273/229:299 ff. as above.
46. *Malay Sketches*: 'Menggelunchor,' pp. 31-7. *PGG*, 24 July 1897, *STD*, 24 July 1897.
47. *PGSC*, 14 and 17 August 1897.
48. CO 273/229:299 ff. As above.
49. Gullick, 1978, op. cit.
50. A.J. Stockwell, 1976, 'Sir Hugh Clifford's Early Career (1866-1903)' *JMBRAS*, 49 (1):89-112.
51. *Ibid.*
52. *PGSC*, 25 February 1897, 31 March 1897, *STD*, 24 February, 9 and 23 March 1897, *MM*, 14 April 1897.
53. *STD*, 10 July 1902.
54. Clifford Papers: Swettenham to Clifford, 27 November [1902] quoted by Stockwell, 1976, op. cit.

55. CO 273/293:315 Swettenham to CO, 54 of 10 February 1903 and Stockwell, 1976, op. cit. Wilkinson, 1902, op. cit.
56. *Unaddressed Letters*, John Lane, The Bodley Head, London & New York, 1898.
57. *Unaddressed Letters*: 'Daughters and Despotism,' pp. 98 and 102.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
59. *STD*, 10 September 1898. Other reviews are in *MM*, 16 and 20 August 1898, *PP*, 17 September 1898.
60. SSF 5144/96. Various files in 1897 record progress on preparation of the access and construction: SSF 5066 and 5552/96, 886, 1298 and 5370/97, HCO 53/97
61. CO 273/228:446 ff. Mitchell to CO, 53 of 6 April 1897, enclosing Swettenham's memo of 27 March 1897.
62. *STD*, 25 May 1897.
63. *STD*, 25 April 1898 and *MM*, 21 April 1898.
64. *MM*, 9 April 1898.
65. *STD*, 8 July 1898. The open nature of the hilltop is clear from drawings and prints of the time.
66. *MM*, 1, 4 and 6 June 1898.
67. *MM*, 25 June, 13, 27 and 29 August 1898.
68. *MM*, 30 August 1898.
69. *PP*, 27 July 1898.
70. *MM*, 3 October 1898.
71. *BM*, May 1936 p. 4.
72. Robert W. Chambers, 1895, *The King in Yellow*, F. Tennyson Neely, New York.
73. The play has proved untraceable.
74. CO 273/241:468 ff. Mitchell to CO, 189 of 1 December 1898, including Swettenham's letter of recommendation of 24 November 1898.
75. *STD*, review, 24 February 1900. Also Stoodley papers, p. 269 and Chapter 48 below.
76. For reviews, see Stoodley Papers, pp. 255-85. 'A Line Engraving' is pp. 210-23 in *Malay Sketches*.

Federation in Practice

Swettenham's first annual report as Resident-General conveys an idea of his continuing energy and enthusiasm: '... I believe the prospects of the Malay States were never brighter than they are now. But we cannot afford to sit still. The country is to a great extent, an unpopulated jungle; money must be spent in developing its resources, and men of energy, miners, planters, traders, and Government servants — must be encouraged to drive the work along.'¹

Mitchell, when forwarding the report to London, added, 'I cannot speak too highly of the tact and ability shown by the Resident-General, and by all the Residents in overcoming difficulties, diminishing friction, and generally promoting the success of the Federation.'² Yet there were problems from the very start. We noted in Chapter 33 that the most immediate bone of contention between Sultan Idris and Swettenham was the changed legal position which came about as a result of Federation: the Sultan was no longer to act as final court of appeal in the State. It was indeed a change which had far-reaching consequences, one of which was a reduction in the extraordinary power wielded by the Residents and the District Officers. It is remarkable that Swettenham who for so long stood for the interests of the executive arm of government, where possible totally independent of any control or supervision, should, as one of his first acts as Resident-General trim that power. The whole issue of course had its origins in the rivalry between Swettenham and Maxwell at the end of the 1880s.

Within weeks of Jackson's arrival in Singapore in early September 1896 as Judicial Commissioner, permission was given for lawyers to practise in the FMS. Previously they had been forbidden to do so, apparently out of fear that they would batten on illiterate litigants. This change in the judicial arrangements of course removed what many had seen as an impediment to the further development of the FMS: European planters and capitalists who had previously hesitated to invest there because of the absence of legal safeguards now began to take a closer interest.³ Further changes

followed with little delay: the original jurisdiction of the Residential Court in Selangor was abolished in early 1897, being replaced by the Court of Judicial Commissioners.⁴

That the position of the courts was still regarded as unsatisfactory may be deduced from an article in the *Straits Times* of 1898. This trenchant criticism included a demand for a Court of Appeal if the office of Judicial Commissioner was not abolished. It was necessary that there should be a body independent of government, to provide such a Court, secure uniformity of law and procedure, and improve local courts by supervision. It was suggested that Jackson was little more than a civil servant, appointed by and answerable to the High Commissioner, and it was pointed out that no appeal from him as Judicial Commissioner was possible. The solution might be to appoint two more Judicial Commissioners. The three of them would then act as a Court of Appeal.⁵

Later, after he had become Acting Governor in Singapore, Swettenham complained of frequent demands from the Colonial Office to change laws which had already been passed in the Legislative Council and suggested that the time might be approaching when a Federal Council was needed. There was no recorded reply to this suggestion.⁶ While the judiciary might be allowed to develop along conventional lines, Swettenham was adamant in his opposition to consular representatives in the FMS. This he felt would simply encourage the Germans to build up a trading position, as they had done elsewhere, to the detriment of British trade.⁷

Swettenham was anxious to avoid destroying what he termed 'individual effort,' to encourage Federal officers to use their authority 'rather as inspectors and advisers to the local officers than as the heads of departments.' This was to prove a vain hope. The life of a Resident-General was an arduous one. In his first year in the job, Swettenham claimed to have covered more than 7,000 miles, as he was not slow to point out in his first annual report.⁸

Swettenham's tenure of office as Resident-General was marked by a determination to gather to that office as much power as he was able, at the expense of the unfortunate Governor: a policy which was promptly reversed as soon as he became Governor himself. In his first annual report, he was quite categorical about the aims of Federation: '... to relieve the Colonial Secretary of all concern with Malay affairs, to give the Governor ... an adviser who should be in touch with the Rulers and Residents ... to secure continuity and uniformity of administration.'⁹ The problem was not so much work to do, as hands to do it. The fact that the Colonial Secretary, operating out of Singapore, was his own brother, acting on occasions as Governor, no doubt sharpened Swettenham's

enthusiasm for independence. Swettenham had initially envisaged an arrangement where he as Resident-General would communicate directly with London, as did Australia and Nigeria. This was not to be, and early in the exercise we find Mitchell in Singapore writing with a degree of ill-temper 'Please address me in future as high commissioner on all native matters.'¹⁰

Indeed, within days of Swettenham's return in June 1896, there was a row over the policy towards granting mining concessions in Pahang to Lord Sudeley: 'The Governor and my brother do not agree with me — our views are quite different [on labour] It is [a question of] getting the country opened up and attracting capital, or doing the opposite,' he complained in a letter to Lucas.¹¹

This rivalry forms a leitmotif running through Swettenham's years as Resident-General. The papers sarcastically compared the two brothers. Of Frank, the younger, the *Straits Times* reported that he had the full support of the Perak establishment, while in Selangor he was admired for his general ability, sporting interests, 'and for a certain modesty regarding the importance of his own personality.'¹² At its most basic, the rivalry was personal, slightly absurd and public, revolving round gleeful comparisons in the local newspapers of the size of their hats. At a race-meeting in Singapore in October 1896, Frank Swettenham was reported as follows: 'He tempered his head-gear as a concession to Singapore susceptibilities, by caving in the upper half of it. It is only in the freer air of the Federated Malay States that that remarkable golgotha is allowed to erect itself to its full official altitude.'¹³

Such was the *Perak Pioneer's* enthusiasm that it launched into doggerel verse two days later, under the title *The Topi Stakes*.¹⁴ Another paper recorded of the occasion:

It may be added that the Colonial Secretary established himself as the cynosure of all eyes by appearing in a hat which entirely eclipsed in grotesque incongruity that of his distinguished brother, and to see the two gentlemen together irresistibly suggested the enquiry as to where the rest of the minstrels might be.¹⁵

This rivalry seriously affected their professional activities. The position cannot have been helped when Frank Swettenham received his KCMG as part of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in June 1897, almost a year before his elder brother James, senior to him in service, received the same honour.¹⁶ It seems likely that relations between the two men were particularly frosty during the intervening eleven months. It was thus amidst sparring personalities that the principles of Federation were settled.

Yet the precise interpretation of these principles provided fertile ground for further controversy.

There were for instance more differences of opinion on land matters and a need to establish uniformity over the question of land in the different states. Before he went on leave in 1895, Swettenham had prepared a memorandum on land matters, printed and dated 20 August 1895. This to a large extent conceded Maxwell's arguments. It was forwarded to the Colonial Office by Mitchell soon after Swettenham's return from leave in 1896, and received without comment.¹⁷ Even while he was still on board ship returning from leave in 1896, he prepared a memorandum arguing that the government had been illiberal rather than the opposite in its grants of land to planters.¹⁸ Since W.E. Maxwell had been safely removed from the scene of combat, the element of personal rivalry in the arguments was absent. We saw in Chapter 29 that the Colonial Office realized this point, and hence deferred reply, but eventually favoured Maxwell's arguments in this lengthy, heated debate on the Perak Land Code.

In July 1896 a draft of this code had been revised by committee, and was submitted to Swettenham as Resident-General. He recommended a top-level conference of Residents to discuss the code, which took the revised Perak draft as its basis. The technicalities of the discussion need not concern us, but it was remarkable that Swettenham, Birch and Rodger, who had opposed the principle of reassessment three years earlier, now supported it. However they approached the problem from a slightly different standpoint. They introduced a policy of alienating state land at a low rent in the early years, rising, by virtue of the provision of the original grant in later years to predetermined amounts.¹⁹ The justification for this was, of course, that a higher rent should be payable when the land was in full production. The draft Federal Land Code thus allowed the Resident, after five years, to declare that all lands which had been alienated were to be subject to reassessment, in the first instance no less than thirty years from the date of the declaration.²⁰

In practice, the higher rents became payable at a time when the rubber industry was in a trough after the planting boom, and the government at that time had some difficulty in resisting demands for a reduction in these higher rents. Both Swettenham and Maxwell were groping, in an era when persistent high inflation was unimaginable, for a process of adjusting rents to profits. Ultimately they were defeated by fluctuations in the price of rubber. Swettenham acknowledged that the Land Code was one of the most urgent matters requiring his attention. He concluded his report on the matter by noting that no other subject in the Malay States had

received such careful consideration. He might have added that none had created such controversy.²¹ However it was another fifteen months before the regulations were passed by the Perak State Council, chiefly because, in the absence of Maxwell's expertise, the Colonial Office had insisted on major changes in 1897. Similar legislation was passed in the same year by the other Federated States.²²

There were other problems over land matters. On a more specific issue, in Selangor, an application was pending for Huttenbach, who had applied for 320 acres of land near Batu Tiga at the end of June. He had apparently felt encouraged to do so by Swettenham's remarks on the need to encourage planting at his talk at the Royal Colonial Institute earlier that year. His application had received the blessing of Rodger, the Resident, and Swettenham himself.²³ The Governor however objected strongly: 'Mr H's allusion to your speech is unfortunate as the responsibility of deciding how land shall be alienated lies on me.' Swettenham was instructed not to proceed till he had held a conference on the subject with the other Residents.

Swettenham's reply was barbed: 'I do not understand why Your Excellency says that Mr Huttenbach's allusion to my paper is unfortunate, but the rest of the sentence seems to charge me with interfering with Your Excellency's prerogatives, and I must disclaim any such intention, nor do I think anyone can fairly bring such an accusation against me.' Mitchell clarified that the problem arose from Huttenbach's interpretation of Swettenham's talk as indicating a change of plans, 'and [he] now looks to *you* to change the plan I had initiated.'²⁴ Mitchell hastened to add that he saw nothing in Swettenham's lecture to object to, 'and much to admire.' Swettenham responded: 'Then have I Your Excellency's permission to address you concerning the auction question in Selangor?' Mitchell answered that since the durbar was postponed, Swettenham should summon to Kuala Lumpur the Residents of Perak and Negri Sembilan for a discussion with him and Swettenham on the matter. Here, at last, at the Residents' Conference mentioned above, by dogged perseverance and no doubt by some astute lobbying of his colleagues before the meeting, Swettenham got his way with all the Residents on his side. Mitchell asked plaintively, 'Do you all desire me to abandon auction sales except in cases of town lands?' Swettenham replied that he had had no experience of auctions, a point which was not entirely true, but argued for the use of the application system, at least where large reserves were concerned, like those in Selangor. To further comments from the Governor, Swettenham replied that auctions encouraged land-jobbing: a

comment which might under the circumstances have been considered impudent.

Self-aggrandizement formed an important feature of Swettenham's period as Resident-General. This can be seen in the case of the Johore boundary dispute, which arose in 1896 between Johore and its neighbours, Pahang, Malacca and Johol (part of Negeri Sembilan.) The young Sultan Ibrahim of Johore suggested that the Colonial Office should resolve the issue, with the help of one of the Sultan's own courtiers and Herbert, recently retired from the Colonial Office. The idea was agreed, and a committee was set up, consisting of the above-mentioned two men to represent Johore together with Sir Cecil Smith, brought out of retirement for the purpose, and one other to represent the Colonial Office. The logical choice was James Swettenham, at that moment on leave in Europe. However Frank Swettenham submitted a strong memorandum of objection via Mitchell in September 1897, stressing that the matter must be settled in Malaya, by people who were familiar with the conditions. Mitchell accepted the memorandum, and James Swettenham was stood down, in favour of Frank. James made no objection: 'He never does,' minuted one of the Civil Servants in Whitehall. Memoranda were submitted by men on the ground, and the Colonial Office noted that as all the participants were in UK, including by that time Frank Swettenham, a meeting could be held there. A further meeting would be held in early December 1897.²⁵

The matter was finally resolved in 1898 when the commission reported. Smith had found the work distasteful, for he had reported, so he said, at length on the problem when he was in government. This seems a flimsy excuse: an increasing dislike of his co-commissioner Swettenham seems more probable. Lucas advised Chamberlain to give the ruling his approval without referring to the Governor: 'If it is a good arrangement, and I believe it to be so, each party will be dissatisfied.' The detailed solutions need not concern us. It is only necessary to note that once again Swettenham had got himself onto the relevant committee, despite Mitchell, and the seniority of his own brother. He then commented smugly on the outcome in his next Annual Report.²⁶

Swettenham was aware of the perils of independent advisers on a later occasion in Selangor. Raja Bot persuaded the Sultan in 1902 to attempt to recruit the recently retired G.C. Bellamy as his private secretary. Swettenham, echoing the FMS hierarchy, strongly disapproved. He stated that it was the District Officer's duty to advise the Sultan. Moreover it was a government post to be paid for out of government funds. The money was not available. If the Sultan wanted this sort of assistance, he should employ a Eurasian clerk, as was done by the Perak ruler. Swettenham

concluded his letter to Chamberlain on a note of exasperation: 'The whole affair is due to the officiousness of a busybody named Raja Bot, who is always getting himself or someone else into trouble.'²⁷

Other instances of Swettenham's disagreements with the Governor were on procedural matters. Thus, when the Governor attempted to force Swettenham to receive details of all leaves granted in the FMS, Swettenham strongly disagreed in a minute, which, starting with the words, 'No Sir ...' has a strangely American air. On that occasion Swettenham was reluctantly obliged to concede the Governor's point.²⁸

The following year the damage was done before the Governor heard of it. Sir Andrew Clarke had suggested to Swettenham that Guthries be appointed FMS agents in London to encourage inward investment. When Swettenham prompted the Acting Resident General, Treacher, to write direct to Guthries, Mitchell minuted plaintively: 'This correspondence should not have taken place without previous reference to me.'²⁹ A more serious blow came the same year in an exchange of minutes on railway construction. Swettenham's insistence on the paramount importance of the railways led to Mitchell being overruled by Chamberlain on the subject.³⁰

Mitchell died suddenly in office on 7 December 1899. The ever-conscientious James Swettenham deferred his leave to fill the gap, thus becoming the Acting Governor. At this stage the rivalry between the two brothers came into the open. The most striking instance of this was in early 1900 when the brothers fell out badly over the lease of what was to become known as Carey Island to Mr Carey. In exasperation over his brother's caution and interference, Sir Frank minuted: 'This question was referred to the late High Commissioner by Mr Treacher when acting for me. There was no reason to refer it and I should not have done so. The Resident-General was intended to deal with all matters concerning lands and mines' He further pointed out that he had far more experience than anyone else in alienating land. The implication was clear: his older brother did not know what he was talking about. In conclusion, he added that if everyone sat back and waited when an unusual scheme was proposed, government servants' lives would be much easier, but the country would make very slow progress. Sir James replied in a further minute: 'If you are correct in your statement (I have no data on which to question it at present) you may grant the concession, but without my approval.' After these displays of temper, and further discussions between Sir Frank and Carey, a proposal was made, to which Sir James agreed.³¹

Sir John Anderson, as High Commissioner, some years later summed up the position: the Resident-General was to relieve the

High Commissioner on routine matters. 'But I am afraid that the position rapidly changed and that the Resident-General, instead of being what I may call the mouthpiece of the High Commissioner, more or less combined the duties of both ... and at the same time, he had to such a very large extent power to overrule the Residents that he became practically the final authority to all intents and purposes.'³²

Towards the end of his period as High Commissioner, Swettenham, like so many able administrators whose time has passed, still continued to involve himself in the minutiae of the Resident-General's, and at times even the Residents' jobs. Thus in early 1903, Swettenham overruled decisions taken by the Resident-General at a Council of Residents on the role of the Director of the Public Works Department.³³ Later that year, he involved himself in arguments over another matter which had been discussed at a Residents' Conference, the subject of accommodation for government clerks.³⁴

As the Federation gradually took shape, it was inevitable that there should be certain frictions, not only between the colonial administrators, but also with the sultans. Their role, whatever might be said, was being diminished, in direct contravention of the promises which Swettenham had given them when he persuaded them to accept Federation. It was not surprising that finance proved a major bone of contention. Swettenham, with the able support of Lucas, was keen to introduce a common purse, or federal financial system. In his 1897 FMS Annual Report he wrote, 'The natural sequence of administrative union would be a common purse, the abolition of interstate loans, interest, accounts, and the appropriation of Federal balances for the construction of works for the general benefit of the Federation without reference to the amount of revenue raised in any particular State during any given financial year.' Swettenham was convinced that in the long term this would pay.³⁵

Mitchell, cautious as always, felt that such a move was premature. Moreover, he recognized to his credit that such a move would amount to a breach of faith with the rulers, who had been specifically assured that separate state treasuries would be maintained. Thus the cumbersome procedures of interstate loans continued.³⁶

This did not prevent Swettenham from raising the matter when he was home on leave in 1898, and following this up on his return to the FMS with further enquiries of Sultan Idris. Once again, he met his match, for Idris raised 'insuperable objections' to such a plan, which, he said, would violate the Federal treaty. Swettenham was thus confined to remarking, in his 1898 Annual Report, how desirable such a financial union was. He concluded ambiguously,

'But it cannot be pressed, and the difficulties referred to are therefore likely to increase.'³⁷

If a common purse was not possible, it might at least be feasible to press for an Auditor-General. This was suggested in May 1899. Mitchell was not in favour of this, despite Swettenham's nomination of a person to fill the post.³⁸ Swettenham recognized that there were weaknesses in the Treasury and Audit Departments, for Arthur Knight, the same man who had served with him in the Colonial Secretary's office in 1876-7 was sent up from Singapore at this time to overhaul the financial system and audit the accounts.³⁹ It is no longer evident what he found amiss, but it provided further ammunition for Swettenham. As a result, Swettenham's nominee, Hewett, was appointed Federal Auditor, complaints from Sultan Idris of Perak notwithstanding.⁴⁰

Modest steps towards a common purse were taken at a conference of Residents in early 1902, waiving the payment of interest on interstate loans, and cancelling the accumulated interest on loans to Pahang. It has been suggested that the Sultan of Perak did not object on this occasion because he was looking forward to a visit to UK for the coronation of Edward VII.⁴¹ On balance however Swettenham considered, by February 1902 that it would not be wise to take further the question of a Federal Legislature. The risks of further clashes with the rulers were too great.⁴²

Sultan Idris was not the only ruler to object to the high-handed measures of remote control from Singapore. Later, when Sir James Swettenham was Acting Governor in Singapore, Sultan Ahmad of Pahang resurrected an unanswered question from 1888, when he had first requested a Resident. In this he requested that the new government whose representative he was about to receive should not 'interfere with the old customs of our country.'⁴³ Investigations revealed, embarrassingly, that no specific reply had been given on this point, although the Sultan had been provided with a copy of the Pangkor Engagement, the basis for his acceptance of a British Resident. A year later he attempted to veto the reappointment of Clifford as Resident. Sir Frank Swettenham contested this. A potentially difficult situation was defused when it became evident that Clifford's health would prevent him from taking up the appointment.⁴⁴ The following year Swettenham visited Pahang, saw the Sultan, and concluded that he had not long to live. He recommended an increased allowance and the award of a KCMG. Although the Sultan lived another ten years, his health deteriorated sharply. Swettenham had recognized that he was a spent force, but underestimated his determination to survive.⁴⁵

If the durbar was deemed to be an impractical and unsatisfactory method of promoting the aims of Federation, the

same could not be said of the conferences of Residents, held once or twice a year, usually in Kuala Lumpur, with Swettenham as Resident-General presiding. We have seen in this chapter how the first such conference in 1896 resolved the vexed question of the Land Code. At a later conference, the Residents agreed on a Mining Code.⁴⁶

Although in Swettenham's early years as Resident-General it was said that the FMS was only on trial for three years, scarcely more than six months later he was deemed, by those in the FMS, to have brought tact, and a matured and valued judgement to the job.⁴⁷ He spent the years 1896-1900 establishing a strong and independent role for the Resident-General. His reaction to his elevation in February 1901 to High Commissioner for the FMS, based in Singapore was to reverse this policy. Centralization, even without Swettenham, was perhaps to some extent dictated by the vast improvements in communications. However it also reflected the fact that his successor, W.H. Treacher, had long been accustomed to work under him, and was by nature shy and retiring. His views were generally expressed in a somewhat diffident manner.

Swettenham by contrast was almost truculent in his attitude. In cases where as Resident-General he would have argued for the right to operate independently of the High Commissioner, he now argued equally forcibly for the High Commissioner's intervention. Thus during deliberations in 1901 on a draft Land Enactment, when Kershaw, the Legal Adviser argued that reference to the High Commissioner should not be obligatory, Swettenham wrote: 'I don't want to limit the authority of the Resident-General ... the whole question is whether he will see that land is not given away improperly. I am not certain that some mistakes have not already been made in this respect.'⁴⁸

Later he was to claim that almost every issue discussed by the Conference of Residents was referred to him as High Commissioner, and that the Malay States gave him almost twice as much work as the Colony, work which he found much more agreeable than that connected with Singapore. For Swettenham added, dismissively, that work in the Colony 'could be carried on successfully by anyone of average intelligence with some knowledge of public business.' The Colonial Office agreed, one official minuting: 'This is because the RG is a weak man, and because Sir FAS is a strong man of much more experience than Mr T.'⁴⁹ The *Straits Times* had a further gloss on his style in a leading article criticizing the Colonial Office for delaying his confirmation as Governor for so long. It characterized him as '*suaviter in modo*' with respect to the Straits Settlements and '*fortiter in re*', with

respect to the FMS: a smooth operator in the Straits Settlements, and a man who got things done in the FMS.⁵⁰

Yet despite the enormous progress in the decade up to his retirement in 1904, Swettenham's views on the role of Malays in the administration had scarcely changed. Until his retirement he effectively prevented the establishment of Malay College, Kuala Kangsar. His own solution was simply to increase the allowances to the penghulus: 'I have already asked that the status and salaries of penghulus may be raised to a proper level and it is by this means that I hope to get the best class of Malays into the Government of the country. They can be extremely useful as penghulus; their powers can be extended and their salaries can be raised to \$100 or \$200 a month instead of \$20 or \$40.'⁵¹ His own attempts along these lines included the establishment of the posts of 'Superintendent of Penghulus' or Assistant District Officer in remote areas. This attempt to employ selected aristocrats failed to take adequate account of the need to educate such men, if they were to compete for the higher posts in the administration.

For all his conservatism in the matter of Malay education, Swettenham was nevertheless perceived in the press as champion of the Malay cause, at least by the Europeans: 'If there is one thing for which the Resident-General is to be respected more than another, it is his well-known wish to place the interests of the Malays in the forefront of all others.' After discussing the proposal, revolutionary for the time, that an English-speaking Malay be appointed to teach in the Victoria Institution, the article went on to praise the initiative of Campbell and Belfield who were advocating the setting up of a Model Settlement for Malays in Kuala Lumpur. Blocks of a quarter or half an acre were to be given out 'to any respectable married Malay who asks for one.' This was the origin of Kampong Bahru.⁵²

At a lower level in the hierarchy, and one surely where decisions should have been left to Treacher as Resident-General, Swettenham deplored any further moves to provide accommodation for government clerical employees: 'In my opinion the Government will make a serious mistake if it commits itself any further in regard to the provision of free quarters!'⁵³ Indeed, Swettenham's interference on minor matters of FMS administration, combined with his conservatism, would have caused problems with a Resident-General less loyal and compliant than Treacher.

The years 1902 and 1903 were marked first by some spirited correspondence with the Colonial Office on Swettenham's part, in which he shared his views on the future. Many of his colleagues and those slightly younger than him had been transferred from Malaya to other territories: Rodger to the Gold Coast, Clifford to

Trinidad, to mention but two. Of those who remained, several were shortly due for retirement. Amongst their successors there would have to be men drafted into the FMS who had not the many years of experience there enjoyed by Swettenham and his colleagues. What would be the implications of such developments on the administration?

Swettenham, in a ruminative mood, was not slow to forward his views unasked. As was his custom, he pulled no punches on his own contribution: 'As I am to a large extent responsible for the initiation of the present system, and have been closely associated with its development for the last 28 years, it appears to me that my successor will be placed in a somewhat difficult position, and you may desire to consider future arrangements while I am still here.' The Colonial Office was not to know that Swettenham's views would be as readily available to them, unasked, after his retirement as before it. Not content with this, Swettenham added that all the Governors since Ord had looked to him for advice in their dealings with the states. The Residential system succeeded because everyone followed one Resident, or one Resident persuaded the Governor to institute policies. The strongest argument in favour of Federation was the appointment of a Resident-General who had unrivalled knowledge of the country and how it should be developed. Curiously Swettenham drew no clear conclusions from this essay, though Mr Fiddian of the Colonial Office described Swettenham as 'thinking aloud,' and disagreed with the implication that the High Commissioner must be a man of experience in the FMS. He added snidely that for the burden of FMS administration, Swettenham had only himself to thank, for he it was who recommended Treacher to the post. Other officials in their comments suggested that when Swettenham and Treacher retired, it might be better to abolish the post of High Commissioner, and allow the Resident-General to correspond directly with the Secretary of State in London. Lucas strongly disagreed with the idea of divorcing the FMS and Straits Settlements. In its reply the Colonial Office requested Swettenham to comment on this point. Should the post of Resident-General be retained after Treacher's retirement, and should Residents and the Resident-General always be selected from within the service?⁵⁴

Swettenham in his reply to this dispatch, mindful of his own position, felt that the Resident-General should come under the High Commissioner. He foresaw as a logical result, and as a move towards union, the gradual disappearance of Residents, to be replaced by keen young secretaries to the government in the different departments. The Malays, he believed would strongly oppose the abolition of the post of Resident, for the Resident was the man who fought their cause up to the Governor. Swettenham affirmed that

the Residential system had succeeded 'because we have shown to the Malay Rajas the consideration which I think was their due.' While the Resident-General's post must be maintained, it was, he felt, no longer necessary that he or the Residents should speak Malay.⁵⁵

In another move shortly before his departure, Swettenham proposed significant changes to the classification of Malayan Civil Service officers. The number of such officers, and their scope of work had expanded out of all recognition since the early days of his career, and this, he felt, justified appointing men to classes rather than posts. Such a reform would put an end to the situation in which older, less able men claimed almost proprietary rights to undemanding senior offices.⁵⁶ A few weeks later, in comments on the Conference of Chiefs prior to his retirement, Swettenham noted: 'The past has proved that for many obvious reasons, the interests of the Federated Malay States and the neighbouring British Colony are identical on all large issues and will be served by a continued and even closer communion.'⁵⁷ The issues touched on in his comments on the future development of the Federation were to be taken up with vigour over twenty years later, with Swettenham as enthusiastic a combatant as ever.⁵⁸

NOTES

1. HC 8661:9 FMS AR, 1896, RG's Report, para. 23. Compare with HC 1819:5. FMS AR, 1902, HiC to Chamberlain, 11 July 1903, para. 7 quoted in Chapter 41 below.
2. HC 8661 Mitchell to Chamberlain, 4 June 1897, forwarding FMS AR, 1896.
3. *PP*, 5 September 1896 announced Jackson's arrival in Singapore, *STD*, 28 September 1896 noted that lawyers could speak before Swettenham in court. *PP*, 2 December 1896 noted renewed interest of investors. See also HC 8661, FMS AR 1896, RG's report, para. 3.
4. *STD*, 9 and 11 January 1897.
5. *STD*, 27 June 1898. Agitation was renewed in *PP*, 31 January 1900 and *STD*, 28 March 1900 and *PP*, 1 August 1903.
6. CO 273/273:5 Swettenham to CO, 172 of 10 May 1901.
7. CO 273/273:520 Swettenham to CO, Confidential of 15 August 1901.
8. HC 8661, FMS AR, 1896. RG's Report, para 12.
9. *Ibid*, para. 11.
10. HCO, number not given, 11 August 1896, quoted by Heussler, 1981, *op. cit.*, p. 228.
11. CO 273/215:186. Mitchell to CO, 263 of 10 June 1896, enclosing Swettenham's letter to Lucas of 6 June 1896.
12. *STD*, 22 April 1898. For another sarcastic comment, see *STD*, 16 April 1898.

13. *PP*, 28 October 1896, quoting *SFP*. See also caricature of Swettenham *Str. P.* 3:10.
14. *PP*, 31 October 1896.
15. *STD*, 26 October 1896.
16. *MM*, 23 June 1897, *PP*, 26 June 1897 and *STD*, 24 May 1898. Frank had been recommended for this award somewhat earlier, in early 1896. See CO 426/12:6 Letter of recommendation dated 18 February 1896, presumably from Mitchell, the Governor.
17. CO 273/215:328 ff. Mitchell to CO, 284 of 22 June 1896 enclosing Swettenham's printed memo of 20 August 1895. *SFF*, 15 August 1896 expressed publicly the need for such a code.
18. CO 273/223:426 ff. Swettenham to CO, 15 May 1896 enclosing his memo on land grants.
19. J.H. Drabble, 1973, *Rubber in Malaya, 1876-1922*, pp. 36-7.
20. CO 273/218:109 ff. Preliminary report on Land Code for the Federated Malay States by Resident-General, 25 September 1896, enclosure in J.A. Swettenham to Chamberlain, 472 of 10 October 1896. The Federal Land Code as approved is in CO 273/218:116-32. See also HC 8661 AR FMS, 1896, RG's Report, para. 7.
21. HC 8661 AR FMS 1896, RG's report, para. 7.
22. CO 273/219:1 Telegram of 1 December 1896, CO 273/219:246 ff. Minute by Sir H. Hockling, 25 May 1897 on Mitchell to Chamberlain, 563 of 15 December 1896, CO 273/219:260-85 Chamberlain to Mitchell, 4 June 1897, CO 273/239:542 ff. and Mitchell to Chamberlain, 35 of 1 April 1898, J.A. Swettenham to CO 1 April 1898. A useful summary of the position is provided by Lim, *op. cit.*, 1976.
23. HCF 130/96, referring to Huttenbach's application of 23 June 1896.
24. Emphasis as in the original.
25. CO 273/229:317 ff. Mitchell to CO, telegram of 25 August 1897. CO 273/229:359 ff. Mitchell to CO, telegram and 131 of 15 September 1897, CO 273/230:219 Mitchell to CO, telegram of 8 November 1897. See also *STD*, 16 July 1898.
26. CO 273/239:344, Mitchell to CO, 5 of 18 January 1898; CO 273/239:402. Mitchell to CO, 11 of 1 February 1898; CO 273/244:52-93, Mitchell to CO, 10 March 1898, with rulings. Also *STD*, 16 July 1898. HC 9524, FMS AR 1898, p. 10 RG's Report, para. 18.
27. SSF 5608/02, 6558/02 and 7082/02, *MM*, 15 January 1903.
28. HCF 204/96.
29. HCF 1010/97. See also CO 273/230:312 ff. Mitchell to CO, 186 of 14 December 1897 and CO 273/245:455 Swettenham to CO, 25 January 1898.
30. See Chapter 35.
31. HCF 327/00. Other instances of lesser friction are to be found in HCF 1452 and 1720/00.
32. Sir John Anderson's speech in the Federal Council on 2 November 1910, quoted by Thio, 1969, *op. cit.*, p. 175.
33. SSF 3358/02.
34. SSF 4930/02.
35. HC 9108 FMS AR 1897, RG's Report, para. 9.

36. CO 273/229:121 ff. Mitchell to CO, 89 of 4 June 1897, and CO reply, 19 August 1897. SSF 3374/98.
37. CO 273/245: Swettenham to Johnston, private of 17 January 1898 CO 273/251:414 J.A. Swettenham, Acting HiC to CO, 174 of 12 July 1899. Also HC 9524 FMS AR 1898, RG's Report, para. 13. See also CO 273/274:629 ff. Gov. to CO, Telegram of 3 December 1901.
38. CO 273/251:5 Mitchell to CO, 113 of 3 May 1899.
39. *PP*, 21 and 28 June 1899.
40. CO 273/451:414 Mitchell to CO, 174 of 12 July 1899.
41. Thio, 1969, *op. cit.*, p. 177.
42. SSF 1353/02.
43. CO 273/261:607 ff. Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, 203 of 17 May 1900 enclosing Butler's letter of 19 April 1900.
44. CO 273/272:781 ff. Swettenham to CO, Confidential of 18 April 1901.
45. CO 273/284:6 ff. Swettenham to CO, Confidential of 6 October 1902. The Sultan finally died in 1914.
46. HC 8661 FMS AR 1896, RG's report, para. 7. The finishing touches were put to this in 1902, when Swettenham was High Commissioner. See SSF 4394/02.
47. *PGSC*, 9 February and 3 September 1897.
48. HCO 717/1901 RG to HiC, 11 April 1901.
49. CO 273/283:736 ff. On Swettenham to CO, 328 of 4 September 1902.
50. *STD*, 2 October 1901.
51. CO 273/303:205 ff. HiC to RG, 16 September 1903, enclosed with SSD 480, 17 September 1904. See also CO 273/284:145 Swettenham to CO, Confidential of 22 October 1902.
52. *MM*, 23 August 1899.
53. SSF 4930/02.
54. CO 273/283:736 ff. Swettenham to CO, 328 of 4 September 1902.
55. CO 273/284:521 ff. Swettenham to CO, Confidential of 7 December 1902.
56. CO 273/291:99 ff. Swettenham to SS, Confidential of 24 June 1903.
57. Minutes of Conference of Chiefs of the FMS held at Kuala Lumpur on 20-23 July 1903 in HCO 1404/1904. See Chapter 41 below.
58. See Chapter 47.

Wheel to Keel

Swettenham's enthusiasm for the development of roads, railways, agriculture and mining, which was such a marked feature of his earlier career, continued unabated during his period of service as Resident-General and later as High Commissioner for the Federated Malay States. In these later years, Swettenham was working on a much broader canvas, for as Resident-General he was responsible not just for one, but for all the four Federated Malay States. The speed with which these states were linked by road and rail to each other was remarkable. The rather special circumstances under which they were linked to Singapore through Johore forms the subject of a special chapter.¹ However a shift in emphasis is noticeable in the later years, which led to the construction of north-south lines, in contrast to the early lines, which aimed simply to link inland areas, generally centres of mining or agricultural activity, on an east-west axis, to the west coast.

Moreover there was a close connection between the development of the railway lines and the opening up of land for estate purposes. This eventually resulted in the planting of rubber estates from Kedah to Johore, roughly along the line of the railway, while the central and eastern side of the Peninsula which lacked such infrastructure was seriously disadvantaged and thus opened to estate agriculture rather later.² The result of course was that development of the western side of the Peninsula rapidly outstripped that of the east coast.

In its letter to Swettenham, appointing him Resident-General, the Colonial Office had indicated that Chamberlain was 'inclined to lay special stress on the desirability of extending roads and railways on one uniform system with a view to promoting both British and native interests in the Peninsula.'³ Swettenham could scarcely have drafted a better policy brief himself, and wasted no time in forwarding his plans, while still in London. His memorandum on the subject was completed in February 1896.⁴

In the memorandum, accompanied by maps, Swettenham pointed out that lines previously built had generally been to connect

inland areas with the coast. He now recommended joining up Prai, opposite Penang, with Malacca. The most important addition, he considered was a line linking Taiping to Chemor, thus joining the Larut and Kinta sections. The second most important was a line linking Taiping to Prai. This should be undertaken by private contractors, as he believed the Straits Settlements could not afford the funds, and Perak, as a Federated State should not be lending money for the construction of a railway on Colonial territory (Province Wellesley). This led to some embarrassment with the British firm of Kerr Stuart, to which Swettenham had apparently given certain commitments in early 1895. Indeed, they went so far as to claim that in March 1895 he had given them a contract to construct this part of the line. They in turn had agreed to set up a syndicate of well-known capitalists to provide finance. Matters were protracted while Swettenham was away on leave, so much so that one of the Kerr Stuart directors met Swettenham in France in May 1896 as Swettenham returned to the East. Swettenham wriggled and prevaricated, and after further exchanges of letters, Kerr Stuart had to be satisfied with sending a board resolution to the Colonial Office deploring the behaviour of the government. The Colonial Office would not agree the terms on which the line might be purchased by the government, while the company objected to the use of a government officer to certify the construction expenses. The surviving correspondence, and the tone of Kerr Stuart's reactions suggest that Swettenham had in some way double-crossed them, but like so many of his other transactions of this nature it is no longer possible to get to the heart of the matter.⁵

Swettenham also recommended two further lines, one to join the Perak and Selangor systems, and a further branch-line from Kuala Kubu, over the Semangko (Gap) pass to Kuala Lipis. This was to be Pahang's first railway, and would help open up what was believed to be the rich mining potential of Raub and the adjacent areas. Lucas was in favour of simply acknowledging the memorandum and passing a copy to Mitchell. However Chamberlain insisted that the matter should not be allowed to rest. Sir Montague Ommaney of the Colonial Office was therefore asked to consider the matter further, and opened his discussion by pointing out a serious omission: no mention was made of the overall need to link Prai with Singapore. He felt the Colonial Office should make a start at each end, while the various states involved were encouraged to complete their own linking stretches. Moreover, he strongly deplored the idea that any parts of the main line should be in private hands, citing the financial problems of the private sector-financed Sungei Ujong line as an example of the pitfalls when such development was allowed.

The covering dispatch of 17 March 1896, accompanied by a copy of Swettenham's memorandum, noted that the the same gauge had been used for all lines to date: this would assist the future extension of the railways. Chamberlain remarked:

I hope to find that in the future the work of constructing highways and railways along or across the Peninsula will be pursued not merely with a view to the profit and development of particular districts, but upon comprehensive principles, and with a preference for such works as are capable of future extension to meet future needs.⁶

While basically approving Swettenham's suggestions, though in a slightly different order of priority, Chamberlain, who personally signed this dispatch, added that it was important to build a line at an early date to connect Singapore town with the mainland. In considering the financing, he endorsed Ommaney's view that the states should pay for those parts of the line passing through their territories, from their own resources, while the Colonial government in Singapore should be prepared to finance the remainder. The costs were to be significant: some \$6.5 million according to one newspaper.⁷ This Swettenham considered should not be too difficult, despite recent straitened financial conditions. If necessary, he felt the Straits Settlements should raise a loan to expedite the completion of the line. Chamberlain concluded his dispatch by stressing that railway development in the Peninsula had his hearty support.

Swettenham returned to the attack in April 1896, just before he left London, urging that at a time when prices of tin and coffee were down, it made sense to embark on railway work to mop up unemployment. He suggested that the Crown Agents should be asked to enquire about the terms on which £500,000 could be raised for the FMS as a loan in London. Swettenham characteristically preferred a loan to FMS rather than to the Straits Settlements since the latter 'would probably give rise to the imposition of very inconvenient restrictions by the Straits Legislature.'⁸ He followed this letter with a further note, a day later to Lucas, referring to a personal discussion with Chamberlain, 'the other night:' the two men must have dined together.⁹

Mitchell, by nature more cautious, replied warily in June: 'I have grave misgivings as to the policy of hastening beyond the present system of expending all available balances in gradually extending the lines of railway in the direction indicated [by Swettenham].' Moreover he strongly objected to proposals to raise a loan to speed up railway expansion. He added that if it was deemed essential to follow this course, it was preferable that the FMS should raise a loan, rather than the Straits Settlements, thus

affirming that the FMS was able to stand on its own feet. In this at least he agreed with Chamberlain and Swettenham.¹⁰

Swettenham's skilful dispatch writing was matched by equally skilful public relations. The opportunity of Mitchell's visit to Kuala Lumpur in September 1896 was taken to draw attention to the achievements of the railways.¹¹ Despite the evident disapproval of both Mitchell and his brother, James, Swettenham persevered.¹² In October 1896 he set out in detail the work in hand and made his proposals. Selangor could afford \$500,000 for surveys and construction other than that already in hand, while Perak could only afford \$300,000, and all of that would be required for existing projects. A loan therefore was essential. He stressed: 'I can only repeat that, in my opinion, this work is the most important, most valuable and most urgent of any that we can undertake.'¹³ At the same time, on his return in 1896, the state railways were quickly brought under one administration.¹⁴

Swettenham's opponents in London were still hostile, with Fairfield commenting on the railways scheme: 'A last attempt of Mr F. Swettenham to blow the trumpet.'¹⁵ In another paper Swettenham dangled a carrot before Mitchell and Chamberlain, by saying that if a loan was agreed, this would enable Selangor to take over the whole of the Pahang debt to the Colony, at that moment approaching a million dollars, at 4 per cent. Assuming the FMS could raise funds in London at 3.5 per cent, this exercise would result in significant economies.¹⁶

Chamberlain was tempted, but felt obliged for the moment at least, to accede to Mitchell's arguments:

... while I still adhere to the views which I have expressed as to the importance of railway enterprise in the Malay Peninsula and still look to its being vigorously prosecuted when circumstances permit, I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that the time has not arrived for the extensive scheme proposed by Mr Frank Swettenham.¹⁷

Swettenham was not prepared to be overruled in this way, and fought back with a trenchant but polite argument setting out the virtues of his scheme. He failed to move Mitchell: '... forcible as are Mr Swettenham's arguments, they do not afford me ground for departing from the conclusions detailed [earlier].'¹⁸

Chamberlain was eventually won over, in the early months of 1897. It is not evident from surviving correspondence why this occurred, and the suspicion must remain that Swettenham had written directly to him. In Chamberlain's dispatch of 12 May 1897, Swettenham was fully vindicated, and Mitchell humiliatingly overruled. Chamberlain queried whether it was essential to undertake all the work at once, and admitted he had been persuaded

to abandon his outright veto on a loan because he had been convinced that railway economies dictated early completion which would only be possible with loans. Though he would have preferred to avoid a loan, he made it clear that if funds ran out, he was prepared to raise one to complete the work. He specifically approved the plan which Swettenham had set out earlier and instructed the Governor to take immediate steps to implement it.¹⁹ Rubbing salt in the wound, he added:

I am glad to add to the reasons which lead me to sanction this course my confidence in Mr Swettenham's experience and good judgement, and my wish that while his services are still available, he may superintend the carrying out of the policy of which he is so strong an advocate.²⁰

The press, while praising Swettenham, clearly felt that most of the credit should go to Chamberlain: 'The whole of Malaya has to thank Mr Chamberlain for initiating the greatest forward movement it has known.'²¹ Meanwhile Mitchell remained intensely conservative. He reiterated his opposition to a loan for the railway in his covering letter accompanying the Resident-General's 1896 report.²² Towards the end of 1897, he noted that he had turned down a request by the Resident-General for the Straits Settlements to lend surplus funds to the Federation, on the grounds that such a course would involve selling gold investments 'which does not appear to me expedient.'²³ Even after Mitchell had lost the main battle, he still maintained that the local banks would not take up the loan, which would therefore have to be raised in the United Kingdom. Subsequently the necessary facilitating legislation was passed.²⁴

The overruling of the Governor in this manner was remarkable, and attested to Swettenham's determination. Later it turned out to be unnecessary to raise any loans: the extensions were financed entirely by the states themselves, and the through line from Prai to Seremban was opened to coincide with the convergence on Kuala Lumpur of the rulers for the Conference of Rulers in 1903. The minutes of proceedings noted that Sultan Idris, his wife and attendants had travelled by train from Kuala Kangsar to Kuala Lumpur, a journey that took eight and a half hours.²⁵

The first year of Federation saw a slowing down in railway receipts in Perak at least.²⁶ This was chiefly due to a depression in the tin industry.²⁷ Swettenham saw fit to make no mention of the railways in his first report as Resident General.²⁸ By the time of his 1897 report, Swettenham was crowing over his success with the loan: '... the Secretary of State for the Colonies sanctioned ... the raising of a loan of £500,000 ... This is the most important step, after Federation, that has yet been taken in the Malay Peninsula: and

it is doubtful whether anything could confer such benefits on this country and its people as the raising of this loan and the devotion of so large a sum to railway construction.' He believed it would take four years to complete the work of linking up the lines.²⁹ Moreover advantage should be taken of the low prices and surplus labour which reflected the slump in the tin price at the time to press ahead with these important public works. They were to be financed, initially at least by the sale of Indian investments.³⁰ Ultimately the sales of the Indian investments and current revenues proved adequate.

There was a curious inconsistency about the reporting of the opening of one of the sections of this line, from Prai to Bukit Mertajam, by Mitchell. The *Malay Mail* reported that Swettenham was present, and characteristically, that in his speech he took credit for the initiation of this railway. Two days later the *Perak Pioneer* categorically reported that he was not able to attend.³¹ It is possible that he sent a speech to be read out by one of his underlings. Two months later, when the stretch down to Nibong Tebal was opened by the High Commissioner, Mitchell praised Swettenham for his crucial role in railway development.³² The newspapers gave him credit for the Victoria Bridge over the Perak River at Karai, costing \$300,000, commemorating Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee: '... a bridge to bring Malayan wheels to British keels.'³³

With his commitment to the development of the railways, it was not surprising that Swettenham should have fought hard to promote them. In July 1899 it was suggested by a number of European businessmen, supported by Thamboosamy Pillai and Loke Yew that the proposed increase in railway rates would make them higher than those charged elsewhere. They held a meeting with Swettenham in Carcosa on 12 July. The *Malay Mail* reported the following day that the Resident-General, '... in hobnailed boots yesterday afternoon performed a war-dance upon the prostrate bodies' of those who objected. They were treated to Swettenham's well-known sarcasm, in a manner which was subsequently criticized.³⁴

In early 1899, Swettenham took stock of the position with a memorandum showing the loans and revenue which in his view would be needed to complete the railway work in each of the Federated States, to link Prai to Port Dickson. The overall cost he estimated at ten million dollars: no mean sum, even for the FMS.³⁵ By mid-1899, both Swettenham and Mitchell recognized that the work would take longer than expected. Moreover there had been an error of \$715,000 in the Perak estimates, and additional unforeseen expenditure of \$185,000 had emerged. Swettenham was confident that all this could be raised out of the state's current revenues.³⁶

They did not anticipate completion of the full line before 1903 or 1904, and Swettenham complained of the delays caused by the need to fund half the cost of extensions from current revenue.³⁷ Progress was also hampered in 1899 by labour shortages. In September, in submitting the railway estimates for 1900, Swettenham, ever impatient, was urging that capital work should be undertaken as soon as possible.³⁸ He reiterated his views at the turn of the year, specifically mentioning that construction in Perak could be accelerated if local expenditure were increased in 1900 and 1901, as recommended by Hanson, the Chief Railway Engineer for Perak. 'Let him spend and I will recommend it to the High Commissioner,' minuted Swettenham.³⁹

By 1900, in his first report as Acting High Commissioner, Swettenham recorded with some satisfaction that the aim would be achieved without any recourse to borrowings.⁴⁰ Progress continued in 1901. However there was trouble in Singapore, over the question of building a railway there to link the docks via Tank Road near Fort Canning north towards Johore. Mr Earle in the Legislative Council had the temerity to question an additional vote of some \$161,500.⁴¹ There was further trouble towards the end of that year from Mr Burkinshaw, also in the Legislative Council who called for an enquiry to ensure that Singapore money had been properly spent. Swettenham, with Colonial Office backing had little trouble in silencing him.⁴²

In mid-1901, as a result of earlier recommendations by Swettenham, Spooner was appointed General Manager of the FMS railways, while Caufeild went to the PWD.⁴³ One of the striking features of Swettenham's choice of men for key posts, here of Spooner, and in another context, E.W. Birch, was his realism and lack of pettiness. Both men, earlier in their careers, had been protégés of Maxwell, yet Swettenham was willing to use their considerable talents and energy. Swettenham himself was not slow to bring his own achievements to the attention of the Colonial Office. At the end of March 1902 he set off on a grand tour, by sea to Penang, and then by rail wherever possible from Prai to Seremban. On his return to Singapore he wrote a detailed account of this journey, including comments on the few places where work was still in progress. He was hopeful that the line would be complete by the middle of 1903.⁴⁴ By the time of his valedictory report for 1902, dated 11 July 1903, Swettenham could boast of a continuous line, 300 miles in length, from Province Wellesley to Seremban in Negeri Sembilan, with plans for extending this to Johore Bahru: all constructed without recourse to loans.⁴⁵ The Kajang-Seremban stretch had been opened as recently as 3 April 1903.⁴⁶

Preference was given to the main trunk-line from north to south. Although Swettenham had in the late 1880s as Resident, Selangor, pressed for the opening of routes into Pahang, the idea of a Pahang extension to the railway system had first been mooted by Maxwell. This had been the source of a row between him and Spence-Moss in 1890.⁴⁷ It is possible that when in 1896 Spence-Moss, under the name Moss-Blunden, had briefly visited Singapore, he may have warned Swettenham off the idea of a railway extension to Pahang.⁴⁸ The Pahang extension, when it came some years later, branched off much further south, at Gemas. Detailed discussions which took place in 1901 and 1902 on the whole question of rail links between the West coast and Pahang revealed Swettenham's disillusion with Pahang: it had failed to live up to its promise of mineral wealth. For this reason he urged extreme economy in any plans for railways in the state.⁴⁹ In his address to the Legislative Council in October that year, he remarked, 'Pahang has not yet realized the expectations of those who believe in the value of its undeveloped resources.'⁵⁰

Swettenham in these years also took a keen interest in the irrigation schemes in Perak. In early May 1901 he paid a visit north, stopping three days in Penang before going over to Perak via Prai and Nibong Tebal. Near Sungei Gedong an irrigation canal under construction was to pass under the Kurau River by means of a siphon. He reviewed all of this, and the basic canal building work. Two thousand labourers were employed on the scheme, but their health was poor, due chiefly to an outbreak of dysentery. There were however very few cases of malaria and beri-beri, the other two scourges of the period. He reported in characteristic style: 'I originally recommended this irrigation scheme, and it is a great satisfaction to me to be able to report that it is now fairly started.' He continued further south, reviewing railway progress en route, taking a boat from Teluk Anson to arrive in Singapore on 9 April, in time to meet the Siamese King the following day. It had been a hectic visit. 'Well worth reading,' commented Lucas on the subsequent dispatch. 'Sir F. Swettenham's energy and go are worth a great deal,' added Ommaney.⁵¹

Swettenham's experience in Perak in the early 1890s led him to favour main lines constructed by government in the early years of Federation. Yet he still did not exclude the possibility of private sector involvement. In the short term this led to a series of abortive attempts to encourage the private construction of branch-lines. Swettenham was disposed to encourage new capital by 'grants of large areas of land and concessions for constructing tramways, rice-mills and other beneficial schemes.'⁵² The comment foreshadowed

his own exploits in this direction over the Johore railway concession.⁵³

The case of de la Croix afforded one instance of Swettenham's continuing partiality for private enterprise. De la Croix was deeply involved in 1898 in plans to introduce tramways in Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Malacca, in most cases linking towns or settlements on an east-west axis. He had asked for exclusive terms, and although Swettenham supported him, the Colonial office was not prepared to agree to these concessions. As a result the project lapsed, like other private sector railway projects at the time, as the government decided to press ahead with its own schemes for extending and connecting existing lines.⁵⁴ The episode did however provide a further opportunity for a clash between the Swettenham brothers. Sir James Swettenham managed to suggest in dispatches to London that his younger brother had arranged a special deal on this subject with de la Croix: an allegation which Swettenham rebutted, forcefully and angrily.⁵⁵

Another example of a railway which was constructed and run privately was the Sungei Ujong railway, financed and constructed in the late 1880s by Hill and Rathborne, who had subsequently transferred their interest in it to a London-quoted company. The terms granted by Smith at the time had been too generous, and thus the state government was continually obliged to subsidize the line to make up a certain level of profits guaranteed in the agreement.⁵⁶ By the end of the 1890s, the Sungei Ujong railway was regarded as a considerable inconvenience. Swettenham on this occasion took the view that it would not be an attractive purchase for the government, more particularly as the guarantee was to continue till 1908.⁵⁷

By 1903 he had become completely disillusioned with turnkey jobs by private contractors on civil engineering projects such as railways and piers.⁵⁸ Moreover he insisted that the consulting engineers should be supervised locally, rather than by the Crown Agents in London. In this, once again, Swettenham received the full support of Lucas: 'I can only say, as I have said before, that in my opinion Sir F. Swettenham should be allowed to have his way.'⁵⁹

Significantly, the only new stretch of line that did not form part of the north-south link was the extension from Klang to the new port, Kuala Kelang. Although the work was completed by 1897, it was not opened till the new wharfs were ready.⁶⁰ Substantial construction problems were encountered with the wharfs at Kuala Kelang.⁶¹ They were consequently not completed till 1901, when Swettenham announced their completion to the Colonial Office, adding smugly that the port had been renamed Port Swettenham. A Colonial Office official minuted: 'It would I think have been in better

taste if Sir F. Swettenham had not assented to the change.⁶² The completion of the new port at a cost of over \$1 million and its eventual opening on 15 September 1901 were reported in detail in the Selangor Annual Report for the year, together with the name change, 'in honour of the officer with whose name the Federation of the Native States and the extension of the railway system will be indelibly connected in the annals of the Malay Peninsula.'⁶³

There were however immediately serious problems. The land at the new port had not been properly drained, and this resulted in a major outbreak of malaria with some twenty-five deaths. The matter was raised in a leading newspaper article two months later on 15 November 1901. As a result, Swettenham ordered the port to be closed, and administered a stern reprimand to the Acting Resident General: 'Nothing can excuse a useless waste of life.'⁶⁴ Drainage measures were put in hand, the funds for this work being approved immediately by Swettenham.⁶⁵ Gauze screening was provided for living quarters. However the fact that Swettenham had ordered gauze as early as June 1901, well before the port was opened, suggests that he was well aware of the problem at an earlier date, and was only spurred to criticism of his colleagues in Selangor by the newspaper article of 15 November 1901. Swettenham himself acknowledged this point the following year. By 31 December 1901, seventy-three people had died. The solution of the problem of malaria at Port Swettenham gave Dr (later Sir) Malcolm Watson a start in his brilliant career in the control of tropical diseases.⁶⁶

This line was significant because, as we have seen,⁶⁷ it was alleged that Swettenham himself was speculating in land in the area, and it was this consideration which determined the choice of the old port, rather than the very much more suitable Kuala Sungei Dua, the site of a more recent new port which was only built almost three-quarters of a century later. The error in choosing the correct site for the port was spotted at least as early as 1903. There was discussion at that time over whether the Federal workshops should be sited in Selangor, or the senior state, Perak. The *Perak Pioneer*, remarking that the site of Port Swettenham was too far from the sea, concluded incorrectly as it turned out that this would probably cause Selangor to lose the Federal workshops.⁶⁸

Swettenham was also involved in the development of port facilities at Butterworth and Penang.⁶⁹ In 1898, Swettenham recognized that there was a need to construct a wharf at Butterworth, at the railway terminal. Two years later, problems were identified on the other side of the Penang Straits. The chief of these was the siltation of the quayside.⁷⁰ Towards the end of March 1902, it was confirmed that Swettenham was arranging to borrow \$600,000 at 4 per cent interest from the FMS to pay for the expansion.⁷¹ Of this,

\$300,000 was to come from Selangor.⁷² The work was to be handled by a Mr Newmarch, under an agreement which, Swettenham noted differed significantly from what would have been regarded as standard elsewhere.⁷³

Scandal, if such there was, must have been associated primarily with the breach of the financial principle that the FMS should bear its own expenses, and not be required to finance developments in Straits Settlements territory. The chief objector would in all probability have been Sultan Idris; yet no traces of his objections now remain. It seems unlikely that strong objections came from London, for in his speech to the Straits Settlements Association on his return to London at the end of 1903, Swettenham boasted that there was to be 600 feet of berthage by February 1904, and the wharf itself would be completed by August 1904.

In the development of infrastructure in the years 1896-1903, roads took second place to railways. Swettenham spelt out his priorities quite clearly in his 1897 report:

... though this form of expenditure [roads] always repays the outlay, the large sum that it will be necessary to provide for railway construction will leave little for other works, and, looking to the amount of road construction already done in Perak and Selangor, I should prefer to see any available balances spent on the irrigation of land for rice cultivation.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, various road-building projects were undertaken during this period, notably the Pahang trunk-road, linking Selangor and Pahang over the Semangko (Gap) pass, near the turning to what is now Frasers Hill, extending as far as Kuala Lipis. This was constructed to facilitate the transfer of the state capital from Pekan to Kuala Lipis, and in the hope that it would boost development, particularly mining, in the west of Pahang, tying it into the Selangor transport system with a railway terminus at Kuala Kubu leading to Port Swettenham. As a result, for the year 1896 at least, over \$2 million were spent on roads, with less than \$1 million spent on railways.⁷⁵

From 1898 to 1901 no major new road-building exercises were embarked on, although the finishing touches were put to the main trunk-road from Province Wellesley to Malacca. However in 1902 the laying out of a road from Bentong to Kuala Pilah was sanctioned.⁷⁶

In 1902 Treacher as Resident-General, no doubt at Swettenham's prompting, asked the Selangor authorities for proposals for road construction in the state. He received a very lukewarm response. Apart from a proposal to upgrade the track across Genting Bidai, prompted by 'the Towkay in Bentong,' who must have been Loke Yew, anxious to link his mines in Bentong

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more closely to Kuala Lumpur, it was felt that no new main roads were required. Caulfeild pointed out that a number of roads which had been built had not taken the most economic route, and suggested a thorough examination of 'natural routes.'⁷⁷ However in 1903 further consideration was given to the respective merits of the Genting Bidai and Genting Sempah passes. On balance, the decision favoured the Genting Sempah.⁷⁸

There is an oral tradition that shortly before his departure, Swettenham was taken out on horseback by Loke Yew on an overnight camping expedition up the Gombak Valley to view a possible trace for this new road. By September 1903 he had approved a new road through the Genting Sempah.⁷⁹

In assessing Swettenham's overall contribution to the development of transport infrastructure in the Peninsula, it must be recognized that his vision and drive contributed greatly to the comparatively advanced infrastructure which existed on the west coast of the Peninsula before independence. That road and rail communications developed very much less swiftly on the eastern side of the main range was chiefly because there were no viable economic activities in Pahang to justify the high capital costs of transport infrastructure. This, more than anything else held back the development of the east coast. If it were necessary to identify Swettenham's primary achievement during his years in Malaya, that achievement would certainly be his success in establishing the railway system in the country.

NOTES

1. See Chapter 40.
2. Amarjit Kaur, 1985, *op. cit.* Maps on pp. 48 and 50.
3. CO 273/203:356 CO to Swettenham, 27 December 1895 filed with Gov. to CO, Confidential of 1 May 1895.
4. CO 273/223:331 ff. enclosed in CO to Governor, 17 March 1896. Swettenham's memorandum was dated 17 February 1896.
5. CO 273/233:482 ff. Kerr Stuart and Co. to CO of 15 September 1897. See also CO 273/223:423 ff. Correspondence with Kerr Stuart, 28 May-5 November 1896. CO 426/12:387 ff. and *PSSLC* 1896, C.341A. Sir J.A. Swettenham to RG, 2 November 1896.
6. CO 273/223:331 ff. Chamberlain to Mitchell filed with Swettenham's memorandum of 17 March 1896.
7. *Ibid* and *STD*, 24 August 1896.
8. CO 273/223:394 ff. Swettenham to CO, 22 April 1896.
9. CO 273/223:403 Swettenham to Lucas, 23 April 1896.
10. CO 273/215:376 ff. Mitchell to CO, 288 of 24 June 1896. See also CO 273/228:140 ff. Gov. to CO, 15 of 18 January 1897.
11. *STD*, 23 September, 26 October, 5 November 1896.
12. CO 273/218:202 ff. J.A. Swettenham to CO, 483 of 16 October 1896.

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13. Swettenham's minutes on SSF 724/96 of September 1896.
14. HC 8661:6 FMS AR, 1896 RG's Report, para. 11.
15. CO 273/218:202 ff. Comments on J.A. Swettenham to CO, 483 of 16 October 1896.
16. HCO 417/96.
17. HCO 675/96.
18. HCO 21/97.
19. HCO 21/97.
20. CO 273/228:140 ff. in Chamberlain's reply of 12 May 1897 to Mitchell to CO, 15 of 18 January 1897.
21. *STD*, 19 June 1897.
22. CO 273/229:138 Mitchell to CO, 89 of 4 June 1897.
23. HCO 163/97 Mitchell to Chamberlain, 2 November 1897.
24. CO 273/229:282 Mitchell to CO, 121 of 17 August 1897. CO 273/239:453 Ag. Gov. to CO, telegram of 17 February 1898. CO 273/239:599 Gov. to CO, 43 of 7 April 1898. CO 273/240:18 Ag. Gov. to CO, 59 of 5 May 1898 and CO 273/245:423 ff. Swettenham (on leave in UK) to CO, 8 and 20 January 1898.
25. HCO 1404/04 containing the Proceedings of the Conference of Rulers, July 1903.
26. HC 8661:13, PAR, 1896, para. 2.
27. *Ibid*.
28. HC 8661:3-10, FMS AR, 1896.
29. HC 9108:7, FMS AR, 1897, RG's Report, para. 12.
30. CO 273/241:291 ff. Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, 164 of 14 October 1898 enclosing Swettenham's memorandum and CO 273/241:301 Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, 169 of 28 October 1898 enclosing further letters and memoranda by Sir F.A. Swettenham. See also SSF 4148/97.
31. *MM*, 29 June 1899, *PP*, 1 July 1899.
32. *PP*, 14 October 1899.
33. *STD*, 26 March 1900.
34. *MM*, 11, 13 and 15 July 1899, *STD*, 22 July 1899.
35. CO 273/250:408 ff. Mitchell to CO, 55 of 8 March 1899, enclosing Swettenham's memorandum of 2 March 1899. This was subsequently printed in CO Pamphlet Eastern 70.
36. CO 273/251:428 ff. Mitchell to CO, 175 of 12 July 1899 enclosing Swettenham's memorandum of 1 June 1899.
37. HC 9524:7, FMS AR, 1898, RG's Report, para. 8.
38. CO 273/252:106 ff. Mitchell to CO, 238 of 28 September 1899.
39. CO 273/260:317 ff. Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, 60 of 8 February 1900 enclosing Hanson's and Swettenham's notes of 30 December 1899 and 26 January 1900.
40. HC 382:5, FMS AR, 1899, RG's Report, para. 8. and HC 815:4, FMS AR, 1900, Acting High Commissioner's Report, para. 9.
41. CO 273/271:12 Swettenham to CO, 445 of 12 October 1901.
42. CO 273/271:380 Swettenham to CO, 517 of 17 December 1901. Further problems due to the cost of land which had to be acquired are recorded in CO 273/271:569 Swettenham to CO, 530 of 24 December 1901.

43. CO 273/266:663 Memorandum by Swettenham on railways, 27 September 1900. CO 273/273:255 ff. Swettenham to CO, Confidential, 19 June 1901.
44. CO 273/282:819 Swettenham to CO, 154 of 29 April 1902. It seems possible that the pictures of railway construction in *British Malaya* facing pp. 256 and 257 were taken on this tour.
45. HC 1297:3 FMS AR, 1901, HC's letter to Chamberlain, para. 3, and HC 1819:3 FMS AR, 1902, HC's letter to Chamberlain, para. 2. See also CO 273/294:49-79 Swettenham to CO, 249 of 14 May 1903 and CO 273/294:845 Swettenham to CO, 425 of 13 August 1903.
46. *STD*, 4 April 1903.
47. Amarjit Kaur, 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
48. See Chapter 32.
49. SSF 450/02, including a memorandum from Swettenham in Penang, 7 August 1901.
50. *PSSLC* 1901. C.242. Swettenham's address, 8 October 1901.
51. CO 273/273:5 Swettenham to CO, 172 of 10 May 1901.
52. HCO 456/98, 13 March 1898.
53. See Chapter 40.
54. SSF 3350/97, HCO 456, 828 and 901/1898. See also CO 273/245:508 ff. for Swettenham's and de la Croix's memo.
55. CO 273/240:510 ff. Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, 121 of 20 August 1898. See also CO 273/240:335 Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, 94 of 12 July 1898.
56. For full details and references see Amarjit Kaur, 1985, *op. cit.*, pp. 21 ff.
57. CO 273/251:591 ff. Mitchell to CO, 95 of 14 April 1899. CO 273/252:559 ff. Sir J.A. Swettenham, Confidential of 26 November 1899, CO 273/261:868 ff. Gov. to CO, 269 of 28 June 1900, CO 273/273:166-73 Gov. to CO, Confidential of 30 May 1901, CO 273/274:26 ff. Swettenham to CO, Secret of 5 September 1901.
58. CO 273/268:13 Swettenham to CO, 138, of 21 March 1903 cited both the Singapore railway and the Penang Pier as examples where construction had not been satisfactory due to the activities of turnkey contractors.
59. CO 273/272:702 ff. Swettenham to CO, Confidential of 12 April 1901. See also CO 273/270:320 Swettenham to CO, 391 of 7 September 1901.
60. HC 8257:31 FMS AR 1895. Report on Selangor, paras. 27 and 30. *STD*, 7 July 1896. PPC 8661: 42, FMS AR 1896, para. 31.
61. SSF 3135/96, 2660/97, 5980/97.
62. CO 273/274:151 Swettenham to CO, 326 of 24 September 1901, *PP*, 18 June 1901.
63. HC 1297:12 FMS AR, 1901, RG's Report paras. 35 and 52-3.
64. *STD*, 15 November 1901, SSF 6346/01, 6712/01, 6846/01, 6847/01, 6852/01, 6931/01, 6949/01, 6981/01, 7047/01, 7060/01, 7071/01.
65. Mills, 1942, *op. cit.*, p. 299.
66. SSF 7160/01, 1857/02, 1116/02. See also Watson, 1921, *op. cit.*
67. Chapter 30.
68. *PP*, 18 April 1903.
69. It has been alleged that one reason for Swettenham's premature retirement was a degree of financial impropriety associated with the Penang Harbour Board: the late T.B. Barlow, *pers. comm.* If such was the case, no evidence survives.

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70. CO 273/278:204 ff. Swettenham to CO, 57 of 7 February 1901 and *STD*, 16 January 1901.
71. CO 273/278:526 Swettenham to CO, Telegram of 20 March 1902.
72. SSF 729/03.
73. CO 273/280:162 Swettenham to CO, 334 of 7 August 1903.
74. HC 9108:8 FMS AR 1897, RG's Report, para. 13.
75. HC 8661:8-9 FMS AR 1896, RG's Report, paras. 17 and 19. See also HC 9108 as above and HC 9524:7 FMS AR 1898, RG's Report, para. 9.
76. HC 1819:17 FMS AR 1902, RG's Report, para. 44.
77. SSF 3605/02.
78. SSF 4752/03, 4838/03 and 5051/03.
79. HC 2243:25 FMS AR 1903, RG's Report, para. 34. See also HC 2777:95 FMS AR 1904, Pahang Report, para. 67. Mr. W. Martin, pers. comm. and SSF 5051/03.

The Social Whirl

Swettenham's social activities as Resident-General to some extent followed the pattern of his Perak days, but on a larger scale, for he now divided his attention between Selangor and Perak. For the first three months of his return to the new job in 1896, Swettenham was kept extremely busy on the west coast, with visits between Kuala Lumpur, Taiping and Singapore, establishing Federation.

In early September however, Swettenham took ten days off to accompany the Mitchells up the east coast. Swettenham's role was primarily that of interpreter for Mitchell in his interviews, particularly with Sultan Zainal Abidin III of Trengganu, 'a very shy young man.' In part at least the mission was a probing exercise, to try to determine the attitudes of the east-coast sultans towards Siam, and the extent of Siamese influence. When in Kelantan, Swettenham lost no time in pointing out to Mitchell the areas of land no longer cultivated, attributable in his view to disease. Indirectly of course this was a criticism of the Siamese administration. Mitchell was particularly incensed at the Siamese flag which he found flying at Kota Bahru, but was persuaded that it would be in Britain's best interest not to make an issue of the matter: that would simply draw the attention of other Western powers to the area.¹

Cricket and racing continued for the moment to be important pastimes, although by the end of 1897 he was playing less frequently, and by the end of 1898, he was increasingly adopting the role of host and senior spectator. By 1900, he had effectively given up any active participation in the game.² However his interest in the game continued undiminished, and in 1903 he presented a competition trophy to be played for by cricket clubs in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States.³

On the racecourse, Swettenham's favourite horse, Locky, continued to run, trained by the well-known W. Dallan, based in Singapore.⁴ Yet there are signs that Swettenham was anxious to reduce his racing commitments: why else should he have advertised Locky for sale in mid-1897?⁵ Such a sale would certainly have strengthened his resources to cope with undisclosed expenses. In

fact, Locky was not sold for another two and a half years, just before he left for UK on leave in mid-1900. Locky's last race was in Penang in January 1899, where he won a third prize. While owned by Swettenham, he had won no fewer than twenty races.⁶ Thereafter Swettenham kept and ran the occasional horse, but appears either to have lost interest, or been too short of funds to afford to race.

Evidence of Swettenham's continued interest in painting comes from accounts in the papers of exhibitions held around the country at which he exhibited. In Singapore, after 1901, he made Government House available for exhibitions. At most of the exhibitions, his own contributions were noted, and in some cases titles of the paintings were given. From these it is evident that his output was extensive. It seems likely that many of his works were given away, or offered as prizes in charitable causes.⁷ Another focus for relaxation during his final years in Malaya was the bungalow which he built for himself at Magnolia Bay, near Port Dickson. Here he entertained some of his closest friends, such as the Caulfields.⁸

A steady flow of newspaper and magazine articles in UK helped to keep his name in the limelight there and were conveniently reported locally. In December 1901 *Black and White* published such an article, centre page, with a fine photo of Swettenham. Headed 'A Strong Man in the East,' it described him as, 'A strong fine specimen of the best of Englishmen,' and, touching tactfully on his domestic problems, referred to him as, 'a man who has striven bravely in the face of great difficulties.'⁹ A few days later *Free Lance*, commenting on his appointment as Governor, remarked accurately: 'In appearance Sir Frank is a singularly handsome man, with magnificent bold blue eyes and a heavy moustache.'¹⁰

As befits middle age, Swettenham became a keen golfer, and in 1897-9 served as president of the Selangor Golf Club.¹¹ His handicap was listed, in 1896 as 16, early 1897 as 17, and by 1899, 30.¹² He was regarded as 'a very useful player', and as a senior member he took 'a keen interest in the affairs of the Club.' The club had elected Mitchell as its first honorary member, and conferred the same distinction on Swettenham when he became High Commissioner.¹³ The Lake Club celebrated his KCMG award by putting on an impromptu firework display in his honour.¹⁴ His investiture took place in Perak in September of that year, with Mitchell doing the honours from the Sultan's residence, the Istana Club, in Taiping, where both men were staying.¹⁵

In October 1897, Swettenham departed on the *Laos* on a further leave to London, taking with him Raja Alang Iskandar, son of Sultan Idris, to be placed in Oxford with a tutor, A.L. Smith.¹⁶

Swettenham incorrectly claimed that he had 'placed him at Oxford with Mr Smith of Balliol.' Raja Alang was in fact introduced to A.L. Smith, then tutor and later Master of Balliol College, by Hugh Clifford, who brought him to them 'with some pomp and ceremony.' He remained in the household for five years. Smith's widow and biographer made no mention whatever of Swettenham.¹⁷ Idris was ultimately displeased with his son's performance in Oxford. His displeasure reached breaking point when Idris saw the absurd uniform which the boy had had made, to wear when he accompanied his father in Edward VII's coronation procession. Dissatisfaction with his son's performance in UK could not have improved Idris' relations with Swettenham. Hence perhaps Swettenham's comment that Raja Alang stayed 'longer than was necessary or advisable.'¹⁸ Swettenham's references to Raja Alang Iskandar at this time are touched with sarcasm. When in 1902 he was making arrangements for the official Malayan party to the coronation of Edward VII in London, headed by Sultan Idris, he referred scathingly to Raja Alang Iskandar who had studied at Oxford for four years as 'believed to be proficient in the English language.'¹⁹ The trip proved a fiasco, for the coronation had to be postponed due to the illness of Edward VII. In Singapore, Swettenham was obliged to cancel at the last moment a celebratory ball which he had planned and distribute all the food to charity.²⁰ The cancellation however did not prevent the holding of a Straits Coronation Banquet in London, where Sir Cecil Smith, presiding as Chairman, paid tribute to Swettenham's ability as a brilliant administrator.²¹

After Raja Alang had been established in Oxford, albeit not by Swettenham, his leave fell into the usual pattern: visits to his brother Richard, at Hurworth-on-Tees, interspersed with visits to friends, hunting from Whilton Lodge, near Rugby, and periods spent at the Bath Club in London. The latter was convenient for visits to the Colonial Office. Swettenham's letters written while on leave, show that he was concerned chiefly with his own levels of remuneration, the loan for the railway expansion and the Krian Irrigation Scheme.²²

He doubtless enjoyed being presented at a levée at St. James's Palace on 2 March 1898,²³ and delivering a speech to assembled retired governors at the Straits Settlements Annual Gathering held in London.²⁴ He was back in Singapore by 17 April 1898. The rest of the year was spent up and down the west coast, apart from a visit to Pahang with his brother in September. Towards the end of the year a massive tiger shoot was arranged at Enggor in Perak, for the benefit of both the Sultan and Swettenham. Some 2,000 beaters

were mobilized, but despite all the effort, no tiger was seen. Against such odds, one's sympathies rest with the tiger.²⁵

The year 1897 witnessed the death of Martin Lister, who went on leave for health reasons and died of fever in the Red Sea on board ship: a loss to the country of an able administrator, and, for Swettenham perhaps the closest of those few colleagues in the service who could call themselves friends rather than acquaintances.²⁶ Swettenham paid a graceful tribute to his old friend in his first Resident General's Report.²⁷ He also headed an appeal for a memorial plaque, which can still be seen in St. Mary's Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur.²⁸ Less unwelcome no doubt was news of the deaths of Maxwell in West Africa and his ever critical colleague, Fairfield, in the Colonial Office. This conveniently left his old friend Lucas, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, in a position of undisputed influence.²⁹

The final obsequies of another old colleague, Syers, formerly Commissioner of Police were performed in 1899. His body, originally buried in Pekan, after his tragic death while hunting seladang at the time of the first durbar in 1897, was exhumed with the assistance of Dr Travers and brought to Kuala Lumpur for reinterment. Some 6,000 mourners attended the funeral parade, with Swettenham at their head, bearing tribute to the esteem in which Syers was held by all classes and races of Kuala Lumpur society. It was by far the largest such procession Kuala Lumpur had ever seen.³⁰

Closer to home, though probably of no great concern to Swettenham was news of the death of his brother-in-law, M.E. Holmes, killed in action as a sergeant in Astor's battery outside Manila on 13 August 1898. The newspapers tactfully refrained from mentioning the cloud under which he had departed from Perak. His amiable but undistinguished brother in Selangor, H.C. Holmes, departed for UK the following year.³¹ Swettenham had done his best for his Holmes brothers-in-law, but they had not excelled. Now it was the turn of his own nephews, sons of his elder brother, W.N. Swettenham. James Parry Swettenham, born in 1875, was appointed an assistant engineer in the PWD in 1902. His younger brother, Roger Frances Ross Swettenham was appointed a Settlement Officer in 1906. Neither shone in the service: R.F.R. Swettenham later developed a drink problem.³²

Nor were remoter relations excluded. Mr Spencer Jackson, a young solicitor, was the son of a distant cousin of Swettenham. He was accepted into the service, but resigned shortly afterwards on grounds of ill-health. On this occasion, the exercise backfired badly, for Jackson and another cadet wrote to *The Times* alleging that cadets were obliged, 'to live amidst surroundings of a social and

moral nature such as we hesitate to describe.' Unfortunately young Jackson failed to spell out the details of his insalubrious surroundings. However the matter was taken up in the *Malay Mail*, and Swettenham was reminded sharply by his elder brother that he had promised on his last leave to produce a pamphlet containing, for the benefit of FMS cadets, details of conditions they would encounter.³³

Of more concern was the sudden death of his brother, Richard Paul Agar Swettenham, at the end of 1899 at the comparatively young age of fifty-four. Swettenham received £100 from his modest estate.³⁴ However Richard's shares in the Australian Raub Syndicate, undoubtedly bought on his younger brother's recommendation, and possibly for his account, were also bequeathed to Swettenham. This produced a sensitive predicament, and Swettenham raised the matter with the Colonial Office. They replied that while he should in due course sell the shares, there was no urgency to do so until such time as he could sell without incurring a loss.³⁵

The problem of government officers investing in businesses over which they might have some influence was one which had surfaced sporadically over the years, since the celebrated row unleashed by Maxwell in 1892. Mitchell was strongly opposed to any investment. In 1899 when Swettenham enquired whether public officers in Perak could take up shares in the States Trading and Mining Co., Mitchell said no.³⁶ Swettenham at once wrote back to appeal against this ruling, stressing the need for a flexible approach, and encouraging officers to invest. There was a slight relaxation. The Governor and the Resident-General were to be allowed discretion, but the same rules must apply both to the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States.³⁷ By April 1900, the subject had developed into a row between the Swettenham brothers, with Sir Frank taking a relaxed attitude in contrast to his elder brother's squeaky clean approach.³⁸ Later in the year, Sir James asked for a ruling on landholding by government officers. Needless to say, no clear ruling was ever established. Swettenham even pressed the issue when he was on leave.³⁹

Mindful of earlier problems, Swettenham now dutifully reported that he owned certain mining company shares and enquired whether it was necessary to dispose of them.⁴⁰ The matter had become so sensitive that on Swettenham's return from leave, as Officer Administering Government in February 1901, Lucas advised that the whole issue should be dropped.⁴¹ Even when Swettenham was Governor, the subject remained touchy. Sultan Idris had presented Swettenham with a wrist-watch, a memento in appreciation for Swettenham's having arranged his visit to London

for the coronation of Edward VII. Swettenham was at pains to report that he had returned this gift to the Sultan through the good offices of Seri Adika Raja, without causing offence to any of those involved.⁴²

Mitchell's death in early December 1899 produced a frenzy of speculation in the local press about the identity of his successor.⁴³ The speculation was natural and cannot have been unwelcome. For the moment, Sir James Swettenham acted in his place. The Colonial Office and Sir James must have been equally relieved when Swettenham left on 29 April 1900 on what was to be his last trip to UK before his ultimate retirement, forestalling further unseemly rows between the brothers.⁴⁴

Swettenham's return on this occasion took him back to Shanghai, and on a visit to the recently acquired British enclave of Weihaiwei on the Chinese coast in north-east Shantung. Britain had leased the area from China in 1898, at the same time as it had leased the New Territories of Hong Kong. Weihaiwei was needed as a naval base to counteract Russian influence at Dairen and Port Arthur, and German influence to the south, near Tsingtao.⁴⁵ The British parliament had just voted £4 million to fortify the place, and Swettenham's brief was to report on what steps were necessary to start a civil administration there.⁴⁶

He travelled to Hong Kong on the cruiser, *Terrible*. In China he was joined by G.T. Hare, the knowledgeable Protector of Chinese in the FMS. Shortly after his arrival at Weihaiwei, Swettenham was stricken by malaria, so severe that he had to be moved to the ship of Admiral Bruce, to be under the closer supervision of the ship's surgeon. Hare meantime with his excellent knowledge of Chinese dialects pursued enquiries round the enclave, directed by Swettenham from his sick-bed.⁴⁷

Nothing appeared to be known of the Russian enclave, Port Arthur, directly to the north, across the mouth of the Gulf of Chihli. Swettenham therefore slipped away while he was recuperating, took an overnight boat across the Straits from Chefoo, and spent a day wandering round Port Arthur. At lunch time he found a Japanese restaurant, and was not surprised to discover that the wife of the proprietor spoke Malay. He recorded laconically: 'She had travelled,' meaning almost certainly that she had at one time been a prostitute in Singapore.⁴⁸ He failed to get the photographs he required of dock installations in Port Arthur, but back in Chefoo the next day, managed to acquire adequate photographs. These were in due course passed to the Admiralty.

Once back in Weihaiwei, Swettenham was anxious to visit Peking, and indeed he and Hare got as far as Tientsin before further progress became impossible due to the outbreak of the Boxer

Rebellion. They returned to Chefoo, and with the assistance of the Weihaiwei authorities, Swettenham was able to pick up a Japanese boat offshore, proceeding thence to Tokyo, and then by an American vessel via Honolulu to San Francisco. Swettenham continued his journey across the USA by rail to New York. There he embarked on an American vessel for UK. The travel gave him ample time to prepare his two reports on Weihaiwei. These he sent to Joseph Chamberlain on the evening of his arrival in London. The following day he was summoned to meet Chamberlain, and discuss matters in more detail. Chamberlain took him over to see Arthur Balfour, the Prime Minister, in the House of Commons, where they discussed British policy towards China. Swettenham recorded that he did not find Balfour a congenial personality.⁴⁹

In England, Swettenham spent the first two months of his leave with relations, in particular his elder sister, Lucie Maria Jones-Parry and her large family at Llwynton Hall, Wrexham. One of her sons, Captain G. Jones-Parry was appointed to the police the following year.⁵⁰ The register shows a spate of letters to the Colonial Office between 11 and 16 August, on a wide range of matters concerning the Peninsula.⁵¹ Once again there was the customary wrangle with the Colonial Office over his salary, which was renewed from Singapore in March 1901.⁵² There was also at least one visit to the Yorkshire moors, at Masham, for grouse shooting in September, as guest of Lord and Lady Annaly.⁵³

News of Swettenham's impending elevation to High Commissioner, to succeed his brother, on his return from leave in February 1901 prompted an enthusiastic letter of congratulation from his former boss, Sir Andrew Clarke, and sent Swettenham scurrying back to London, to take up residence at the Bath Club in Dover Street, strategically placed for forays into the Colonial Office at Whitehall. Apart from a week in December, when he was laid up, possibly with flu, Swettenham used the club as his base from early October till Christmas, when he returned to Wrexham. In December he was corresponding with the Colonial Office about a sword of the Perak regalia, part of which was still missing and believed to be in the Colonial Office Library. It had, he thought come into Hugh Low's hands, and passed via him to Meade and the Library.⁵⁴ He located the sword, took it back with him to Perak, and gave it to Sultan Idris, who confirmed its identity.⁵⁵ There is also evidence to show that while in London Swettenham was involved in deliberations over the Johore railway.⁵⁶ Although Swettenham later recorded 'a half season's hunting in the Shires' that winter, it is difficult to see how he could have managed this, given his prolonged stay at the Bath Club, and his return to the Straits in mid-February 1901.⁵⁷

Swettenham's return to Singapore in February 1901 was remarkable for the almost unseemly haste with which he took over from his elder brother. He arrived off the *Australian* early on 17 February, went straight to Government House, and saw his brother off that evening. Sir James returned to Ceylon, where he took up the post of Colonial Secretary.⁵⁸ It was noted that Sir James, by his generous entertainment, had made a mark for himself as the 'most munificently and generous hospitable Governor' in memory. There is no indication in the records of overt hostility between the brothers, but the event must have caused comment. It was perhaps to allay idle gossip on this score that Sir James returned later in the year to pay a social visit on his younger brother.⁵⁹

On his return, Swettenham was only gazetted Acting Colonial Secretary, and not Officer Administering Government or Acting Governor.⁶⁰ This provoked predictable local comment: he would not agree to an acting job unless there was substantial incentive.⁶¹ Less than a month later however Swettenham was boasting that the Straits Settlements were the premier crown colony.⁶² Distinguished positions, some in fields where he had not previously shown great expertise or interest, were offered: in June 1901 he became patron of the Singapore Philharmonic Society,⁶³ in September, the President of the Singapore Cricket Club,⁶⁴ and in February 1902, on this occasion reverting to interests of his earlier years, Patron of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.⁶⁵ He was eventually confirmed as Governor in September 1901.⁶⁶

The first social event of importance, and possibly the occasion which gave impetus to Swettenham's wish to take over so swiftly from his brother, was an impending royal visit, by the Duke and Duchess of York, later to become King George V and Queen Mary. The Duke, as Prince George, had last visited Singapore in 1882, and it seems likely that Swettenham would have met him on that occasion.

Even before Swettenham reached Singapore he had cabled to the Colonial Office for fuller details of the plans. Moreover problems with Sultan Ibrahim of Johore at that time threatened to provoke a diplomatic incident of major proportions. The Sultan had recently been expelled from the Singapore Racing Club, of which he was an honorary member, on the grounds that he had forged the pedigree of a horse which he had recently run there.⁶⁷ The Sultan laid the blame, not altogether convincingly, on his trainer. Swettenham could scarcely invite the Sultan to meet Their Royal Highnesses so long as his reputation was thus besmirched. Yet failure to do so would create a diplomatic incident. Herbert of the Advisory Board in London was consulted, amongst others, while Swettenham for once lost his customary cool, writing personally to

Lucas for help on how to avoid the crisis. The panic was such that the question was even referred to Chamberlain.⁶⁸ A suitable compromise was eventually reached under which the Sultan set sail for Europe on the day of the arrival of the royal party, ostensibly to further negotiations for the construction of the railway through Johore to Singapore. However, the Sultan was not to call on the Colonial Office. It doubtless involved Swettenham in some delicate diplomatic footwork, but the solution was regarded as ingenious and satisfactory.⁶⁹

A sum of \$25,000, subsequently increased to \$45,000 was allotted for the reception of the royal party. This consisted, in addition to the Duke and Duchess, of a large number of courtiers, together with Sir John Anderson, specially knighted for the occasion, and destined to be Swettenham's successor as Governor. The two men did not get on well. Reception committees were planned, amid frantic telegrams to London to ascertain the proprieties of the dress-code. In the atmosphere of high excitement which pervaded Singapore, the *Ophir* carrying the royal party arrived on 21 April. Although Swettenham was late in arriving at the quayside to meet them, this appears not to have acted as a dampener on subsequent proceedings.⁷⁰

If the homework on the dress code was well done, publicity for the results was less impressive, for on the evening of the reception in Government House, news unexpectedly went round that those shaking hands with the royal party would have to wear white gloves. The ladies, of course, posed no problem: they always wore gloves in the evening in those days, but the men were in a quandary. 'If there had been a dance afterwards we should have come prepared, but as it was, only about a dozen pairs of gloves were found to be available. The difficulty was cleverly got over by stationing a chain of men *behind* the Royal chairs. The gloves were then dealt out in "ones" to the first twenty-four to be received, and as each man passed the Duchess, the man at the end of the chain pulled the glove off the wearer's hand, passed it down the line, and handed it to one of the waiting guests. Men who had got a left-hand glove had to wear it back to front!'⁷¹

The four-day visit, which took place between 19 and 23 April 1901 was judged a success, although the Penangites were disappointed that time could not be found for a visit to their island. The royal guests were greeted by 6,000 flag-waving schoolchildren and the royal carriage was escorted on arrival by a detachment of Perak Sikhs in scarlet uniforms, lent by the Sultan of Perak. That part of the detachment which was mounted were ridden by European jockeys (possibly Australians).⁷² The opportunity was also taken of awarding Sultan Idris the GCMG and inviting him to attend the

The Social Whirl

forthcoming coronation of Edward VII.⁷³ The royal party embarked on a hectic round of speech-giving, sight-seeing, polo tournaments and official receptions. On one evening there was a visit by rickshaw to Chinatown.

Kling Street was completely "paved" with Turkey red cloth, while there was a complete "ceiling" of the same cloth stretching from housetop to housetop across the whole length of the street. The Chinese dealers knew how to do things properly in those days. The rickshaw pullers were clothed in scarlet running pants and scarlet coats for the occasion. I remember that the Duke looked quite at home in his rickshaw, and the Duchess sat up very stiffly, and seemed *most* uncomfortable, as if she expected to be thrown out at any moment!⁷⁴

Swettenham himself presented the Duke and Duchess with a facsimile, made in pure gold, of the Perak chain of office in the form of coconut flowers which formed part of the Perak regalia.⁷⁵ Swettenham retained till his death the effusive letters of thanks which he received at the end of the visit, some of which were published.⁷⁶

For Swettenham, one of the major perks of his post as Governor in Singapore was the steady flow of the great and the good who, when they passed through either stayed with him at Government House, or at the very least called on him. Contacts thus made were to provide a useful springboard into the Edwardian society of Britain after his retirement. Lord and Lady Lonsdale who came to stay in April 1903 were a good example.⁷⁷ Sir Andrew Clarke had died at the end of March 1902, and later in the year Swettenham entertained one of his daughters in Singapore, on her way to Australia.⁷⁸

A more regular visitor to Singapore during Swettenham's governorship was Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry Keppel, by then in his nineties. To the consternation and horror of his family, Keppel insisted on travelling to Singapore, which he had known so well half a century earlier. In November 1901 he arrived in Singapore, and Swettenham paid him a visit at Raffles Hotel. The following month he stayed as a guest of Swettenham's at Government House.⁷⁹ On this occasion it was decided that New Harbour should be renamed Keppel Harbour in his honour. Swettenham presided over the ceremony, after which the party, with all the leaders of Singapore in attendance steamed through the anchorage, 'and broke champagne bottles on a convenient buoy, cheering the old Admiral to their hearts content.'⁸⁰

He returned again in January 1903, staying till early April when Swettenham headed a ceremonial procession to see him off

from the wharf.⁸¹ Swettenham, like most others who met him, obviously felt considerable affection for the old man, for when he published *British Malaya*, he included as frontispiece a photograph of himself in top hat and tail coat, sitting talking to an extremely aged Keppel, on the lawn at Government House.

March 1903 saw the arrival of further visitors, one of whom was to play a more important role in Swettenham's life: Gertrude Bell and her brother Hugo. She was then an unmarried woman of thirty-five, from a British north country family of industrialists: a noted traveller, linguist, mountaineer, diplomat and scholar who eventually made her name in the Middle East. The Bells' visit was broken by a trip to Java in mid-March, from which Hugo returned with a fever. Swettenham was helpful and solicitous until the two set sail for China on 31 March. Gertrude Bell's comments in the course of her visit are interesting. Her initial comment, in her diary for 12 March 1903 reads: 'Sir F. is a curious saturnine creature but very good company. We get on famously, I assuming a light and jocular tone.' The next day, in a letter to her stepmother, she reported: 'I don't really like him, but I like a good many nice people a great deal less. You can't help feeling the undoubted power and ability of the Tuan under an almost comic self-absorption. I equally cannot help feeling that he has got a horrid inside. But after all that's not my business and he's extremely kind to us and very entertaining. This morning he talked his own shop to us — it was excellent good hearing.' By 25 March she noted, 'I get on surprisingly well with Sir F.,' and on 30 March, 'I have made great friends with my host, who is a curious and interesting person. He has been kind to us.' The latter reference referred to the particular concern he showed over her brother Hugo.⁸² She was a keen photographer, and took a series of him in Singapore, amongst the best of him at that period. It was a hobby which they shared.⁸³

A further extract from her diary casts an interesting light on Swettenham's household and social arrangements, for she met there none other than Isabel Caulfeild, the writer of the Valentine poem of 1895. The diary reference suggests for Mrs Caulfeild a role somewhat more than a housekeeper, somewhat less than a mistress. The thank you letter which Gertrude Bell wrote to Swettenham, on board the *Shanghai* was formal but friendly, starting, 'My dear Excellency', and paid tribute to the long and enjoyable discussions they had enjoyed: 'I feel I owe the Gods of Talk some return for the week they gave me at Singapore.'⁸⁴ The meeting formed the basis for an intense correspondence, to be considered later.⁸⁵

Another visitor of interest at this time was Alleyne Ireland, who was born in England but emigrated early in his life to USA, where he was associated with Chicago University. He was



59. Sultan
Muhammad IV
of Kelantan.

60. Sir Hugh Low.



61. Sultan Ahmad of Pahang, an early photo when he was still Bendahara, 1860s.



62. Sultan Zainal Abidin III of Trengganu.

63. Drawing of Frank Swettenham from *Review of Reviews*, May 1896, p. 394.



64. Frank Swettenham, 1896.

65-67. Studies of Sir Frank Swettenham in 1903 by Gertrude Bell.



67. Sir Frank Swettenham in 1903, by Gertrude Bell.



68. Sir Frank Swettenham, 1890s.



69. Gertrude
Bell from a 1921
portrait.

70. Sir Charles
Mitchell, Governor,
1894-1899.



71. Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore with coronation crown in 1886.



72. Sultan Ibrahim of Johore as a young man.



73. Isabel
Caulfeild,
1890's.



74. Sir Frank Swettenham and the Caulfeilds at Port
Dickson, early 1900s.

recommended to Swettenham by the Foreign Office, when he proposed to them a two-year tour of British establishments in east Asia, with a view to writing an authoritative work on British colonial policy for publication in the USA. It was agreed he should be granted full facilities.⁸⁶ In 1902 he had visited Singapore and British North Borneo, earning the criticism of the *Straits Times* for receiving a 20,000 acre concession from the Governor, E.W. Birch. Although the initial accusation that this was a *douceur* for favourable articles about the territory was retracted, the deal itself was not denied.⁸⁷ The following March he returned to Singapore and stayed at Government House with Swettenham, and the Bells. It was announced that he would spend three months studying colonization in the tropics.⁸⁸ Despite the favourable treatment he received in Singapore, when the articles came to be published in the papers in the autumn, they were still found to be critical of the British North Borneo Government.⁸⁹

Swettenham found the association agreeable and useful, for as will be seen, he was keen to develop, after his retirement, a position as the ultimate authority on colonial matters. The association with people like Ireland helped to consolidate such a reputation. Meantime, it was satisfactory to Swettenham that his hospitality should be repaid by flattering references in Ireland's articles. That on the FMS contained a welcome tribute to 'the genius of Sir Frank Swettenham.'⁹⁰

NOTES

1. CO 273/217:285 ff. Mitchell to CO, 423 of 14 September 1896.
2. *MM*, 14 November 1898. He played in his last cricket match between 5 and 7 August 1899: *MM*, 8 August 1899.
3. *Sunday Times*, (Singapore) 5 June 1938.
4. Dallan died in 1901: *STD*, 21 October 1901.
5. *PGSC*, 12 July 1897.
6. *PGSC*, 18 January 1899, *PP*, 21 January 1899. Thereafter Locky went into retirement, dying in November 1901. Obituary in *STD*, 22 November 1901.
7. Accounts of exhibitions in which Swettenham participated are in *STD*, 26 December 1899, 31 October and 4 December 1901, 11 February, 5 March, 4 and 12 December 1902, *PP*, 31 March 1900, 4 July 1898, 24 November 1898, 30 December 1899, *MM*, 2 August 1899, 7 May 1901 and *PGSC*, 4 November and 7 December 1901, 18, 24 and 27 February 1902. It is evident that Lim and Barlow, 1988, showed only a selection of his paintings: more await discovery. Major Giles, collaborator in his early painting activities, died in Rhodesia on 17 December 1900, not 1901, as noted in Lim and Barlow, 1988.
8. Plate 74, *STD*, 14 and 15 October 1902.
9. *STD*, 4 December 1901, reporting on the article in *Black and White*.
10. *Free Lance* quoted in *STD*, 10 December 1901.

11. RSGC Centenary Booklet, 1893-1993. Kuala Lumpur, 1993.
12. *MM*, 14 December 1896, 19 January 1897 and 18 February 1899.
13. Anon, 1954, op. cit., pp. 16 and 29.
14. *STD*, 15 April, 28 June 1897, *MM*, 23 June 1897.
15. HCO -/97 of 22 September 1897 and *PGSC*, 18 September 1897. See also *PP*, 5 and 30 November 1898.
16. *PGSC*, 27 September 1897, *PP*, 29 September 1897, *STD*, 30 September 1897, *Footprints*, p. 109.
17. This series of minor discrepancies over the incident, while not important in themselves, adds to doubts about *Footprints* whenever Swettenham is showing off or pontificating. See M.L. Smith, *Arthur Lionel Smith, Master of Balliol (1916-1924): A Biography and Some Reminiscences by His Wife*, 1928, p. 145. The subject, drawing partly on Raja Alang Iskandar for material was dealt with, in novel form in *Saleh: a Prince of Malaya* by Hugh Clifford with introduction by J.M. Gullick, OUP Paperback, 1989 ed.
18. *Footprints*, p. 109.
19. CO273/283:352 ff. Swettenham to CO, 233 of 26 June 1902 on coronation arrangements.
20. CO 273/283:429 ff. Swettenham to CO, Telegram of 23 July 1902 enclosing private note from Swettenham.
21. *STD*, 21 June 1902.
22. Swettenham's letters while on leave are in CO 273/245: 423 ff. and CO 273/230:312 ff. Leave details are in *STD*, 18 October 1897.
23. *PP*, 16 April 1898.
24. *PP*, 2 March 1898.
25. *STD*, 23 November 1898, *MM*, 4 November, 28 November 1898, *PP*, 16 November 1898.
26. *SFP*, 8 February 1897.
27. HC 866:10 FMS AR 1896, RG's Report, para. 10.
28. *PGSC*, 13 April 1897.
29. *PGSC*, 25 May 1897 and *PP*, 7 July 1897.
30. *STD*, 27 July 1899, *MM*, 10 August 1899.
31. *STD*, 31 October 1898, *PP*, 2 November 1898 and *MM*, 21 February 1899.
32. Appointment book, ANM, and *MM*, 9 November 1933.
33. CO 273/239:497 Mitchell to CO, 28 of 18 March 1898, reporting Jackson's resignation, CO 273/241:499 Sir F.A. Swettenham to Sir J.A. Swettenham, 23 November 1898, reporting the problem, and citing *The Times*, 25 October 1898 and *MM*, 22 November 1898. For further correspondence, see CO 273/244:237, CO 273/245:105, CO 273/251:173, and CO 273/252:192 ff. Swettenham to HC, 30 September 1899.
34. Will of R.P.A. Swettenham at Somerset House. Died 20 December 1899.
35. CO 273/277:605 ff. Swettenham to CO, 22 January 1901.
36. CO 273/251:301 Mitchell to CO, 159 of 15 June 1899.
37. CO 273/251:352 Mitchell to CO, 166 of 29 June 1899. See also CO 273/260:132 Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, Confidential of 18 January 1900, and *PP*, 17 January 1900.
38. CO 273/261:433 Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, 173 of 28 April 1900.

39. CO 273/262:396 Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, 357 of 1 September 1900. CO 273/266:760 Swettenham to CO, 28 December 1900.
40. CO 426/13:596 Letter of 25 January 1901.
41. For comments on acquisition by government servants of land or shares see CO 273/236:501 ff. and CO 273/237:309 ff. OAG (Sir J.A. Swettenham) to Chamberlain, 22 June 1898 and Sir J.A. Swettenham's revised circular on the same subject, 24 August 1899. The subject continued to feature in official correspondence. See CO 273/266:760, 769 and CO 273/272:758 for Lucas' memo advising the matter be dropped.
42. CO 273/284:462 Swettenham to CO, 483 of 10 December 1902.
43. CO 273/249:403 Cables of 7 and 8 December 1899. *STD*, 9 December 1899, 8 January 1900, *MM*, 9 and 12 December 1900. See also E.A. Brown, *Indiscreet Memories*, Kelly and Walsh, London, 1936, p. 7.
44. For leave details see CO 273/266:627 ff. Swettenham to CO from Wrexham, 4 September 1900. See also CO 426/13:251, and CO 273/261:154 Sir J.A. Swettenham to Chamberlain, 146 of 12 April 1900.
45. Pamela Atwell, *British Mandarins and Chinese Reformers*, OUP, 1985.
46. CO 273/260:608 ff. Swettenham to Lucas, Telegram of 15 March 1900 and Lucas to Swettenham, 16 March 1900. In *Footprints*, p. 124, Swettenham makes a further minor error in saying that he was instructed to visit Weihaiwei in October 1900.
47. *Footprints*, p.125 ff. and CO 273/262:560 Gov. to CO, 375 of 15 September 1900.
48. *Footprints*, p. 125.
49. *Footprints*, pp. 125-9.
50. Letters in CO 273/262 and CO 273/266 indicate a longish visit to Wrexham. CO 273/263:315 Swettenham from Bath Club, 6 December 1900 to Marsh of CO. *STD*, 30 December 1901.
51. CO 426/13:592 ff.
52. CO 273/263:755 ff. and CO 273/272:646 Swettenham to CO, 121 of 30 March 1901.
53. CO 273/262:12 Swettenham from Yorkshire to Lord Ampthill, 19 September 1900, on recruitment of Captain Duff.
54. CO 273/266:710 Swettenham to CO, 14 and 20 December 1900.
55. CO 273/268:332 Swettenham to CO, 194 of 27 April 1901.
56. *STD*, 14 January 1901.
57. *Footprints*, p. 130.
58. *PP*, 14 February 1901. He did not stay long, and was soon afterwards posted as Governor to Guiana. *STD*, 30 April 1902.
59. *STD*, 18 February 1901. For Sir James's visit, *PGSC*, 2 and 15 October 1901.
60. CO 273/276:562 Colonial, 18 January 1901, *MM*, 26 February 1901.
61. *PP*, 21 February 1901.
62. *PP*, 14 March 1901.
63. *FP*, 6 June 1901.
64. *STD*, 3 September 1901
65. *STD*, 14 February 1902.
66. CO 273/280:70 Swettenham to CO, 303 of 10 July 1902.

67. *STD*, 6 March 1901.
68. CO 273/266:546 Swettenham to Lucas, private, 7 March 1901.
69. CO 273/267:46 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 15 February 1901. CO 273/267:546 ff. Swettenham to CO, private of 21 February 1901 on the Sultan of Johore's misdeemeanours and CO 273/268:286 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 11 April 1901, reporting on his solution to the problem. *STD*, 12 April 1901.
70. Brown, 1936, op. cit., p. 51.
71. Brown, 1936, op. cit., p. 55.
72. Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, *The Web of Empire: A Diary of the Imperial Tour of Their Royal Highnesses the Duke & Duchess of Cornwall and York in 1901*, Macmillan, London, 1902.
73. HC 1297:41, FMS AR 1901, PAR, para. 42.
74. Brown, 1936, op. cit., pp. 55-6.
75. *STD*, 9, 11, 21, 23 February, 6, 15, 23, 25 March, 6, 12, 20, 23 April, 1 May 1901, 18 September 1902, PP, 12 June 1902, PGSC, 3 April 1901.
76. *STD*, 31 May 1901. *Footprints*, p. 132.
77. *Footprints*, pp. 137 and 151. *MM*, 15 April 1903.
78. *STD*, 2 and 29 April 1902, CO 273/284:26 Swettenham to CO, Secret of 7 October 1902. See also *STD*, 1 November 1902, 26 January 1903.
79. *STD*, 18 November 1901, PP, 22 November 1901, PGSC, 12 December 1901.
80. Vivian Stuart, *The Beloved Little Admiral: The Life & Times of Admiral of the Fleet, The Hon. Sir Henry Keppel, GCB, OM, DCL, 1809-1904*, Robert Hale, London, 1967.
81. *STD*, 2 and 3 January, 10 February, 3 April 1903.
82. H.V.F. Winstone, *Gertrude Bell*, 1978, paperback by Quartet 1980. For extracts from her diary, I am indebted to Miss Lesley Gordon of the Library, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
83. *MM*, 16 February 1897, and photos on pl. 65-67.
84. This and subsequent letters from Gertrude Bell have been quoted from the Swettenham Papers, Stoodley Coll. on microfilm.
85. See Chapter 45 below.
86. CO 273/275:420 Foreign 3 July 1901.
87. *STD*, 16 and 23 December 1902.
88. *STD*, 26 March 1903.
89. The articles formed the basis of a book by Ireland published in 1905, *The Far Eastern Tropics....* etc.
90. *STD*, 11 April 1904.

Singapore and other Matters

When in 1901 Swettenham took over as Governor of Singapore, he became the first and only holder of that post to have spent his entire career in the Straits Settlements and more particularly in the Malay States. His successor as Resident-General was W.H. Treacher, a colleague of many years and a dull plodder without flair, whom Swettenham had recommended for the post.¹ It was convenient to have an obedient retainer. However in Singapore as Governor he was obliged for the first time in his career to deal directly with the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements. This Council, albeit unrepresentative of the populace of the Straits Settlements, was divided between 'officials' and 'unofficials'. The officials were members of the administration, including the Governor, as Chairman, and the Colonial Secretary.

The unofficials consisted of various prominent citizens including representatives of Malacca and Penang, often, but not always, chosen for their commercial pre-eminence. It was customary for a leading Chinese to be appointed. In 1895 this honour fell to Dr Lim Boon Keng. Lim, born in 1869, had distinguished himself at school, and was awarded a scholarship to Edinburgh University. He qualified in medicine in 1892.² It seems likely that the seat on Legco reflected Sir James Swettenham's high opinion of him, for when Lim married a lady from Foochow, at the end of 1896, Sir James was invited to propose the health of the young couple. He did so 'with a certain natural diffidence due to his own state of bachelorhood.'³

If Dr Lim was on good terms with Sir James, the same could not be said of relations with his younger brother. Lim supported the preparations for the royal visit, attending the public meeting called to lay plans, and, after the event, seconded the additional vote which was required.⁴ On 29 October 1901, he launched a bitter attack at a Legco meeting to consider the estimates. It was wide-ranging, including the management of the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company, the police, and the opium and spirit farms, but focused on British attitudes to the education of Chinese in Singapore, an

issue on which he had written four years earlier.⁵ Swettenham in his reply used heavy sarcasm: '... he [Swettenham] thought while the honourable member had pointed out an enormous number of defects this Colony has, it was at least a source of congratulation that the Colony should have produced Dr Lim Boon Keng.' In reply to Lim's criticisms of the lack of support for education of the Chinese, Swettenham maintained that this community 'of aliens' was so rich that they could afford to pay for their education themselves.⁶ Swettenham's failure to restrain his disposition to implied sarcasm, causing much offence, was one of his shortcomings: '... there was a subtle suggestion of sarcasm in all he said.'⁷

Pressure was renewed at a Legco meeting in January 1902. Swettenham defused the situation by setting up an education commission, to which Lim was appointed.⁸ However this still did not silence Lim, for a few days later he was criticizing government policy in respect of control over consultants: traditionally, in respect of large projects in Singapore, such consultants were controlled from London. Lim, in the influential *Straits Chinese Magazine* of which he was editor, argued for control from Singapore.⁹ Lim was evidently becoming a thorn in Swettenham's side. The solution was to appoint him, together with the troublesome Sultan Idris to participate in the coronation delegation to London: a device which safely removed him from the Straits Settlements for three months.¹⁰

Lim was also involved in legislation for the establishment of a married women's property act and registering medical practitioners.¹¹ He sided with J.M. Allinson, a respected member of Legco in criticizing investments made by the Crown Agents on behalf of the Currency Commissioners, in Australian and other colonial stock, which they considered risky. In this connection they prepared a memorandum outlining their objections. Swettenham suppressed this, and was supported by the Colonial Office in London, with the unusual exception of Lucas, who pointed out that they were responsible businessmen and should be listened to.¹² When Lim Boon Keng's resignation from Legco was announced, the *Straits Times* remarked pointedly that the news would be received 'with general if not with universal regret.'¹³

The strained relations between the two men suggest that Lim may well have had a fair idea of some of Swettenham's less creditable activities. It also reflected Swettenham's divergent attitudes towards the two main racial groups, the Malays and the Chinese. He would never have spoken of the Malays in the following hostile terms, applied to the Chinese in Singapore. On visiting a Chinese part of the town, he remarked:

I was surprised to note the very insolent manner of the Chinese (especially of the shop-keeping classes) towards Europeans. It is only too evident that the Chinese section of the community has got out of hand, and it will be well to make them understand that they are living in a British society and not in China, before the present state of affairs leads to serious trouble.¹⁴

This attitude of hostility towards the Chinese community was later remarked upon in an article in the *Straits Chinese Magazine*.¹⁵

For Swettenham the Straits Settlements government, subject at every move to questioning in the Legislative Council, was less congenial than the free-wheeling ways of the Federated Malay States, with which he was accustomed. In 1901 he was rapped over the knuckles by the Legislative Council for spending money without their prior approval. He replied airily that technically the rules only allowed him freedom of action over sums not in excess of \$500, so far a cry from the \$10-20 million he had been accustomed to deal with in the FMS that he had quite failed to note the difference.¹⁶

The death of Queen Victoria in 1901 provoked an outburst of imperial lament which affected Singapore no less than other territories under British rule. To commemorate her rule, it was decided that the old Town Hall should be rebuilt on a grander scale, and named the Victoria Memorial Hall. Swettenham personally contributed \$1,000 to the fund, headed the committee and on 9 August 1902 laid the foundation stone. He showed impatience over the incompetence of the Public Works Department in the design of the building, in which he took a close personal interest. It was only completed and opened in 1905.¹⁷

During Swettenham's period of office, Singapore domestic life was relatively peaceful. There was however one exception: a strike by the rickshaw coolies, who formed the least disciplined and roughest section of Singapore society. In June 1901 a rickshaw puller had collided with Swettenham's carriage in Singapore. The puller who was prosecuted a few days later, with Swettenham himself appearing in court as a prosecution witness, was found guilty and sentenced.¹⁸ The incident prompted a general strengthening of administrative procedures, in particular a demand by the police that pullers should have some knowledge of the rules of the road. The rickshaw pullers interpreted this as a sign that the Governor was out for vengeance, and a remarkably complete strike was organized on 21 October 1901. Since 75 per cent of the Europeans working in Singapore used rickshaws to travel to and from the office, they regarded the matter as serious. Swettenham was in Singapore at the time:

The Governor then took a very firm attitude and summoned the Towkays (rickshaw owners) to attend at Government House. He explained to them that they were on British soil, and what they could do in China they could not practise here with impunity.

It was said that His Excellency kept the Towkays waiting at Government House for about an hour, sending in biscuits and drinks to them. When he did appear, he talked to them affably about the weather, etc., and said it was very nice of them to call and see him. After a short while he excused himself, saying he was very busy, and just as he was leaving the room, turned to them and said: "Oh, by the by, gentlemen, there's a rickshaw strike on in town. There's also a boat leaving for China tomorrow. If that strike is not stopped before the ship leaves, you'll be on it! Good morning."

Whether this actually happened or not I cannot say, but certain it is that next day the strike was called off, and in a few hours the vehicles were out on the streets again¹⁹

Swettenham also publicly arrested two of the leading Chinese towkays involved, and was congratulated on his firm line by the *Straits Times*. Subsequently the principal owner in the most troublesome faction was banished for three years.²⁰

Of greater significance during this period was Swettenham's involvement in securing for British interests the future of the smelting industry. He had heard unofficially in 1901 that an American consortium under a Mr Bailey planned to buy up tin ore from the miners, at whatever price was necessary to ensure the closure of the smelting works in Singapore and Penang. This would ensure control of the tin ore market in the Straits. A smelter was then to be established in USA, which, because of its control of the Malayan tin ore market, could force down the price paid to miners. Protective tariffs would then be imposed on the import of tin to USA in any form other than unrefined ore.²¹ In March 1903, Swettenham met the representatives of the American interests, warning them that the British government would not sit idly by if they attempted to corner the Malayan market for tin. He quickly informed the Residents in Perak and Selangor, asking for information, and warning that it might be necessary to impose a punitive duty on tin ore leaving Malaya in unrefined form. Memoranda were prepared setting out the extent of the threat:

The whole future of the Colony and Native States will be jeopardised by any interference with the course of the tin trade from which so much of the revenues are derived British territories and British interests are not to be absorbed by American capitalists.²²

Despite plans by the Americans, who claimed they had spent US\$30,000 on a smelting facility in New Jersey, Swettenham remained adamant, and on 1 June 1903 imposed a duty of \$30 per pikul on all ore exported.²³ The move had the necessary effect. Swettenham was no doubt pleased to receive the personal support of Chamberlain over this matter.²⁴ However the alarm caused by this episode was such that the Straits Trading Co., the major smelter, fearing that its shares would be bought up by the Americans as an alternative means of achieving the monopoly they desired, approached Swettenham to suggest that the FMS should take up shares in the company.²⁵

Both the Resident-General and Chamberlain disapproved of the idea, the Colonial Office commenting that it 'wd. be an interesting socialistic experiment.' The official correspondence concluded with a decision to take no further action until Swettenham returned to London on leave.²⁶ Swettenham in *Footprints* dates the suggestion that FMS buy shares in the company a year later, after his retirement. He claimed he was then approached on the matter by a director of the Straits Trading Co. and had a difficult interview with Winston Churchill on the subject. He further claimed, incorrectly, that measures along the lines he suggested were eventually taken. In fact, protective measures taken in 1907 gave power to the government to cancel or refuse the right of any company to purchase ore if such a move was to assist in creating a monopoly.²⁷

Among the other major issues which emerged during Swettenham's period as Governor of Singapore was that of the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company. The company had grown over some thirty-five years to achieve a near-monopoly position in the Singapore docks. The management of the company was not facilitated by the presence of a London Consultative Committee, operating from the same premises as the Straits Settlements Association. This committee on occasions overruled the Singapore board.²⁸

By the turn of the century, there was a serious shortage of docking facilities in Singapore. A series of reports were commissioned on how to tackle the problem, including one by J. Llewellyn Holmes in 1901.²⁹ In the same year a managing director, George Rutherford was appointed by the London Committee, without prior reference to the Singapore board.³⁰ Swettenham first indicated his attitude in 1900 in the course of negotiations by the company for the renewal of a lease on land which it needed for expansion. Swettenham proved uncooperative in the granting of this lease, on the grounds that the company had not fulfilled the terms of a lease, granted some twenty years earlier. Acrimonious

correspondence passed, and John Anderson, chairman of the company in Singapore hinted to London that the feelings shown by Swettenham were not those 'of dignified impartiality but of extreme prejudice and antagonism to the company.'³¹ Certainly Swettenham had acted with undue asperity and revealed a remarkable hostility towards the company.

After Swettenham's retirement, the company encountered further problems. In 1903 the directors had applied to the government to rectify their sea-frontage. It was a comparatively minor technical point, which had the support of the Acting Governor, W.T. Taylor, more particularly because the company, as an inducement, had offered the government two seats on the board of directors. Draft enabling legislation was sent home at the end of 1903. Then, on 22 April 1904, Lyttelton, the Colonial Secretary, changed his mind, and wrote to the new Governor, Sir John Anderson, instructing him not to introduce the bill. The reasons cited were that the government could have no pecuniary interest in the company, and that two government directors would give the government seal of approval, but would have no real power.

Worse was to come, for in late 1904, the company made a further approach to the government in respect of an improvement scheme to cost \$12 million, on which the board had decided. It was agreed that such an ambitious plan would require external financial assistance. In view of railway development on the west coast of the Peninsula, the company suggested that the FMS might become involved in raising the funds. In June 1904 Taylor met the chairman of the board of directors to inform him that although there could be no chance of funding from the FMS, proposals for financing the scheme had been made and recommended to London. Taylor suggested the London Consultative Committee become involved. Preliminary exchanges between the Colonial Office and this committee took place in 1904, culminating in a meeting on 1 October. This was attended on the government side by Lyttelton, Swettenham and Fiddes. Three representatives from the company were also present. No minutes were taken of the meeting, and later there was some dispute over exactly what was said. Swettenham alleged that at this meeting the company representatives had offered to the government the docks, land, works and buildings in the Colony in exchange for a guarantee to pay a dividend of 12 per cent on the shares.³² He criticized the Colonial Office for not accepting this offer on the spot, and said they should have made the chairman put his offer in writing before he left the room. Swettenham also recorded that the company had offered, if government wished to appoint an arbitrator, to agree to his own name being put forward. Not least because it was written many years after the event, this

account seems unlikely. Subsequently the company wrote to the government offering 8,000 shares at \$300 per share, plus a debenture issue, two seats on the Singapore board and one on the London Consultative Committee.³³

A month later, Lyttelton wrote to the Governor, favouring expropriation. The chairman of the London Consultative Committee was informed of this decision on 9 December 1904. Swettenham's initial response to expropriation was that it was impractical.³⁴ Later, he merely recorded that the government's decision to expropriate was a wise one, but criticized the method of deciding on the award.³⁵ Arbitration was eventually decided on after an initial offer of \$240 per share had been turned down by the company which demanded \$700 per share. Swettenham, who was not appointed arbitrator, expressed surprise that a price was not fixed by negotiation. This he felt could have been achieved at a considerable saving on the eventual agreed price of \$761.76 per share. The favourable result was improved still further when the government, shortly before the award, for no evident reason, fixed the value of the dollar at 2/4d. Later³⁶ Swettenham recollected that the government had bought at his own instigation, some 2,931 shares in the company at a very modest price. Thanks to the high award, the FMS Government had made a substantial profit. This, he commented with satisfaction, 'would more than repay the cost of any pension to which I might be entitled on retirement.'³⁷

The chairman of the company in Singapore at the time Swettenham was Governor was John Anderson of Guthrie's, a leading businessman who subsequently chaired Swettenham's farewell dinner, and with whom Swettenham had good relations. Yet Swettenham was not given to taking such a close interest in financial matters without some element of personal involvement. His pronounced hostility towards the company, though not apparently towards its chairman, must leave open the possibility that he was more deeply involved in its affairs than the surviving evidence suggests.

Apart from the issues referred to above, Swettenham's tenure of the Governorship of Singapore was marked more by his preoccupation with developments in the Federated Malay States, and beyond, in the Siamese states, than by any major initiatives of importance within the colony itself. Among the several roles which went with Swettenham's post as Governor of Singapore was that of High Commissioner for Brunei, Sarawak and British North Borneo, stretched along the northern and western coasts of the island of Borneo. These states formed a remarkable trio, for Sarawak and British North Borneo had both been carved out of the traditional sultanate of Brunei. Moreover British North Borneo was

administered somewhat inefficiently by a Chartered Company, on behalf of its shareholders, from London, while Sarawak had by the turn of the century become the hereditary fiefdom of the Brooke family. These two governments rubbed along uneasily with what by then was a severely diminished Brunei.³⁸ The atmosphere of the moment in London was accurately conveyed by a minute from Lucas in 1899:

I still think that the best plan will be not to allow Brunei to be swallowed up either by the company or by Sarawak. I am inclined to think that the best plan will be on the Sultan's death to annex it, though possibly we might, as in the case of Labuan, hand over its administration to the company or Sarawak, and I should be inclined — even in the sultan's lifetime — to ask him whether he would like to be taken over by the Queen: it is very probable that the desolate old man would take the offer.³⁹

Swettenham himself had never visited Borneo, although his brother made a visit in 1900.⁴⁰ His disparaging comments in his youth on the Malay language as spoken in Borneo gave some idea of his views then, and there is no reason to believe they had changed in the intervening years.⁴¹ In 1898, Swettenham had recommended his former Secretary, A.L. Keyser, to the post of British Consul in Brunei. Keyser got the job, and kept Swettenham well-informed about affairs there.⁴²

One of the earliest Borneo problems which Swettenham inherited on becoming High Commissioner in 1901 involved hereditary rights over land between Sipitang and Mengalong. Briefly, one of the *penghulus* had secured a *chop* (a document carrying the royal seal) from the Sultan of Brunei, which, he believed, gave him and not the Sultan, the right to dispose of this land to the Chartered Company without reference to the Sultan, and in disregard of the Sultan's rights of sovereignty. Clifford, by then Governor of British North Borneo, consulted Swettenham as High Commissioner. Swettenham was cautious in his response, partly because he saw legal problems over a change in sovereignty rights while the old Sultan of Brunei was still alive, and partly because he felt that to grant this case would set a dangerous precedent for Sarawak, which was also anxious to increase its territories at the expense of Brunei. The Foreign Office however took a cynical view: 'The country is bound to be divided eventually between the Company and Sarawak, and is there any reason why they should not draw nearer to each other a little sooner instead of a little later?'⁴³

After some correspondence, the company was granted the eastern watershed of the Trusan River.⁴⁴ Consideration was now given in the Colonial Office to the question of whether Swettenham

should be sent on a mission to Borneo, to consider the whole question of Brunei partition. That Swettenham had hoped for a Residency in Brunei was evident: he had told Lucas as much before he returned from leave in January 1901.⁴⁵ At the end of January 1902 Swettenham enquired whether he should visit Brunei and Sandakan. If the answer was positive, the best time would be March or April: but if Sarawak got its way, there would not be much left of Brunei to visit except the town. The suggestion came to nothing.⁴⁶ As a result, Swettenham's role in Borneo affairs was confined largely to that of an interested spectator at the machinations of Brooke, Hewitt, the Consul and the Chartered Company. Two years later oil was found in Brunei, and it was perhaps this, rather than the ineffective machinations of Hewett which ultimately secured for Brunei the independence it so nearly lost at this period. Swettenham's role was uncharacteristically muted, although basically more sympathetic to the Brookes than to the Chartered Company or the Sultan.

In 1903, for the last time, it was suggested that Swettenham visit the area to report. Again, it became evident that such a visit would not be possible. But the idea was emerging that since absorption of Brunei by Sarawak had failed, the only solution might be a Residency. This course was favoured by Swettenham although, 'it might be too costly.'⁴⁷ By the end of 1903, both Swettenham and Sir Charles Brooke were back in England. Correspondence resumed there, with Sir Charles rapidly realizing that before the Foreign Office made up its mind, it would wish first to consult Swettenham.⁴⁸ A Resident for Brunei was in fact eventually appointed, combining the post with that of Consul for Sarawak and North Borneo. However this did not occur till 1906.⁴⁹ Swettenham's general support for the Brooke family became evident some years later, when Margaret Brooke, wife of Sir Charles, wrote her memoirs, *My Life in Sarawak*, and persuaded Swettenham to write a preface.⁵⁰

NOTES

1. CO 273/274:356 ff. Swettenham to CO, secret of 27 October 1901.
2. Song, 1923, op. cit., pp. 234 ff., *SFP*, 22 August 1895.
3. *SFP*, 30 December 1896, *PGSC*, 31 December 1896.
4. *STD*, 2 March and 1 May 1901.
5. *MM*, 12 July 1897 for his earlier article. Accounts of the Legco meeting are given in *STD*, 29 October 1901, *PGSC*, 4 November 1901 and *PP*, 5 November 1901.
6. *PSSLC* 1901. B 123 of 10 October 1901.
7. Makepeace, Brooke and Braddell (eds.), 1921, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 159.

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8. Minutes of Legco, 21 and 28 January 1902, *STD*, 22 and 29 January 1902, 1 February 1902.
9. *STD*, 12 February 1902.
10. *STD*, 1 May and 30 July 1902.
11. *PGSC*, 11 February 1902 and *STD*, 7 March 1903.
12. CO 273/281:59 ff. Swettenham to CO, 462 of 12 November 1902.
13. *STD*, 18 August 1903.
14. CO 273/279:179 ff. Swettenham to CO, 204 of 30 April 1902.
15. Makepeace, Brooke and Braddell (eds.), 1921, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 125.
16. SSLC 1901. B 225 of 3 November 1901.
17. Makepeace, Brooke and Braddell (eds.), 1921, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 334. CO 273/279:172 Swettenham to CO, 202 of 29 April 1902, *STD*, 18 July and 17 September 1903, *MM*, 6 February 1902. See also *PSSLC* 1903 Minutes of 17 April 1903, and Brown, 1936, op. cit., p. 193.
18. *STD*, 17 June 1901.
19. Brown, 1936, op. cit., pp. 74-5.
20. *STD*, 21-4 October and 7 December 1901. For background on the strike, see J.F. Warren, *Rickshaw Coolie: A People's History of Singapore (1880-1940)*, 1986, Chapter 8.
21. CO 273/293:212 ff. Swettenham to CO, confidential of 3 June 1903 and *Footprints*, pp. 133-6.
22. CO 273/294:236 Swettenham to CO, confidential of 3 June 1903, enclosing memo on Straits Tin.
23. CO 273/294:279 Swettenham to SS, confidential of 3 June 1903 and Wong, 1965, op. cit., p. 229. The duty continued to be levied up till 1948. *STD*, 6 March 1954.
24. CO 273/294:285 Chamberlain to Swettenham, telegram of 3 July 1903.
25. CO 273/294:264 ff. Swettenham to RG, 6 May 1903.
26. CO 273/294:213 ff. Swettenham to CO, Confidential of 3 June 1903 and CO 273/294:536 ff. Swettenham to CO, Confidential of 9 July 1903.
27. *Footprints*, p. 136, and Wong, 1965, op. cit., p. 230.
28. All details in this section from G. Bogaars, *The Tanjong Pagar Dock Company, 1864-1905*. Memoirs of Raffles Museum, No.3, 1956.
29. CO 273/279:159 ff. Swettenham to CO, 199 of 27 April 1901 enclosing report on Singapore Harbour improvements.
30. There is no indication that L.Holmes was related to Swettenham's wife Sydney, or that George Rutherford was connected with the man whom Swettenham had wished to recruit some twenty years earlier for the Selangor railways: see Chapter 19.
31. Bogaars, 1956, op. cit., quoting *Letterbook* 22/1900, 23 November 1900. The John Anderson mentioned in the letterbook is a different man from Sir John Anderson, who succeeded Swettenham as Governor.
32. *Footprints*, pp. 138-9.
33. Letter of 14 October 1904 cited by Bogaars, 1956, op. cit.
34. *Correspondence Relating to Appropriation*, Letter 9 cited by Bogaars, 1956, op. cit.
35. *British Malaya*, pp. 334-5.
36. *Footprints*, pp. 138-9.

37. *Footprints*, p. 136.
38. The background is set out in N. Tarling, *Britain, the Brookes and Brunei*, OUP, 1971.
39. Minute, 24 June, on CO 144/73 [16140]. FO to CO of 9 September 1899, FO 12/105; also, with minutes, CO 144/73 [24234], quoted in Tarling, 1971, op. cit.
40. CO 273/261:859 Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, Confidential of 27 June 1900.
41. See Chapter 13.
42. CO 273/240:366 Swettenham's testimonial to Keyser, 20 May 1898. He had left the area by early 1903, for a consular appointment in Spain: *STD*, 9 January 1903.
43. Sir F. Swettenham to Lansdowne, 21 March 1901, No. 21, FO12/120; also in FO to CO, received 29 April, CO 144/75 [14993]. Notes by Hopwood and Villiers on FO version, Clifford to Acting HC, 8 February 1901, in Birch to Martin, 29 May, CO 874/267, quoted in Tarling, 1971, op. cit.
44. Forbes to Villiers, 17 May 1901, FO 12/120 quoted in Tarling, 1971, op. cit., p. 472.
45. Swettenham to Villiers, 27 September 1901, enclosing Birch to Swettenham, 11 September 1901, FO 12/120, cited by Tarling, 1971, op. cit., p. 485.
46. CO 273/282:292 Swettenham to CO, Secret of 30 January 1902 and CO 273/286:257 Foreign, 20 March 1902.
47. Swettenham to Lansdowne, 6 August 1903, No. 15, Secret FO 12/122. See also CO 273/291:377 Swettenham to CO, Secret of 22 August 1903.
48. Brooke to Lansdowne, 30 November 1903.
49. Tarling, 1971, op. cit., p. 522.
50. Swettenham's preface to Margaret Brooke's *My Life in Sarawak*, Methuen, 1913, republished OUP paperback, 1986.

The Problem of Siam: Hopes for Success

We have already noted that Swettenham's attitude towards Siam was marked by a profound hostility from an early stage in his career. It was deepened and embittered by the failure of the negotiations which he had conducted in the late 1880s in London.¹ Even while he was Resident of Perak, he schemed against the Siamese, although he had no opportunity to become directly involved with the affairs of Kelantan and Trengganu. His reputation was well known and attracted complaints against Siamese exactions from the Raja of Kelantan in 1890.²

Moreover his reputation attracted the attention of Prince Prisdang, an intelligent dissident from the Siamese court. He had been educated as a young man at Raffles College in Singapore from 1871, and there must be a chance that he met Swettenham there. After qualifying as a civil engineer in UK, and serving in the Siamese legation in London, between 1882 and 1883 he returned to Siam, where his advanced views led to his banishment. He made his way to Penang, and then Perak, where he worked for four years, under the name Mr Choomsai, while Swettenham was Resident.³ He must have seen quite a lot of Swettenham at this time, for Swettenham, writing in July 1891 summarized Prisdang's views as follows:

Prisdang says that the Siamese Government has always told him they wished to claim as much as they could (whether on the French side or in the Malay Peninsula), and hold on to it as long as possible, with the idea that some day they might ... save Siam, or some part of it, by throwing these outlying provinces, one by one, to the pursuers, French on one side and English on the other.⁴

Later in the year, Swettenham persuaded Prisdang to write a memorandum on Siamese Administration. It was a detailed and damning document. Swettenham wasted no time in forwarding it to

London. There is evidence that it influenced the British government of the early 1890s against the Siamese.⁵

Swettenham realized that his appointment as Resident-General would mean that once again there would be opportunities to become involved in Siam's problems of sovereignty with the Malay states in the north of the Peninsula. He opened his campaign indirectly, almost certainly liaising with his friend Henry Norman to cause the *Daily Chronicle* to produce a leading article on 13 December 1895 which referred to the problem.⁶ This article, after deploring the British failure to seize Johore on Abu Bakar's death earlier in the year,⁷ drew attention to the states on Siam's southern border. These states, the anonymous authors maintained, were seriously misgoverned by the Siamese, whose nominal presence hindered the development of a railway from the Peninsula to India, with all that implied for British trade. If Mr Chamberlain's advisers had not been remiss, they would have advised him as 'an act of great humanity' to seize these states from the Siamese: he would thus have 'relieved a large population from unscrupulous oppression and extortion.' This would have been recognized by the Colonial Office as vintage Swettenham.⁸

A further article from this period appeared anonymously in *Blackwoods Magazine*.⁹ The article does not make pleasant reading. It combines racial prejudice with extreme hostility to Siam, and reveals an inferiority complex over university education. Had its authorship been known, Swettenham's reputation would have suffered. On the other hand, *Blackwoods* was a popular and influential magazine, and it would have been hard to find another which would have been more effective in swaying public opinion. The core of the article¹⁰ consists of a dry summary of the Anglo-French Declaration of 1896, possibly provided to *Blackwoods* by the Foreign Office. The remainder appears to be Swettenham's blustering interpretation. The Declaration was signed on 15 January 1896, when Swettenham was in London, although he was not apparently consulted. It is thus at least open to interpretation that Swettenham was voicing his pique and displeasure at his exclusion from discussion on a subject in which he considered himself expert.

The article commenced with a summary of the earlier position, and the French action in sending a gunboat to Bangkok in 1893. As a result, Siam had ceded to France all its territories east of the Mekong. The incident was viewed with grave concern in London, which feared that if Siam disintegrated entirely, Britain would face France as a direct neighbour not only in Burma, but also in the Malay Peninsula. It was the protracted negotiations in the wake of this incident which led to the Anglo-French Declaration of 1896, the subject of the *Blackwoods* article.¹¹

The effect of this agreement, paradoxically, was that the Foreign Office now no longer felt itself so strongly bound to avoid involvement in the southern provinces of Siam. Their earlier rationale for such a policy had been fear of provoking French predatory designs on other parts of Siam. Now that the French had agreed to endorse the integrity of the central area, roughly covering the Menam Valley, no such inhibitions restrained them. Indeed it is open to suggestion that Swettenham's hand lay behind the memo enclosed in a dispatch of 28 February 1896, which concluded:

It is submitted that no time should be lost in strongly pressing the Siamese Government to give to Great Britain a formal understanding not to part with any of the territory which they claim in the Malay Peninsula without first giving the refusal of it to the British Government, the British Government ... undertaking to support the Siamese Government against any attempt of a third power to acquire foothold in the territory as claimed.¹²

Swettenham claimed at the beginning of the *Blackwoods* article, and with justification, that the Siamese were reduced to playing off the British against the French in a desperate attempt to maintain their independence. No claim could be conceded to the French for fear of upsetting the British and vice versa. Less convincingly, he maintained that, 'by a judicious manipulation of British and French cabinets and British and French popular prejudices, they might even extend their own boundaries on both east and south, and so not only gain great prestige with their own subject peoples and those who owed allegiance to their French and British neighbours, but, when the day of retribution should at last come, that they would have more sops to cast to Cerberus.'¹³ Insofar as these comments referred to the states to the south of Siam, Kedah, Perlis, Trengganu and Kelantan, the Siamese view was that they always had been tributaries of Bangkok, and signified this by sending there tribute of *bunga mas*, at least every third year.

The article criticized the Foreign Office, of myopia, the French of open colonial aggression, and the British representatives in Bangkok of gullibility in the face of Siamese reassurances. Swettenham's biting sarcasm, and inferiority complex about the university education which he had missed are evident: 'After all there is a great virtue in the university education; for the British representative will accept, without question, almost any statement made by the man who can say, "When I was up at Oxford."'¹⁴ He regarded the Siamese as despicable:

The Government of Siam is entirely autocratic, and the King is not physically capable of discharging a tithe of the duties that devolve upon an absolute monarch. The Ministers are

hopelessly incapable, they are torn by mutual jealousies, and they are under the corroding influence of the various palace favourites. The crowd of lesser Government officials is entirely corrupt, and the people count for nothing except to obey the orders of their chiefs.¹⁵

He concluded the first seven pages of invective by remarking with satisfaction that UK and France had bound themselves to preserve the integrity and independence of the central part of Siam. An official summary of the treaty follows: the style is completely different and lacks Swettenham's bombast. It adds that France and UK also agree not to support any third power to undertake actions which are forbidden to them under the terms of the treaty. The states of Kelantan and Trengganu were not specifically mentioned. The article concluded with a return to Swettenham bombast, and a penultimate paragraph which accurately set out Swettenham's agenda for the ensuing seven years:

The extension of British influence throughout the Malay Peninsula, the development of those rich regions, and the junction of the railway-systems of Burmah and Malaya, with the rounding off of British possessions — as the French have secured the rounding off of their Far Eastern territories — is now only a matter of time; and we have a right to believe that our legitimate aspirations can be satisfied without arousing any jealousy in France.¹⁶

When Swettenham returned to Kuala Lumpur in mid-1896 as Resident-General, however much he may have wished to involve himself with Siamese affairs, his position effectively restricted his activities to minor skirmishing on the Perak-Reman boundary problem.¹⁷ The 1896 Anglo-French Declaration had left one area of considerable uncertainty. This was the possibility of intervention by a third colonial power in southern Siam. Such a threat was not to be taken lightly. It was crucial to British policy in the area that Siam be seen to control Kelantan and Trengganu. To resolve this problem, a secret Anglo-Siamese Convention was signed in Bangkok on 6 April 1897, under which Britain recognized Siamese suzerainty over Trengganu and Kelantan, although these were not specifically mentioned, while the Siamese undertook not to part with any of these territories, or grant concessions in them without the prior consent of the British government. Mitchell was informed of the position late in 1896, in fact before the Anglo-Siamese Convention had been signed:

I have now to instruct you definitely that in future you should not in any way question their [Trengganu and Kelantan] political dependence on Siam otherwise there

would remain a part of the Malay Peninsula which might be utilised by a foreign power with hostile intent.¹⁸

The Colonial Office were under strict instructions from the Foreign Office to maintain this secrecy, a position which they themselves later agreed was ludicrous:

We cannot under the existing understanding with the FO tell him [Swettenham] all about it and send him copies of the correspondence, as this latter contains references to the secret treaty about which we are to say nothing to him. The position appears to me ludicrous and intolerable. We have to rely greatly on Sir F. Swettenham for information and advice as to Malayan affairs generally, and yet we conceal from him the most important factor in that policy i.e. the secret treaty.... [The whole episode has become even more farcical since] we know, though we pretend that we do not know, that Sir Frank Swettenham knows of the Treaty.¹⁹

Swettenham however was already in touch on a direct personal basis with Chamberlain, for on 23 July 1897, in a letter to the latter reporting on the durbar he wrote:

I wish it had been possible to do something as regards Kelantan. To bring into the Federation all the states from the Isthmus of Kra to Singapore would not be very difficult, ... if the policy of Her Majesty's Government had been that way inclined I believe that Kelantan and Trengganu might have been got without an effort.²⁰

At the same time the treaty produced severe problems for the Siamese. They recognized the need to be more assertive in their control of the Muslim states in the south of Siam. In attempting to strengthen their administration particularly in Patani, they provoked severe disquiet and unrest. Swettenham, as will be seen, was not slow to capitalize on this as a sign of Siam's inherent inability to control these areas.²¹ From another point of view the element of secrecy in the 1897 agreement was not so inconvenient. While the British government in London recognized Siamese rights and authority, the Colonial officials in the Straits Settlements, who were deemed to have no knowledge of the agreement, were free to pursue their policy of undermining Siamese authority.²²

The Singapore authorities had since 1883 claimed part of the border state of Reman on behalf of Perak, and indeed Low, when on leave in London with Raja (later Sultan) Idris had pressed the case unsuccessfully.²³ The question had arisen again while Swettenham was on leave in early 1898, and he had submitted a memorandum on the subject.²⁴ Later in the year, Swettenham prepared a further memorandum.²⁵ Although the Perak chiefs attached much importance to the question, he had an open mind. He

pointed out how French pressure on the eastern side of the country had forced the Siamese to adopt a more aggressive posture in the south. The only person who would be seriously upset if the decision over Reman went against Perak was the Sultan who had no very strong grounds in any case, since the Siamese claim arose because his predecessors were dilatory in establishing their claim to the territory. Swettenham continued with his well-known theme of the iniquity of Siamese rule:

On the other hand as I see Siamese methods close to, and cannot help noticing the effect of their blighting influence in the Peninsula, it is not easy to realize the advantage of encouraging the Siamese government at the expense not only of British but Malay interests, to acquire wider territorial influence in a country where we have constituted ourselves the protectors of the Malay people.²⁶

Two months later, Swettenham's elder brother also prepared a secret memorandum, concluding, after a historical and scholarly introduction that the most practical solution would be for Perak to purchase for cash from Siam undisputed rights to the area.²⁷ In the meantime a murder was committed in the disputed Reman territory, and it was suggested that Mitchell and Swettenham should visit Bangkok to settle problems of jurisdiction.²⁸

Despite much deliberation over what flags should be flown, the joint visit by Swettenham and Mitchell to Bangkok did not materialize. Instead, Mitchell consulted Swettenham, who, in a memo dated 5 January 1899 spelt out the background of what had transpired in the early years of his association with the Siamese.²⁹ He advised Mitchell against a visit, for fear he would return empty-handed and lose even more face with both the Siamese and the Malays. The only solution Swettenham could see was a trade-off:

If now the British Government will say "if you don't agree to a reasonable settlement of this boundary, we shall resume our own freedom of action in Kelantan and Trengganu" [you, Mitchell] might go to Bangkok with confidence that either the boundary would be settled, or, by the failure to arrive at that conclusion, you would secure much greater benefit to British interests.³⁰

By mid-1899 three further factors had become evident: the snail-like pace with which the Siamese in Bangkok responded to any initiative, and secondly a feeling of dissatisfaction on the part of the Malay rulers of the southern states of Siam which was undoubtedly encouraged in Singapore.³¹ The third factor was a wish on the part of the Siamese to resolve at the same time the problems of extradition from Kelantan and Trengganu. The Foreign Office were disposed to agree extradition arrangements with Trengganu and

Kelantan and the Reman boundary dispute at once.³² To a suggestion that if there were problems, Swettenham himself should go to Bangkok, there came a sharp rejoinder that he was not the appropriate person, as he was too hostile towards the Siamese.³³ Swettenham definitely was not disposed to agree with the Foreign Office, on the ground that those two states were too corrupt to administer extradition arrangements effectively. Moreover, although of course he did not mention it, any agreement on the east coast would make it more difficult for him to find a pretext for interference. He deplored the fact that Siam was now to be considered as the predominating influence in Kelantan and Trengganu: 'It is much to be regretted that the British Government should abandon its influence in Kelantan and Trengganu, to a country so little qualified to assume the duties of protection as is Siam.'³⁴ It was the same message to Lucas:

I will say, for the hundredth time, that it would be a gross blunder to barter British influence in Kelantan and Trengganu and the right (equally with Siam) of interference in those states for any concession of the disputed territory in Upper Perak.

Setting aside geographical position and all outside considerations, I am convinced that the mineral value of Kelantan and Trengganu is so great nothing should induce the British Government to shut the door in its own face in these two states Let us settle the Perak-Reman boundary by all means but do not on any account abandon any British rights or influence in any other part of the Peninsula.

If, however, the position has been abandoned already, if the British Government has withdrawn before the Siamese and is allowing them to make good in the Peninsula their losses to France on the Mekong and in Cambodia, then the sooner we know it the better and for such gain to Siam it would be a bagatelle to give us the whole of our claims in Upper Perak.³⁵

The Reman Boundary agreement was eventually signed on 29 November 1899. It formally recognized that Kelantan and Trengganu were dependents of Siam. Swettenham was well aware of this agreement.³⁶ On the ground in Kelantan, problems were compounded by the death of Sultan Mansor in 1899. An internal palace power struggle developed, out of which Tuan Long Senik emerged as the new Raja.³⁷ In the course of these factional struggles, the Raja unwisely appealed to the Siamese, who sent a warship and soldiers to Kota Bahru.³⁸

At about the same time, in 1900, there was a significant change of personalities in London. Lord Salisbury, who had

previously combined the post of Prime Minister with control of the Foreign Office, was compelled to relinquish the latter job to Lord Lansdowne. The Siamese had regarded Salisbury as an ally. Lansdowne had different views, more in sympathy with the hard-line exponents of the forward movement, like Swettenham in the Straits Settlements.

Fortuitously a number of events occurred at this time in the Peninsula which strengthened the hand of Swettenham and his colleagues in their contention that Siam was not competent to safeguard the British position. The most significant episode was that involving R.W. Duff, a former government officer. Duff's career had commenced with the Malay States Guides, in which he had been a Wing Officer, serving in the early 1890s in Pahang. This had involved accompanying Clifford on an expedition in 1895 to Kelantan and Trengganu in pursuit of Pahang Malay rebels. The British were disposed to see in the Pahang rebellion signs of connivance by the Siamese. The incident strengthened the belief of the Straits Settlements officials that Kelantan and Trengganu had to be controlled to secure British interests in the rest of the Peninsula.³⁹ After a year in the Selangor service, during which he would have had ample opportunity to establish a personal relationship with Swettenham as Resident-General, Duff left on medical grounds for an operation in UK.⁴⁰

However, far from retiring from the Peninsula on medical grounds, as many men would have done, Duff, inspired by what he saw of the commercial possibilities of Kelantan, combined with businessmen in UK to form the Duff Syndicate for the commercial development of the state. With this backing, Duff applied to the Foreign Office in London, to determine who had the right to grant concessions in that state, Siam or the ruler. The Foreign Office, bound by its secret treaty of 1897 was unable to spell out the facts, and so merely referred Duff to Bangkok. There, Siamese officials maintained that the granting of concessions in Kelantan was the prerogative of the Siamese, but one which they were not at this stage prepared to exercise. Despite this, Duff insisted he was heading for Kelantan, where he would select land and apply to the Siamese for title. Reluctantly the Siamese officials in Bangkok agreed, provided he took with him a Siamese Commissioner. To this Duff assented, but gave the Siamese Commissioner the slip by entering, not from Kota Bahru, where he was expected, but overland from Kuala Lipis, accompanied moreover by a mining engineer. This enabled him to undertake substantial prospecting on the way.⁴¹

At Kota Bahru, according to Duff, he found the Raja, terrified of giving offence to the Siamese, yet at the same time willing to concede to him some 2,000 square miles, almost the

whole of the interior of the state, in exchange for £2,000 and some 200 shares in the Duff Syndicate. The reason for the Raja's terror was that the Siamese Commissioner had told him that substantial areas of the state were to be alienated on Siamese instructions to various Chinese. Duff was thus able to play on the Sultan's fears of effective disinheritance to obtain this major concession. Only once the agreement was signed and sealed, did Duff inform the Siamese, accusing them at the same time of forcing the Raja to sign titles to land in the state. He also drew attention to the fact that Siamese officials had misinformed him over who held this prerogative.⁴²

Duff returned to London at the end of October 1900, and, showing the Foreign Office the title he had obtained, requested their support. They were in a dilemma. By the agreement of 1897 they had agreed that Siam had suzerainty over these states, and if they now endorsed Duff in his claim, they would be in breach of the agreement, in spirit if not in word. If on the other hand they did not support him, they might find later that other European powers had established bases in the area. This was a very real possibility: the Germans had attempted to obtain control of Langkawi on the west coast, and were believed to be active in searching for a similar base on the east coast, as were the Russians. The French were already in the area, and well placed to put pressure on Bangkok.⁴³ If the British connived with Duff against the Siamese, the way would be open for other European powers to acquire bases in the area. Yet they could scarcely disown Duff, for to do so would be to support Siamese against British interests. Moreover it had been agreed that the 1897 treaty must be kept secret, so there was no way in which they could justify their indecision publicly. For better or worse, they turned down Duff's request.

The dilemma of the British was heightened by Sir James Swettenham, then Acting Governor in Singapore, who wrote secretly to Joseph Chamberlain pointing this out.⁴⁴ The position was complicated by the arrival of a letter from Prince Damrong to the Syndicate confirming that the land had been granted by the Raja: Duff had been misinformed if he believed the Siamese had any such power. The letter was meant to placate the Duff Syndicate. Duff himself however saw it in a different light. He took it to mean that the Siamese accepted his title was valid. Again he approached the Foreign Office. On this occasion they agreed to write to the British Minister in Bangkok confirming that Duff had received a valid title and requesting that he be given assistance.

Duff regarded this as inadequate, since it suggested his title was valid without reference to Siam. He was aware of differences between the Foreign and Colonial Offices on the question of Kelantan, and was in particular aware of their belief in the risks they

ran from rival European powers in the area. He played his trump card, blackmail. It was evident, he said, that, 'the British Government did not look upon it as a danger, and they did not think it desirable to protect British enterprise in Kelantan. Therefore, I said, "I now proposed to float my company, not in London, but in Paris and St Petersburg, but I thought I would ask for the assurance of the British government before doing anything."' ⁴⁵ This rapidly brought the Foreign Office to its senses: they hastened to promise official support for Duff if he established his company in Siam.

If Swettenham had sought a means of embarrassing the Foreign Office, he could scarcely have devised one more satisfactory than the position which then developed. The immediate question arises: did he collaborate with Duff to engineer this situation? The *Straits Times* in the following year quoted the *Dutch Nieuwe Courant* to the effect that Swettenham found opposition to the Siamese on account of Duff congenial.⁴⁶ Swettenham's own explanation to the Colonial Office certainly suggested that the two men had collaborated closely.⁴⁷ An examination of the list of Duff's original supporters in his Syndicate revealed the names of certain individuals with whom Swettenham was known to be particularly close. Sir Cecil Smith was listed as acting as reference for Duff, while subscribers in the subsequent two years included Loke Yew. There were also a number of names either of leading business groups in Singapore, or of people known to be close to those interests.⁴⁸ Swettenham certainly knew what was happening through his Singapore business contacts. Yet at the crucial period of Duff's visit in May 1900 Swettenham was abroad on his visit to Weihaiwei. At the very least, he was following developments with a keen interest. However ultimately, the prize of bringing Kelantan and Trengganu more fully into the British sphere of influence eluded him, and it is now necessary to follow events to see why this was the outcome of a situation which by mid-1900 seemed eminently favourable to the attainment of Swettenham's objectives.

Duff in his own account made it clear that the nature of the Foreign Office support was not entirely satisfactory. They wanted Duff to go to Bangkok and secure the ratification of the King of Siam. Duff argued that this was undesirable, for it would force onto the King a power he had never possessed. In this Duff evidently ignored the Reman Boundary Agreement of 1899 which formally established this position. Despite these reservations, on 15 April 1901 Duff arrived again in Singapore from UK en route to Bangkok to obtain Siamese ratification of his agreement. Although he was instructed to proceed at once to Bangkok to obtain this ratification, he did not arrive there till 3 June.⁴⁹

There were important developments in Singapore in the meantime, for on 10 May 1901 King Chulalongkorn and the royal party passed through. This could well have explained Duff's delay in Singapore. On their way to Java, Swettenham visited them on their yacht and then entertained them to lunch.⁵⁰ Eight weeks later the royal party returned from Java and again, most unwisely for them, stopped at Singapore.⁵¹ Again, they were entertained to lunch by Swettenham.⁵² After lunch the serious discussion commenced, with the King raising the Reman boundary question. Swettenham took him to his office in Government House, and showed him the maps, maintaining that the boundary was a minor issue. The King, according to Swettenham, asked for advice on administration, saying that he wanted to imitate what the British had done. He must quickly have realized he had made a major blunder, for it gave Swettenham just the opportunity to explain at some length that in his view Siam was badly served in her relations with the FMS by the low calibre of officials she employed. Trouble always occurred when such officials appeared. The King at that stage summoned Prince Damrong, to whom Swettenham made the same points, quoting, when asked by Damrong for an example, the case of the elephants of Syed Zin: a clear indication in his view of the obstreperousness of Siamese officials.⁵³ Damrong countered by blaming the Malay chiefs. Swettenham however pursued his point by urging the Siamese in future to send a higher calibre of official, who could be trusted. To this Damrong agreed: he also borrowed certain of Swettenham's maps, the better to study the boundary problems.

When the King asked for further advice on how to deal with the Malay rulers in the southern part of the country, Swettenham replied with his customary sarcasm: 'I assured HM of my readiness to give him advice, now that he had done me the honour of seeking it,' and urged that UK and Siamese interests were identical. The King agreed and appealed to Damrong to endorse this view. The latter gave the required assurance, 'but not, it seemed to me, with quite the same conviction.' They went on to discuss Islamic matters, and the problems of concessions granted by Malay rulers to Europeans. Swettenham reminded the King that he should not grant offshore islands or patches of country to Europeans without first consulting the British government.⁵⁴

The meeting adjourned for the afternoon to enable Swettenham to attend a meeting of the Legislative Council, but resumed over dinner, at the Siamese Residence, Hurricane House, with Swettenham on this occasion the guest of the King, firmly seated between him and Prince Damrong. After dinner the three men withdrew to a private room for more than an hour to discuss the

vexed question of the Duff concession. The King pointed out that Duff had obtained the concession direct from the Raja of Kelantan, without in any way referring to Bangkok. How was Bangkok to show that it had an interest? Swettenham replied to the effect that he was well aware of the details of the Duff case, and that Duff had been poorly treated by officials in Bangkok: the King now had little option but to confirm the arrangement. He should, Swettenham believed, be reassured that his fears were groundless, and then, 'for the future it would be necessary to state publicly after agreement with the Raja of Kelantan, what the relative positions of Siam and Kelantan are, and to arrange with the Raja what authority he should have for the grant of concessions to other than Malays.'⁵⁵ The King hesitantly agreed to this, and Damrong was even more reserved. Swettenham concluded the meeting by stressing that under the system developed in the FMS, every penny collected was ploughed back into their development: in unspoken contrast to the Siamese way of doing things.⁵⁶

The British response to this dispatch was ecstatic: 'This is an extraordinarily interesting and able dispatch. Nothing could probably be better than Sir Frank Swettenham's frank and candid advice to the King of Siam, and if the King will act upon it, the greater part of our difficulty in the Malay states will be at an end.'⁵⁷ Later, Swettenham wrote privately to Lucas: 'I should have kept him [Duff] here until Prince Damrong accepted my terms, he would have accepted them, but Duff had already promised the *Chargé d'Affaires* to go to Bangkok. So I cannot interfere.'⁵⁸

Swettenham at this stage was in much closer touch with Duff than is shown from surviving records. Later in July, the Siamese, under pressure both from London, and Swettenham as indicated above, ratified Duff's treaty. Duff was in Singapore throughout much of this time.⁵⁹ During this period, when he and Swettenham may have assumed they had the upper hand over the Siamese, Duff's attitude underwent a significant change. He started by denying the right of the Siamese to interfere in his agreement with the Raja of Kelantan. He developed his thesis to deny the Siamese any right of interference in the administration of Kelantan, and extended this principle to the Malay-speaking states, further north.⁶⁰ The Raja of Kelantan in the meantime had regretted his precipitate invitation to the Siamese the previous year, and decided on a visit to Bangkok to complain about the activities of the Siamese Commissioner in Kota Bahru, and to request the withdrawal of the warship.⁶¹

To the disinterested outsider, it might have appeared by the autumn of 1901 that Swettenham and his allies were in a strong position to bring Kelantan and Trengganu fully into the British fold

in the near future.⁶² The main reason for Swettenham's failure was that he consistently overplayed his hand. In parallel with the Duff deliberations, there had been a sustained anti-Siamese publicity campaign in the Straits press. It is likely that the series of articles which appeared were inspired by either Duff or Swettenham.⁶³

At the time when the Siamese King was in Singapore on his return visit from Java, the rulers of Kelantan, Kedah and Patani were also present in Singapore.⁶⁴ The Raja of Patani in particular complained bitterly to Swettenham of the alleged ill-treatment he and his subjects had received at the hands of the Siamese. Swettenham reported the position to London in the following terms:

Those Siamese Malay States are rather seething. The Rajas of Patani and Kelantan are getting restive as the Siamese tighten the knot. They have both been to see me several times and I have (acting on my instructions) put them off, but I hear that they are going to a lawyer and say that if the British Government will not help them to get fair treatment, the USA with their newly acquired possessions in these parts will. Of course they can't but Germany and the USA do not know that yet and I think it is quite likely that either country would like a good footing in the Peninsula if they could get it.⁶⁵

Threats by the Raja of Patani were repeated in his letter dated 13 August 1901, together with the hint that unless he received a favourable response, he would look for support from some other power.⁶⁶ The Foreign Office was unable to ascertain through its Chargé d'Affaires in Bangkok, exactly what the position was in the southern states of Thailand, while Swettenham was maintaining the pressure on London, with his detailed account of the Raja's visit:

What, however, struck me most was the demeanour of the Rajah, who is a man of about 30 years of age. He appeared to me to be in that frame of mind when Malays become desperate, and resort to violent measures in the belief that all others have failed, and life is not worth living under existing conditions. The Rajah said his position was intolerable, and I asked him why he did not leave the country and settle elsewhere. His reply was that he had thought of that, but that he had property, especially land, and the Siamese would not allow him to see it. Moreover, he has many relations, and the Rajahs of the adjoining States [Jering, Sai, Legeh, Reman, Jalor, Nongchik] were all suffering from the same troubles and indignities, and looked to him to take the lead and secure redress. When he left I realized that advice with no prospect of help was not what he wanted.

I cannot say whether the Rajah of Patani would go so far as to act on the last paragraph of his letter and endeavour to secure the intervention of Germany, Russia, or America, which, I take it, are the Powers referred to, but if it were possible for His Majesty's Government to induce the King of Siam to consider what is possibly a serious state of affairs in these northern States and grant some reasonable redress, it might be of advantage to all concerned.⁶⁷

Swettenham was even so bold as to add that he believed the King would not resent advice, if judiciously given. The situation was approaching a crisis point. Deliberations between the Foreign and Colonial Offices in London had produced, in the autumn of 1901, the suggestion that Swettenham might go to Kelantan, 'to arrange with the Raja if possible such modifications for the concession to Mr Duff as can reasonably be confirmed by the Siamese Government without derogation from its sovereign rights.'⁶⁸

Swettenham duly wrote to King Chulalongkorn as instructed, advising him of problems in the south of the country, and, exceeding his authority from the Colonial Office, offered to visit Bangkok to advise on the matter.⁶⁹ He was in no doubt as to the level of his popularity in Bangkok, for he cabled Chamberlain, 'I believe the King will deprecate proposed visit.'⁷⁰ The King, no doubt appalled at the prospect of a further taste of Swettenham's imperial arrogance, hastened to reply that such a visit was unnecessary.⁷¹ On the same day, Swettenham concluded a secret dispatch to Chamberlain:

I think it is clear that the Siamese Government must declare its position vis-a-vis the Malay States, or there is sure to be trouble, either from the Malays themselves or from foreigners, and I shall be sorry if the King of Siam declines the visit I proposed, because I feel sure that it would save trouble in the end.

I have, within the last few days received a long appeal from the Rajah of Sai, complaining against Siamese rule and methods of administration, and the Siamese Government will be unwise if they neglect these signs. Of course, I am assuming that His Majesty's Government wishes me to assist the King of Siam in the matter of these States, otherwise, it is possible that by abstaining from all interference, or even the giving of information as to what is going on, the Siamese Government might be placed in such difficulty, that they would have to abandon the position of protection which they have lately assumed, at any rate, so far as Kelantan and Trengganu are concerned.⁷²

Duff was tendering almost identical advice from London:

The influence of Siam was so slight that I, a private individual, was able to make arrangements with the Rajah of Kelantan by which I acquired from him the whole of the commercial rights over half of his State, and I could have extended those rights to the rest of Kelantan had I wished to do so. This was done in direct opposition to the wishes and intentions of the Siamese Government, who brought to bear against me every particle of opposition which it was in their power to bring.

These facts are in themselves evidence that a foreigner might quite conceivably have attained the same objects had he been first in the field, and this danger still exists. So long as the Malay States could be looked upon as independent, the danger of foreign concessions being granted existed, but only in a minor degree, as the influence of the British officials in the Colony and Federated Malay States was sufficient to dissuade the Rajah from granting such concessions. But if Siam has the right of Suzerain power to confirm or veto any concessions made by a Rajah in the Malay Peninsula, the danger increases greatly for the reason that Siam is bound by Treaty to every Power to grant no privileges within her dominions to any one Power which she will not equally grant to the others.

Siam's recent attempt to assert sovereign right over Kelantan was, he maintained, little more than colonization.⁷³ Moreover Duff was now in contact with the rulers of the other Malay states under nominal Siamese control to the north of Kelantan, and threatened to conclude further agreements with them, as he was doing with Kelantan itself.⁷⁴

The crisis also fuelled Siamese efforts to enforce administrative reforms in the region.⁷⁵ Duff meantime, went to Bangkok in place of Swettenham's aborted visit. The British were hopeful that the outstanding problems which prevented Siamese ratification would be resolved. However, these hopes proved unjustified, and the negotiations between Duff and the Siamese foundered, on the issue of Siamese confirmation of transfers and subleases. The terms were unacceptable to Duff despite attempted mediation by Lord Lansdowne. Duff abruptly pulled out of his negotiations and returned to England.⁷⁶

Independently of this setback in Bangkok, deliberations between the Foreign and Colonial Offices in London produced a further suggestion for coping with the troubles of the southern Siamese states, and establishing the actual situation there. First, the Siamese states in the south-west, bordering on Kedah would be

treated separately, by the British appointing a consul, under the supervision of the Resident Councillor of Penang, to reside on the island of Junk Ceylon (now Phuket). A separate consul for the eastern states might be based at Senggora. Swettenham would advise on whether they should have fixed headquarters, or be required constantly to move from place to place.

In order to secure for these two proposed posts, men who are well acquainted and accustomed to deal with Malay and Chinese populations, Mr Chamberlain is of opinion that it is essential that they should be selected by the High Commissioner from the services of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, and he is willing to invite Sir F. Swettenham to agree to arrange that, inasmuch as the interests of the Colony and the Federated Malay States are vitally concerned, these officers should be paid from Straits and Federated Malay States funds, and that while they should be immediately subordinate to the British Minister at Bangkok, they should be required to send copies of all correspondence to the High Commissioner for his information.⁷⁷

Here was the first germ of the solution, which was to emerge as the Anglo-Siamese Joint Declaration of 6 October 1902. The combined pressure from Swettenham and Duff was beginning to have an effect, for Chamberlain suggested to the Foreign Office that the Siamese be urged to consult Swettenham for his advice.⁷⁸ This message percolated as far as the British Minister in Bangkok who was urged to press upon the King the desirability of discussing Malay matters with Swettenham. This was combined with ideas emanating from London: the King was to be offered the services of experienced British officers, familiar in Malay ways and customs.⁷⁹ Not surprisingly, the Siamese disliked the idea, on the grounds that with such administrative arrangements a dual control would be created, to the detriment of Siamese authority.⁸⁰

Until early 1902, the Siamese maintained that they held written assurances that Kelantan and Trengganu would abide by Bangkok's ruling insofar as the granting of concessions to foreigners was concerned. A further factor for instability was revealed in early 1902 when it was found that these assurances had no legal binding effect. Swettenham had challenged the position as early as the middle of November 1901.⁸¹ The matter was taken up by Tower in Bangkok at Lansdowne's request. On 31 January 1902, Tower confirmed to London that the papers produced at his request by the Siamese government did not constitute binding agreements with Kelantan and Trengganu.⁸² Siam could no longer maintain it had legal control. With this crumbling of her authority,

Siam was even less capable of resisting British demands that she should negotiate further treaties with Kelantan and Trengganu.⁸³

The solutions advocated by the Colonial Office following its discussions with the Foreign Office in October 1901, were either that British officers be posted to administer Kelantan and Trengganu, in the name of Siam, or that the administration of these territories be handed over in its entirety to the Straits Settlements. The Foreign Office feared, correctly, that such suggestions would alarm the King. However the Foreign Office at last relented to the extent of allowing Swettenham to be told of the 1897 Treaty.⁸⁴ The King, when approached by Tower in Bangkok, expressed concern that the appointment of British Advisers would provoke immediate retaliation by the French.⁸⁵

Swettenham was not slow to press his advantage, cabling to Chamberlain that he would be happy to assist with negotiations between Siam, Kelantan, Trengganu and Patani, to ensure that all three Malay states were guided by Siam in the conduct of all dealings with foreigners, 'on condition that the internal authority of the Malay chiefs is not interfered with.'⁸⁶ Tower was instructed to liaise with Swettenham, and if necessary to visit him in Singapore to discuss these proposals.⁸⁷ From Bangkok, Tower increased pressure on the Siamese to consult Swettenham.⁸⁸

Such a solution, it was felt, would satisfy the Siamese and the Malays, while giving no scope for further French demands. Swettenham elaborated on this cable on the same day, suggesting that the British Consul in Bangkok might begin to put pressure on the King, and possibly persuade him to invite Swettenham to Bangkok. Swettenham was infuriated by what he regarded as the deceit practised by the Siamese, in claiming inaccurately to have watertight treaties with Kelantan and Trengganu. He was also offended by the reluctance of the King to seek his advice, despite pressure from Tower. His spleen was expressed in a long memorandum of the same date summarizing the background and present problems in the southern states of Siam. The Siamese, he maintained, were squeezed by the French on the Mekong, and responded by attempting to control the Malay states to the south of the country, particularly now that they could see how valuable such territory had become under British rule. The Malays and indirectly the British were the losers, while the almost complete absence of Chinese spoke volumes for the horrors of Siamese rule, about which, as ever, Swettenham was scathing. The Siamese had woefully failed to realize how unpopular they had become with the Malays, and how incompetent they were to develop these states. Despite a professed aversion to British Advisers, on the grounds they might give the French a pretext to move in, and faced with the

possibility of a foreign power establishing a base in their area, they took little action. They were as uncooperative as ever they had been in the last twenty years.⁸⁹

There were further factors lending instability to the position: the ruler of the state of Patani wished to escape from Siamese rule by asking for British protection. He was followed by the rulers of other small states to the north of Kelantan. The first appeals had occurred while Mitchell and Sir James Swettenham were in charge in Singapore, and fell on unresponsive ears.⁹⁰ From 1901 onwards however, they found a ready supporter in Swettenham. Duff subsequently admitted he had advised the Raja of Patani to consult solicitors in Singapore to help draw up an appeal.⁹¹ The evidence points strongly to a close but covert association between Swettenham and Duff.

The Siamese reacted with vigour to the crisis of disaffection in the south. Siamese administrators were sent to Patani and the dissident raja, Abdul Kadir, was removed on 20 February 1902, just before the King's third visit to Singapore.⁹² The Siamese who organized this operation was Sri Phraya Sahadeb, who was later in 1902 to take up a senior post in London, and there provide the Siamese negotiators with the means of rebutting Swettenham's arguments.⁹³ Once the news reached Singapore, there were howls of outrage in the Straits press.⁹⁴

The incident provoked auguished pleas from various minor chiefs in the area, and from the Queen Mother of Patani to Swettenham, 'my support and the friend of Patani.'⁹⁵ Swettenham wrote protesting personally to King Chulalongkorn, for not having referred to this incident when he was in Singapore. Luckily he sent the letter via Tower, with authority to the latter to suppress it, if he felt it desirable to do so. Tower did.⁹⁶ He justified his action astutely on the ground that protests on behalf of a minor figure, with territory which did not share a boundary with Kelantan or Perak would harm the British cause in the more important states of Kelantan and Trengganu, where relations, 'are still to be adjusted.'⁹⁷ Thus, for diplomatic purposes, discontent in Patani, discreetly encouraged by Swettenham, which had to some extent formed the justification for British involvement was subordinated to the issues of Kelantan and Trengganu, although it left Siam firmly in control of Patani.

The decisiveness with which the Siamese reacted to the Patani trouble was unwelcome to Swettenham, for it showed that the Siamese were capable of handling their own affairs when occasion demanded. There was correspondingly less justification for intervention by Swettenham.

NOTES

1. See Chapter 25.
2. CO 273/168:628 ff. Dickson to Knutsford, Confidential of 28 October 1890, enclosing Swettenham's journal as Resident, Perak for September 1890.
3. *Footprints*, pp. 119-20 and Nigel Brailey, 1989, *Two Views of Siam on the Eve of the Chakri Reformation*, pp. 21 and 119 fn.
4. FAS to Currie (Private) 29 July 1891, (received in October 1891) Foreign Office Confidential Print 6372, No. 33, quoted in Chew Thesis pp. 292-3. Kobkua, 1988, op. cit., Chapter 2, esp. p. 27 explains that loss of territory by a Buddhist ruler indicated a lack of personal merit. These vague undertones may have affected hard-headed Thai assessment of the pros and cons of making sacrifices and may explain their indecision. See also Brailey, 1989, op. cit.
5. Brailey, 1989, op. cit., pp. 49-79, and pp. 81-4 for associated correspondence.
6. *Daily Chronicle*, 13 December 1895, quoted in part in *Straits Budget*, 14 January 1896. See also Chapter 40. Norman, it should be added, had spent some time in Kelantan, in 1894, presumably during the period when he was using Swettenham in Perak as a base for his forays over the Malay Peninsula. See W.A. Graham, 1908, *Kelantan: A State of the Malay Peninsula*, pp. 51-2.
7. See Chapter 40.
8. *Ibid.*
9. 'England, France & Siam,' *Blackwoods Magazine*, vol. 159, March 1896, pp. 461-70. Anonymous, but attributed by the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900*, vol. I to Swettenham, presumably on the basis of access to the magazine's editorial files.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 467-9.
11. For background information, see Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, 1988, op. cit., p. 137. The treaty provided that neither France nor Great Britain would without the consent of the other, advance their forces into Siam. See Likhit Dhiravegin, *Siam and Colonialism (1855-1909)*, Bangkok, 1974, App. C.
12. FO 422/45:49-52 Memorandum on British interests and policy in the Malay Peninsula, enclosed in dispatch of 28 February 1896, from Fairfield at CO to FO quoted in Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, 1984, 'The 1902 Siamese Kelantan Treaty: An End to the Traditional Relations,' *JSS*, 72:95-139.
13. *Blackwoods Magazine*, 1896, op. cit., p. 463.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 465.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 466.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 469-70.
17. See pp. 544, 545 below.
18. FO 422/45:154 Chamberlain to Mitchell, Secret of 2 December 1896. For text of the treaty see Dhiravegin, 1974, op. cit., App. D.
19. CO 273/275:198 ff. CO Minute, 18 May 1901, on Foreign, 13 May 1901.
20. Swettenham to Chamberlain, 23 July [1897]. CP, Singapore.
21. For a detailed discussion of the role of the Patani states, see Margaret L. Koch, 1977, 'Patani and the Development of a Thai State.' *JMBRAS*, 50 (2):69-88.
22. Kobkua, 1984, op. cit., p. 101.

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23. J.M. Gullick, 1986a, 'The Elephants of Syed Zin,' *JMBRAS*, 59 (1):113-23.
24. CO 273/239:370 ff. Mitchell to CO, Secret of 18 January 1898.
25. CO 273/241:178 ff. Kynnersley to CO, Secret of 21 September 1898, enclosing memo by Swettenham, 23 July 1898.
26. Ibid.
27. CO 273/241:186 ff. Secret memorandum by Sir J.A. Swettenham of 17 September 1898.
28. CO 273/241:484 Mitchell to CO, Secret of 21 of 1 December 1898, CO 273/242:48 ff. Admiralty, 19 December 1898.
29. CO 273/246:137 ff. Mitchell to CO, secret of 6 January 1899, enclosing Sir F. Swettenham's memo of 5 January 1899.
30. Ibid.
31. CO 273/243:483 ff. Foreign, 22 December 1898. Sir J.A. Swettenham's dispatch of 13 December 1898 recording the complaints of the Raja of Patani against the Siamese on his visit to Singapore.
32. CO 273/252:7-38 Mitchell to CO, telegram of 7 September 1899.
33. CO 273/252:21 ff. Mitchell to CO, secret of 12 September 1899, enclosing Swettenham's memo of 7 September 1899.
34. FO 422/51:111 Swettenham to Mitchell, secret of 29 September 1899.
35. CO 273/252:32 ff. Swettenham to Lucas, private of 29 September 1899 in Mitchell to SS, 5 October 1899.
36. CO 273/264:381 ff. Foreign, 23 August 1900 enclosing Swettenham, 21 December 1899, as RG agreeing boundary changes.
37. He was initially known as Raja, but raised to Sultan in 1911, ruling as Sultan Muhammad IV till his death in 1920.
38. CO 273/264:791 FO to CO, 9 August 1900, CO 273/283:791 ff. Swettenham to CO, Secret, 10 September 1902. CO 273/303:396 Anderson to CO, Confidential. 20 November 1904. For further details see Mohamed b. Nik Mohd. Salleh, 1974, 'Kelantan in Transition: 1891-1910,' in W.R. Roff (ed.), *Kelantan: Religion, Society and Politics in a Malay State*, OUP, Kuala Lumpur. Also Gullick, 1992a, op. cit., pp. 143-4.
39. Kobkua, 1984, op. cit., p. 110.
40. *PP*, 16 September 1896, 31 July 1897, 14 and 29 December 1898. See also CO 273/260:216 Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, Telegram of 25 January 1900 and CO 273/260:265 ff. Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, 53 of 25 January 1900 for his medical problems and CO 273/261:468 Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, 182 of 3 June 1900, for details of his early career. See also R. Sankaran, 'Prelude to the British Forward Movement of 1909', *Peninjau Sejarah* 1 (2):24-41, 1966, and Wright and Reid, 1912, op. cit., pp. 152-60, and CO 422/56, *passim*.
41. Details in CO 273/275 *passim*.
42. The text of the Duff Concession is printed in Allen, Stockwell and Wright, 1981, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 192-4.
43. For details, see Thio, 1957b, 'A Turning Point in Britain's Malayan Policy,' *The Historical Annual*, (Singapore) 3: pp. 10-11.
44. J.A. Swettenham to Chamberlain, 9 November 1900 quoted in Kobkua, 1984, op. cit.

45. Wright and Reid, 1912, op. cit., pp. 159-60.
46. *STD*, 1 November 1902, quoting *Nieuwe Courant*.
47. CO 273/274:81 ff. Swettenham to CO, Confidential of 9 September 1901.
48. Lists of names are in CO 273/264:555 ff. Confidential, FO to CO 8 May 1900, enclosing Duff Syndicate's letter to FO, 24 April 1900 and CO 273/275:648 ff. FO to CO, 7 October 1901.
49. CO 273/275:341 FO to CO 18 June 1901 and Shaharil Talib, formerly L.R. Robert, 'The Duff Syndicate in Kelantan 1900-1902', *JMBRAS*, 45 (1):81-110, 1973. See also thesis by Shaharil Talib, formerly L.R. Robert, 'Kelantan 1890-1939: Government in Transition,' UM 1973.
50. *STD*, 9 and 10 May 1901.
51. *STD*, 17 July 1901.
52. CO 273/273:428 ff Swettenham to CO, Confidential of 23 July 1901 is an account of their discussions.
53. Gullick, 1986a, op. cit.
54. CO 273/273:428 ff. as above.
55. *Ibid*.
56. *Ibid*. 'Memorandum of F. Swettenham on Notes on conversations with the King of Siam and Prince Damrong his brother.'
57. Minute by Im Thurm at CO on 19 August 1901 on dispatch mentioned above.
58. CO 273/275:730 ff. FO to CO, 23 October 1901 enclosing Swettenham to Lucas, part of letter, undated.)
59. Shaharil Talib, formerly Robert, 1973a, op. cit., pp. 98-9.
60. *Ibid*.
61. CO 273/273:62 Swettenham to CO, Secret of 15 May 1901.
62. This was not in fact achieved till 1909, in Kelantan, and 1919, in Trengganu.
63. 'The Kelantan Question,' *SFP*, 16 August 1901, 'Mr Duff and Kelantan Politics the Peninsula,' *STD*, 22 August 1901 and 'The Kelantan Question: Mr Duff's own views,' *SFP*, 23 August 1901.
64. CO 273/273:428 ff. As above.
65. CO 273/275:471 FO to CO, 31 July 1901, enclosing Swettenham to Im Thurm of the CO, 7 July 1901.
66. CO 273/274:1 ff. Swettenham to Chamberlain, Confidential of 3 September 1901.
67. *Ibid*.
68. CO 273/275:546 ff. Draft to Under-Secretary of State, FO, 2 September 1901, Secret and Immediate.
69. CO 273/274:500 ff. Swettenham to Chamberlain, Secret of 4 November 1901 enclosing Swettenham to Chulalongkorn, 29 October 1901.
70. FO 422/56:94 Swettenham to Chamberlain, Telegraph of 16 November 1901.
71. CO 273/274:517 Swettenham to CO, Telegram of 16 October 1901.
72. FO 422/54:110-11 Swettenham to Chamberlain, Secret of 14 November 1901.
73. FO 422/56:1-3 Duff (London) to Chamberlain, 23 December 1901.

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74. CO 273/277:332 ff. Duff to Chamberlain, 23 December 1901. See also FO 422/56:11 FO to CO, Confidential of 13 January 1902.
75. See Kobkua, 1988, op. cit., esp. pp. 175-80 for an explanation of these reforms and Koch, 1977, op. cit., pp. 70-8 for the adverse complaints to Singapore which the reforms occasioned.
76. For the technicalities of this issue, see Shaharil Talib, formerly L.R. Robert, 1973a, op. cit., pp. 100-3.
77. FO 422/54:89 CO to FO, Secret of 30 October 1901.
78. FO 422/54:101 CO to FO, Secret of 11 December 1901.
79. FO 422/56:9 Lansdowne to Tower (British Minister in Bangkok), telegram of 7 January 1902.
80. FO 422/56:37 Tower to Lansdowne, secret of 27 January 1902.
81. FO 422/54:94 Swettenham to Chamberlain, telegram of 16 November 1901. FO 422/56:9 Lansdowne to Tower, telegram of 7 January 1902. FO 422/56:13 Swettenham to Chamberlain, telegram, received 17 January 1902.
82. FO 422/56:15 Tower to Lansdowne, telegram of 31 January 1902. See also FO 422/56:49 Tower to Lansdowne, secret of 31 January 1902.
83. Kobkua, 1984 op. cit., p. 106.
84. FO 422/56:10 FO to CO, secret of 9 January 1902.
85. FO 422/56:14 Tower to Lansdowne, telegram, confidential of 27 January 1902.
86. FO 422/56: 16 Swettenham to Chamberlain, telegram of 3 February 1902.
87. FO 422/56:17 Lansdowne to Tower, telegram of 8 February 1902.
88. FO 422/56:26 Tower's Pro-memoria of Conversation with Prince Devawongse, 9 January 1902.
89. CO 273/282:312 ff. Swettenham to Chamberlain, secret of 3 February 1902. The dispatch and memorandum, Swettenham to Chamberlain, 3 February 1902 are also in FO 422/56:41 ff.
90. Details are given in Kobkua, 1984, op. cit., pp. 106-7.
91. FO 422/57:164 Duff to Paget in Bangkok, 14 September 1903.
92. See next chapter..
93. See Chapter 39.
94. Shaharil Talib, formerly L.R. Robert, 1981, op. cit., p. 82, *STD*, 12-15, 18, 19 March 1902, *MM*, 13 and 14 March 1902, *PP*, 15 March 1902, *SFP*, 18 March 1902, reproduced in FO 422/56:88-94. The *Siam Observer's* point of view is given in FO 422/56:100, quoting an article of 21 March 1902. The *Siamese Free Press*, quoted in *STD*, of 22 April 1902 stated that Siam must either quit the southern states, or be thrown out. Other *STD* articles on Siam appeared on 16, 29, 30 May, 2 June and 6 August 1902. See also M. Koch, 1977, op. cit.
95. FO 422/56:86. Queen Mother of Patani to Swettenham, 21 February 1902.
96. FO 422/56:96. Tower to Lansdowne, telegram of 26 April 1902.
97. CO 273/286:FO to CO, 5 May 1902 enclosing Tower to FO, Confidential, 17 March 1902.

The Problem of Siam: Reality of Failure

It was with extreme reluctance, and only reacting to pressure from Tower in Bangkok that King Chulalongkorn arranged for the third time to visit Swettenham in Singapore. Ostensibly, the reason for the visit was to accompany his son to catch a German mail-steamer to return to his studies in Berlin. Moreover, it was reported that the politically ambitious M. Doumer, Governor-General of French Indo-China was planning a visit to Bangkok. The King had no wish to meet him: nor did he want to provoke public speculation by inviting Swettenham to Bangkok. In fact, as will be seen, the King had jumped out of the frying pan into the fire.¹

Swettenham had cabled for advice before the Siamese visit.² In a further cable he enquired whether he might be allowed to secure for Britain all islands south of a certain line. This referred to the islands of Langkawi, north of Penang, and Redang on the east coast. In both cases there were rumours that they might be granted to foreigners. He further asked permission that these arrangements be covered by either public or secret treaties. The Colonial Office commented from recent bitter experience that secret treaties were undesirable, and sent the cable on to the Foreign Office, recommending that Swettenham be given a free hand.³

The King and his party duly arrived in Singapore from Bangkok on 23 February.⁴ Swettenham, in his first report to London on the discussions, noted that he had found the King difficult to deal with, as he wanted all the advantages of British support without giving any concessions. Under pressure, he finally agreed that Kelantan and Trengganu be allowed their own home government, but foreign relations were to be in Siamese hands. Nor was the king forthcoming on the idea of ceding islands.⁵

On the same day, Swettenham unburdened himself in a private letter to Lucas. 'My three interviews with the king and his brother have not raised them in my estimation,' he wrote. Indeed, so overbearing had Swettenham been that the King had fled

prematurely, to avoid being subjected to pressure by Swettenham to give definite answers. 'It is ten thousand pities that such a power should blight the prospects of the Malay States ... I feel inclined to say, "Thank God he's gone." '6

There followed a series of dispatches and Promemoria, which were sent to London, setting out in much more detail and with almost as much vitriol as was evident in his letter to Lucas, Swettenham's full account of the visit.⁷ The King had wisely declined an invitation to stay at Government House, and in a masterly understatement Swettenham recorded that his 'sudden departure deprived me of the opportunity of saying all that I meant to say.' The hasty departure, he correctly surmised, was intentional. The King did however admit he was unable to protect British interests in the north of the Peninsula in the manner he had undertaken in the secret treaty of 1897. Swettenham suggested that the solution might be for Siam to allow the British to deal direct with Kelantan and Trengganu, leaving internal administration to the Malays, but maintaining protection. Under these circumstances, he suggested, the Siamese would not surrender their sovereignty. Yet he was sure that the Siamese would wish to yield nothing: 'I have had to do with Siamese directly and indirectly for many years,' he noted gloomily, 'and I have never had a high opinion of them.'⁸

He suspected the King had arrived in Singapore without realizing how serious the position was. The King did not wish to agree to treaties entered into directly between Kelantan, Trengganu and the British because he had previously claimed the two states to be dependencies of Siam, and under his control. Moreover he resisted for as long as possible the idea that the states should manage their internal affairs. In a postscript to his covering dispatch, Swettenham reported that he had just received a letter from Tower, the British Consul in Bangkok, which indicated that he, Tower, had warned the King of the subjects which would be raised by Swettenham. Therefore the King's claim that he had expected only to discuss the appointment of British Consuls was disingenuous. Swettenham also noted angrily that he had, since the visit, received independent information that on 20 February the Siamese had arrested the Raja of Patani. The King, who must have known about this further outrage to Malay susceptibilities in the southern states, had said nothing. 'I hardly see how it is possible to work with the Siamese and retain our good name with the Malays under such conditions,' he commented.

The three Promemoria gave much more detail about the talks. The problem in the King's view was the British complaint that Siam had done little to assert her authority in the southern Malay-dominated states. Siam, the King conceded, must take decisive

steps to protect British interests, and he had come to consult Swettenham as to the best way of achieving this objective. Swettenham's view was different: he had, it was true, gained Foreign Office support by arguing Siam's lack of authority in the area. This argument was based in his mind on the assumption that Siam had no legitimate claim to the states. However the refusal by the Foreign Office to countenance any change in the control of these states for fear of upsetting Siam and the French forced Swettenham to argue for an extension of Siamese authority to protect British interests. Swettenham saw the problems resulting from the extension of Siamese control as purely Siamese. He failed to recognize that they were the result of British pressure in the first case. Given Swettenham's unsympathetic analysis, he concluded, in a condescending tone, that the problem was the 'best manner of getting Siam out of a difficult and serious dilemma.' He tried hard to outsmart the King, and make himself thoroughly disagreeable. He warned of the risk of serious violence on the scale of the Acheen War. The British had relied on the existence of secret agreements between Siam and Trengganu and Kelantan to prevent foreign powers moving in. They now found there were no such agreements. The position was far worse than when the King had last visited Singapore in the previous year, and unless the King showed that he realized this, it was useless for Swettenham to give advice. In a further insult Swettenham claimed that hostilities had only been avoided by the exercise of his personal influence over the rajas. The King accurately but somewhat rashly cast aspersions on Swettenham's and the British government's goodwill towards Siam. Swettenham repeated that the goodwill was evidenced by the fact that no outbreak of violence had so far occurred. Swettenham browbeat the King into asking him, Swettenham, for suggestions for a solution. The King in due course obliged.

There were, Swettenham replied, three possibilities. The first was that Siam withdraw entirely from Kelantan and Trengganu. The second was to appoint British officers as servants of the King, to act as Residents, because the British were the only people who had sufficient experience of the successful administration of Malay states. The third possibility was that Britain would help Siam draw up agreements with these states, under which foreign affairs remained in Siamese hands, while the Malays had the full right to run their own internal affairs. At the same time the islands of Langkawi and Redang would be transferred to British control. Swettenham pressed for a prompt reply to these proposals, but the King not unnaturally prevaricated.

Promemoria 2 covered the meeting that evening over and after dinner at Hurricane House on 24 February.⁹ The King indicated he

would gradually start employing British officers, initially in Bangkok. This was unacceptable to Swettenham, who insisted they be appointed at once to the southern states. He also pressed for treaties in conformity with the third proposal mentioned above, and suggested that the periodical gift of gold and silver tribute from the states should be replaced by the payment of a tithe to Bangkok. After initial prevarication, the King accepted and asked Swettenham to draft suitable agreements.

The third Promemoria covered dinner at Government House on 25 February, immediately before the king's precipitate departure. The agreements in draft had been sent round to the King in the morning, and Swettenham once again pressed for a response. The King again prevaricated, stating that they raised so many problems that he could give no reply before he left. Swettenham reiterated that the solution proposed would have several advantages: the British would know there was no chance of hostile foreign bases being established in the area: Siam would get control of foreign affairs, and the Malays would get home rule, under conditions which would provide the Siamese with a strong argument against any further French encroachment.

Finally, exasperated beyond endurance by Siamese vacillation, Swettenham openly threatened the King that if no favourable answer was received, he would contact the Malay rajas, and could not guarantee that there would not be violence. Swettenham was not unfamiliar with blackmail. The King, and his minister Damrong, after consultation, agreed to the third proposal: that Kelantan and Trengganu should enter into agreements with Siam and be granted home rule. It was scarcely surprising that the King fled to his yacht. Between the lines of Swettenham's suave official accounts may be discerned the glittering malevolence of the imperial proconsul, at the height of his powers.¹⁰ One is left to speculate on the atmosphere in which the King made a gift to Swettenham of a fine silver alloy lunch-box which subsequently took its place in Swettenham's collection of Malay silver.¹¹

The disaster of this meeting with the King was recognized by all concerned, not least by Swettenham himself, who wrote: 'It is well to speak plainly now, and recognize that we are dealing with a people whose word is worthless, and who will resort to duplicity or subterfuge to gain their ends.'¹² Two weeks later, he wrote even more bitterly: 'The Siamese are the most contemptuous, the most unreliable, the most corrupt. They are cruel and lazy, unjust and untruthful, and they are not even courageous.'¹³

Why did Swettenham behave so tactlessly in his negotiations with the King? He was, after all, better acquainted than anyone else, apart possibly from Tower, with the true state of affairs in

Bangkok. Nor did he lack experience in negotiating with south-east Asian rulers. At the beginning of this final series of meetings with the King, there was still the chance that he might have cajoled the Siamese into substantial concessions. So long as the Duff issue remained unresolved, there was scope for negotiation.

The answer would seem to be that in previous negotiations, particularly those at the time of Federation, Swettenham in his dealing with the Malay rulers had the upper hand. If they did not agree, he was in a position to enforce compliance by various means. The Siamese however were under no such compunction. That Swettenham failed to recognize this distinction, and make due allowance for it was a major error on his part. The failure of these meetings was due to Swettenham's overbearing and threatening behaviour. Safely back in Bangkok, the Siamese were also not slow to register their disapproval of Swettenham's high-handed manner. Prince Devawongse complained to Tower in Bangkok.

Prince Devawongse said that the King had been much disappointed at the tenour of Sir F. Swettenham's advice, which he had sought at the suggestion of His Majesty's Government, and that His Majesty was perturbed by the pressure put upon him to cede the States of Kelantan and Tringanu to Great Britain. It was not difficult, he said, to see that, if any such arrangement were agreed to, a similar move would be made by the French on the eastern frontier of Siam, which would practically reduce this kingdom to the limits of the Anglo-French Agreement of 1896 ...¹⁴

Tower, in the same dispatch, correctly assessed that the problems had been exacerbated by the King's visit to Singapore, and would not be improved until the Siamese employed a British official or officials in the southern states to safeguard British interests.¹⁵

Swettenham was instructed to give an account of his activities.¹⁶ He responded two days later, hotly denying that he had attempted to put pressure on the King, and suggesting that this was just a diversion by the King to distract attention from Siamese activities in Patani. Tower stoutly defended Swettenham's strategy.¹⁷ Further prodding from Tower in March eventually produced a memorandum from the Siamese consenting to enter into agreements with Kelantan and Trengganu, which should be administered with the assistance of British nationals to be appointed by the Siamese. A draft text of the agreement prepared by the Siamese was to be submitted to Tower very shortly.¹⁸ The Siamese government's memorandum, officially responding to the proposals of early January 1902, was submitted on 28 March.¹⁹

Meanwhile the Duff Development Syndicate were coming to an agreement with the Siamese authorities. Thus their value as a

bargaining counter, at least for Swettenham, was diminished. An intriguing question which remains open is the role of Dato Seri Adika Raja, who apparently made a semi-secret visit to Kelantan in February 1902, on Swettenham's instructions, in connection with the Duff problem.²⁰ There followed a series of negotiations, chiefly conducted in London and Bangkok, to which Swettenham was not directly party. They were marked, after the February meeting in Singapore, by intense suspicion on the part of the Siamese towards British intentions in the Malay-dominated states of Siam. Although the Siamese now agreed to the principle of appointing British Advisers in Kelantan and Trengganu, but not Patani, and undertook not to interfere in the internal affairs of these states, they wished to control the posts, telegraphs and railways. Following a suggestion made by Swettenham in his second Promemoria, they asked for a tithe of the gross revenues instead of the traditional *bunga mas*.²¹

Tower, who had been sent to Singapore to deliberate with Swettenham, forwarded from there the draft suggested by the Siamese.²² He and Swettenham then rapidly produced a further draft which was transmitted by the latter to Chamberlain on 17 April 1902.²³ This text did not allow Siamese control over the posts, telegraphs and railways. Further, it severely restricted the revenues to be paid to Siam. Both men urged that the British should insist on this version, and Swettenham, in a separate letter to Lucas urged that in the event the Siamese refused to accept the terms, Britain should negotiate similar treaties independently with Kelantan and Trengganu, thus putting an end to what he saw as Siamese pretensions to authority in these states.²⁴

The Siamese, not unexpectedly declined these terms. They took the view that, 'the British Minister who now is thoroughly influenced by the Governor of the Straits Settlements, endeavoured to force us to a kind of dual control over the two States, which proposal, if agreed upon, would not only be the mere peril of the two States, but will surely cause immediately a similar claim made on the other side of Siam [by the French, which will finally cause] the disruption of the whole of Siam. Go and see the British Minister for Foreign Affairs and explain the gravity of the situation.'²⁵ Swettenham again cabled Chamberlain, urging him to insist on his and Tower's draft.²⁶ Further pressure was put on the Siamese by Lansdowne in London, dealing with Phraya Prasadhi, the Siamese Minister there. In these discussions Lansdowne urged ratification of the Duff concessions to show that, 'the Siamese Government were in earnest ... [and] unless this were done without further delay, we should certainly be pressed to come to terms with the Rajahs, without further reference to the Siamese government.'²⁷

The Siamese, increasingly exasperated by what they believed to be the influence exercised by Swettenham upon Tower in Bangkok, requested that all negotiations be transferred to London. This was agreed at the end of June. By early July, news that the Duff concession had been ratified in Bangkok was received in London.²⁸ Although the Siamese may have been able to protect themselves from further direct association with Swettenham, he still exercised power behind the scenes, producing at the end of May 1902 a trenchant memorandum urging that the British should stand no nonsense from them.²⁹ Swettenham still wielded very considerable influence. He had directly swayed Lord Lansdowne to bring pressure to bear on the Siamese in London, thus effectively securing the ratification of the Duff concession. However he had used sledgehammer tactics, and the price he was now to pay was to be relegated firmly by the Siamese to the sidelines. He had shown that he was able, and used the best of his ability to create difficulties for the Siamese, but if he had won the immediate battle, he had lost the war.

Almost certainly he did not realize this. At about this time, he was writing as High Commissioner his covering letter to Chamberlain, enclosing the 1901 FMS Annual Report. He could not resist a swipe at the Siamese in the final paragraph. He stressed that no revenues from the Malay States were ever diverted from local to imperial coffers: 'I only mention the fact because a certain interest attaches to the different methods by which European and Asiatic powers administer their Dependencies.'³⁰

There were still major inconsistencies and problems inherent in the Siamese-Straits Settlements relationship. The first was that Siam and Britain were endeavouring to come to an agreement under which Siam would impose on Kelantan and Trengganu similar treaties, without at this stage revealing to the rulers of the states concerned their intention, indeed obligation to a third party (Britain) to do so. Moreover Britain took upon itself the responsibility of 'safeguarding' the interests of Kelantan and Trengganu, by attempting to impose upon them treaties with Siam, a state to which Britain itself had recognized them to be tributary. Largely thanks to Swettenham, objections were offered to Siam itself securing the signatures of these tributaries to treaties with itself.

The summary removal of the Raja of Patani by the Siamese had severely shaken the Raja of Kelantan and his colleagues in the Malay states of the north-east. He now arrived in Singapore on 15 May 1902, planning to stay for ten days and request help. In fact he remained for over a month.³¹ His arrival provided Swettenham, from his new position on the sidelines, with a further welcome lever

to use against the Siamese. It was also a useful means of encouraging the British government to take a tougher line with them.

Soon after his arrival, the Raja of Kelantan visited Swettenham in Government House to complain about the situation, maintaining he would resist by force any attempt by the Siamese to coerce him. On a subsequent visit on 27 May, he requested British protection and a Resident, who should be British. If these proposals were not accepted, he threatened to return to Kelantan with six hundred rifles and seek help elsewhere.³² On 3 June, the Raja handed Swettenham a written request for assistance, anticipating trouble from Siam and fearing that he would be subjected to the same fate as the Raja of Patani.³³

For Swettenham, the temptation was almost irresistible. He cabled Chamberlain personally:

I venture to repeat the following points — Kelantan declares its independence and asks for British protection and Resident. British interest in danger while Siamese integrity and commerce not affected by extending our protection over Kelantan.³⁴

In his official cable to London a day later, he pointed out that he would not detain the Raja of Kelantan much longer: how much easier it would be for Britain to accept his request for protection and take over control of Kelantan. Such a move was justified on the grounds that Siam had proved herself 'ungrateful, unreliable, and intractable,' and had moreover misled the British government.³⁵ Predictably, this proposal was turned down at the instigation of the Foreign Office.³⁶

Swettenham replied to the Raja on 7 June, hinting that the British had an arrangement with Siam which prevented them from accepting the Raja's invitation.³⁷ When eventually he left on 18 June, he accepted Swettenham's offer of the *Sea Belle*, for security, accompanied by a few Sikhs whom he had recruited in Singapore, and a number of unmarked cases which were presumed to contain arms. Swettenham must have been aware of all this.³⁸

The Siamese of course learned of this activity, and in July objected strongly in London.

I regret to inform your Lordship that a telegram has reached me from His Royal Highness Prince Devawongse giving an account of the treatment by the Governor of Singapore of the Rajah of Kelantan during his recent visit to Singapore and on his departure from there, which shows a spirit very far from friendly towards my Government, and which, considering the existing condition of affairs, is extremely likely to cause a disturbance, and to arouse bad feelings at a time when special care should be taken to prevent this. The occasion of the

Rajah's visit to Singapore appears to have been taken advantage of by the Governor to show him honour of a kind to which his rank and position in Kelantan by no means entitle him, and which, so far, have been absolutely unknown in similar cases.³⁹

Again, Swettenham was asked by London for the facts, and replied tersely that the Raja had been afforded no more than the usual courtesies due to his rank.⁴⁰ A similar complaint came from Paris, where the Siamese Minister, 'laid great stress on Sir F. Swettenham's hostility to Siam,' and upon what he called 'the intrigues of the Governor of the Straits Settlements.'⁴¹

In frustration and exasperation Swettenham wrote sarcastically to Lucas:

I have never heard and I do not pretend to know, what has hitherto influenced the British Government in its relations with Siam, or what its policy towards that country has been, or is now, especially in reference to the Malay States. If I did know, you would be saved the trouble of reading this letter.⁴²

He poured vitriol and scorn on the Siamese as a people. He must have realized he had failed: 'My connection with the matter is I conclude at an end; but I am very anxious to speak one word for the Malays.' British prestige with the Malays was at a high point, and Britain, he felt, could not afford to fail them. He concluded with a further plea on behalf of the Raja of Patani, to put more pressure on the Siamese, and prevent the King, whom he identified as the chief villain, from further prevarication.⁴³

It was no doubt partly in response to this that a suggestion was made in London the following month that Swettenham be sent to Kelantan and Trengganu, to put pressure on the Siamese to come to an agreement. He could if necessary go on to Bangkok to confer with Tower.⁴⁴ When this proposal was disclosed in London to the Siamese authorities, the effect was electric. The Siamese Minister 'begged that we would send anyone but Sir F. Swettenham, whose attitude had from first to last been more hostile to Siam.' Lansdowne replied that if the Siamese arranged their affairs satisfactorily, there would be no need for Swettenham to go.⁴⁵

Swettenham continued to press for firm and immediate action in the face of the Siamese. He made another direct appeal to Chamberlain on 15 July 1902, apparently provoked by a further visit from Tower on his way back to Britain. Once again he urged that the treaty which he and Tower had prepared should be put to the Siamese. If they refused to accept it, Britain should then deal with Kelantan and Trengganu direct. This he maintained they were justified in doing, because, *inter alia* the Siamese had seriously misled the British over the 1897 secret treaty. Now the Siamese

were attempting to divert east coast trade away to Bangkok, to the detriment of the British.

I will not say anything about Siamese diplomacy. I could not truthfully describe the methods and morality of the Siamese Government without seeming to exaggerate.... If the British Government now tell the Malays they decline absolutely to interfere, and they will leave the Malays to settle matters with the Siamese, the Malays will fight. They would have done it already, if I had not used such influence as I possess to prevent a breach of the peace.

Swettenham, never one to underestimate his own worth, concluded his letter by urging yet again that the British should come to the help of their Malay friends in Kelantan or Trengganu, failing which considerable prestige would be lost. Chamberlain replied somewhat guardedly on 15 September, nevertheless supporting Swettenham's policies.⁴⁶

Nothing daunted, the Raja of Kelantan again appealed to Singapore in August, complaining of Siamese interference in the state's internal affairs.⁴⁷ Lucas, reporting to the Foreign Office, once again suggested sending Swettenham on a mission to the east coast states.⁴⁸ On this occasion it was agreed in London that Swettenham should undertake this mission, and for this purpose he was to be provided with the texts of the proposed agreements between Kelantan and Trengganu, and Siam. But he was specifically instructed not to get the rulers' signatures to these agreements without further instructions.⁴⁹ Swettenham wasted no time in heading for Kelantan, while the Siamese both from Bangkok and from their London legation protested vigorously against what they claimed was an infringement of all three treaties with Siam: 1826, 1856 and 1897.⁵⁰

He left Singapore on 5 September, with a small party on the *Sea Belle*, and anchored off Kota Bahru at daybreak on 7 September. The cable warning of their arrival had not been received, so they were not expected. The day was spent in discussions with the Raja of Kelantan and his ministers, observed but not overheard by a Siamese representative. The Raja and his chiefs maintained they would fight if the British declined to assist them. They expressed themselves particularly dissatisfied with Siam, and the way in which the Raja of Patani had been treated. Having taken these soundings, Swettenham left at 11:00 p.m. for Kuala Trengganu, where he arrived at 10:00 a.m. the following day. He found the Sultan, in his discussions with him, to be very devout and reserved. It was clear the Sultan wished to stand aloof from both Siam and Britain. If pressed, it was Swettenham's view he would prefer Siam. However he was willing to give a promise not

to make any concessions without British approval. Swettenham concluded it would be unwise to press that state to accept a Resident at that stage: such an official would be unwelcome, nor was there enough revenue to pay his salary. He therefore departed for Pekan later in the day, having warned the Sultan not to entertain an American, a certain Mr Bailey, almost certainly the same man who had masterminded the attempt to corner the peninsular tin market. After a courtesy call on the Sultan of Pahang, Swettenham returned to Singapore at 2:00 p.m. on 10 September.⁵¹

Additionally Swettenham prepared two memoranda on his visit. That covering Kelantan spelt out recent Siamese attempts to impose their influence on the state, chiefly by taking advantage of the unstable succession. He also noted that in the previous month, one hundred Sikhs were brought to Kelantan, at the instigation of the Raja, to defend the state against Siamese attack. In his second memorandum on Trengganu, he indicated that the Siamese were unwelcome, and in any case had no influence whatsoever on the state. If they tried to impose their influence, they would be met with force.⁵²

The Siamese legation in London continued to protest vigorously at Swettenham's mission. They would not object to an inquiry, provided the person making it was 'unbiased.' Swettenham, by proposing the cession of Kelantan and Trengganu, while the King was paying him a friendly visit in February, had forfeited any claim to be impartial.⁵³ Moreover they and their colleagues in Bangkok argued forcefully that in Kelantan at least they had for years run the government. There were moreover arguments over attempts by Siam to alter duty arrangements between Kelantan and Bangkok to the detriment of Singapore. The Singapore Chamber of Commerce reacted strongly, stirring up colleagues in Britain to protest.⁵⁴ Arguments continued for a further three weeks, with Swettenham angrily refuting what he regarded as Siamese misinformation to Chamberlain and Lansdowne over the state of their rule in Kelantan.⁵⁵

By now the Siamese were alarmed, and realized that they were close to losing all influence over both Kelantan and Trengganu. The result was a series of energetic negotiations led by the Siamese envoy in London, which resulted in the signing on 6 October of the long-awaited treaty. It was accompanied by a private exchange of notes which provided for British Advisers and Assistant Advisers to be appointed in each state with the concurrence of the British authorities. The final draft agreement took the form of identical treaties between Siam and Kelantan and Siam and Trengganu.⁵⁶

It can have been no coincidence that at the same time the Siamese concluded an agreement with France, delineating a new

frontier between Siam and Cambodia, which conceded substantial territory to France. The French authorities insisted pointedly that in their case there were no secret understandings with the Siamese.⁵⁷ Swettenham was informed on 8 October, and instructed to go at once to Kelantan and Trengganu with copies of the agreement. He was to brief the two rulers on the terms of the treaties which were to be imposed on them by Siam, and to ensure the Siamese realized they would have to arrange for a competent individual to attend and sign on their behalf. The rulers were to be assured they would not be deposed by the Siamese provided they behaved themselves.⁵⁸ At the same time Chamberlain explained in a dispatch the reasons why certain clauses in the agreement eventually signed differed from those which had been proposed by Swettenham and Tower earlier in the year.⁵⁹ Swettenham acknowledged this the following month, pointing out that the party most crucially affected by the treaty, drawn up and signed over their heads, was the Malay community of Kelantan. The only chance of a successful outcome he now believed was for the British to insist firmly on their right to choose the advisers.⁶⁰ Meantime, although the Foreign Office was now prepared to make public the Secret Treaty of 1897, the Siamese still insisted it be kept secret, for fear that it would provoke fresh territorial demands from the French.

Just before he left for the east coast, Swettenham let his hair down in a private letter to Lucas. He looked forward to a round of golf with Lucas before long, but said how sad it was that the Siamese had duped the Foreign Office. Britain could have benefited from their deceitful behaviour over the 1897 secret treaty, claiming they had valid written agreements with Kelantan and Trengganu, by applying greater pressure when the terms were being decided. To this the Siamese would have yielded. He alleged that the French had acquired 10,000 square miles of Siamese territory. In response the Siamese had taken Kelantan and Trengganu, at British expense. In his view, had affairs been handled differently, the whole peninsula would by now be under British control. Swettenham concluded by remarking that there was little time before the monsoon to visit the east coast and obtain Kelantan and Trengganu signatures to the treaty which had now been agreed in draft between Britain and Siam. The terms used in his letter were those of a man who has seen what he regarded as the most coveted prize of his career slip from his grasp: the disappointment and bitterness were understandable.⁶¹

Swettenham left for his second visit to Kelantan and Trengganu on 14 October, carrying with him treaties for signature by the rulers of those states. He was not entirely optimistic about the prospects for his visit, as he cabled to London. The Siamese, he maintained, concurred in his action, and could if necessary sign

later. However he doubted whether Trengganu would be persuaded to sign.⁶² Swettenham was accompanied on this trip not only by his ADC and private secretary, but also by Dato Seri Adika Raja of Perak, who had recently returned from an uncomfortable visit to London. The Dato Seri was evidently believed to have some influence in Trengganu, for he, together with a relative of the Sultan, Tunku Chi Malacca from Johore, were dropped off at Kuala Trengganu as the vessel headed north, to put in some groundwork with the Sultan before Swettenham's arrival.⁶³

The main party reached Kota Bahru on the morning of 16 October, and were accorded a substantial reception. The Raja had a number of questions on the implications of the treaty now placed before him. He was reassured that the British officer to be based there would be a man of experience, that he, the Raja would be secure on the throne, and his descendants would succeed him, and that henceforth only the Kelantanese flag would be flown. In answer to his question on whether the Siamese police commissioner, his forces and the Siamese gunboat would leave Kota Bahru, Swettenham said he certainly hoped such would be the case. Satisfied with Swettenham's replies, the Raja of Kelantan duly signed the treaty, and Swettenham departed for Kuala Trengganu.

In Kuala Trengganu, he was met by a colourful ceremonial guard of spearmen, and walked under their escort to the palace. His visit however did not meet with success. Despite the good offices of Dato Seri Adika Raja and Tunku Chi, who had discussed the treaty at length with the Sultan of Trengganu, the latter objected. He maintained that Trengganu had never had a treaty with Siam. He questioned the necessity of one now. Britain had previously always supported the independence of Trengganu, and resisted Siamese claims. Why was it now changing its attitude and helping Siam to establish influence in the state? The Sultan particularly objected to the King of Siam, in name at least, appointing advisers, whose advice must be followed. Swettenham had received from the Colonial Office a cable which authorized him to threaten the Sultan: if he was not prepared to sign the treaty prepared to protect his interests, by the British government, he should not look to them for any further help against the Siamese, and would not be allowed to grant privileges and concessions to any foreign power.⁶⁴ Despite the threats the Sultan remained obdurate and refused to sign. Swettenham departed empty-handed, while the Sultan hid his outright rejection behind the traditional ruse of requiring indefinite time to consider the matter. Swettenham returned from this east coast trip with Duff: a further indication of the continuing close links between the two men.⁶⁵

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In his dispatch to London reporting the position, Swettenham consoled himself with the reflection that the Foreign Office had consistently upheld Siamese claims, against his advice, and it would now do them good to hear the views of the Sultan himself. He referred back as far as his 1882 memorandum, and reminded the Colonial Office that he had all along warned that the Sultan of Trengganu would probably not sign. Why should he? He had repeatedly been assured that the British endorsed his independence. Why now should they be so eager to persuade him to sign a treaty, not with themselves, but with Siam? Moreover in the event that agreement to the treaty was obtained, any Resident would have to use extreme tact and discretion.⁶⁶

Paget had meantime succeeded Tower in Bangkok. He attempted to justify the position in regard to Kelantan as follows:

Whilst it is true that the Agreement is between Siam and Kelantan, it is nevertheless an agreement brought about by negotiations between His Majesty's Government and the Siamese Government, an agreement in which the former are closely concerned, and that they are therefore entitled to have full cognizance of all that takes place between Siam, Kelantan and Trengganu.⁶⁷

It was, for the Siamese, an appalling prospect. That they achieved as much as they did in the face of such difficulties was a tribute to the diplomatic skills of their senior ministers. Once again, Swettenham unburdened himself to Lucas, complaining of what he regarded as an inflammatory article in the Siamese press. This claimed the treaty with Britain as a victory for the Siamese: the states were to remain permanent dependencies of Siam, and by the Siamese king's appointment of British Advisers, the sultans would ensure for themselves 'a better position than that of the mere "figureheads" which the Rajahs of the Federated Malay States are said to be.' The comment was guaranteed to infuriate Swettenham, who remarked that the Siamese would have done better to publish the full text of the treaty.⁶⁸

There now emerged a further problem, directly exacerbated by the lack of tact which Swettenham had shown in his dealings with the Siamese. It hinged on the selection of British Advisers to be appointed by the King to the southern states. It was under the circumstances almost inevitable that any appointee seen to have been prompted by Swettenham, or to be identified as a Straits Settlements man, was doomed to suspicion and failure at the hands of the Siamese.

The deliberations therefore were not without acrimony. Three names were put forward: Graham, Giles and Scott, all men who had been employed by the Siamese. Swettenham snorted with derision:

none of them spoke adequate Malay, he had never met Graham, and as for Scott, 'I have always heard that Scott is a sort of tomcat in the house of Prince Damrong, and not entirely trustworthy.' There were, he concluded, many better candidates in the FMS.⁶⁹ Two days later Swettenham cabled his advice that Campbell of Selangor be considered as a candidate.⁷⁰ Discussions continued in an acrimonious atmosphere for several months, in the course of which the Siamese representative in London confirmed that the Siamese 'would never agree to anyone who could be called Sir Frank Swettenham's man.'⁷¹ In London at least the Siamese predicament was well understood by the Foreign Office. 'Unfortunately for us, the Siamese dislike him [Swettenham]. They believe that he proposed to the King of Siam to cede Kelantan and Trengganu to us, and they have openly told us that they consider him unfriendly.'⁷² Lord Lansdowne was even more blunt. In early 1903 he wrote a strong memorandum defending the Siamese actions, and sympathizing with them in their dislike of Swettenham's nominees, 'for reasons perfectly intelligible to anyone who has watched Sir F. Swettenham's proceedings.'⁷³

The Colonial Office urged that pressure be brought to bear on the Siamese to remove their gunboat and commissioners from Kelantan, not least as a means of encouraging the Sultan of Trengganu to sign a similar agreement. The Sultan however was more securely based than his counterpart in Kelantan. Yet again he prevaricated on signing, saying he had to consult his chiefs.⁷⁴ Swettenham urged in vain that pressure should be exerted by the Siamese on Trengganu, in an attempt to reduce the unpopularity of the British in that state.⁷⁵

The menacing insistence with which Swettenham renewed his appeal to the Sultan of Trengganu was scarcely likely to produce a satisfactory response:

The matters dealt with in the Agreement which I left with your Highness are of the greatest importance, and I ask Your Highness to consider it carefully and to inform me of Your Highness' decision early. Within the last three days I have received instructions from His Majesty's Government to request Your Highness to no longer hesitate to sign the Agreement, for His Majesty's Government takes great interest in the welfare of your Highness and your Highness' country. The Government of His Majesty the King consider that the only possible course open to your Highness is to follow their advice. If your Highness is averse to that course, and to the signing of the Agreement, I must warn your Highness not to look for further assistance from His Majesty's Government; and if any trouble rises with the Government of Siam on

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account of your Highness' refusal to accept the agreement, His Majesty's Government will certainly not protect your Highness from the consequences.⁷⁶

Nor did it. The Sultan of Trengganu produced a suavely diplomatic Malay response, and possibly allowed himself an inward chuckle as he affixed his seal:

Your Excellency requests me to notify my decision early, because the purport of the document left with me by your Excellency, on which I am asked to meditate and make up my mind, is most important. It is, indeed, important; and from the day your Excellency returned to Singapore till now, I have not ceased from meditating and taking counsel upon it.

I cannot give your Excellency a definite answer yet; but as soon as I have finished deliberating, I will inform your Excellency.

I trust your Excellency will pardon the delay, and accept my greetings.⁷⁷

With the arrival of this message, Swettenham admitted defeat in Trengganu. The monsoon had closed in, and there was no further prospect of discussions till it lifted.⁷⁸

Just before Christmas, Swettenham paid a visit to Kedah, to see the sultan and his officials. He was concerned there primarily with the weak condition of the state's finances, and suggested again that a solution might be for the British to buy Langkawi for \$1 million. 'After the experience I have had of Siamese methods, and the real sentiments of the ruling Siamese class from the King downwards, I am convinced that the professions of friendship for the British Government mean less than nothing. The Siamese policy is to play off the British and French governments against each other for their own sole advantage.' Needless to say, Langkawi was not purchased.⁷⁹

Due to the monsoon, it was not till the end of the year that Swettenham caught up with what he regarded as the final piece of perfidy by the Siamese. After he had left Kelantan at the end of October, the Siamese had sent a further delegation from Bangkok to the Raja of Kelantan, with an agreement in Malay. This they had persuaded him to sign. He was threatened that if he did not do so, he would be deported. The text of the treaty was obtained by means which Swettenham regarded as underhand from a copy which he himself had left with the Sultan of Trengganu. It differed in certain minor points from that which he, Swettenham had persuaded the Raja to sign, and, by virtue of carrying the signatures of the two contracting parties, was the definitive document. If the Siamese were out to exact revenge for all the slights and calumnies Swettenham had heaped upon them over the years, they could

scarcely have chosen a more effective device. Swettenham's complaints proved entirely in vain.⁸⁰

Swettenham seems to have realized that he would have to concede the nomination of an Adviser to Bangkok, in the form of W.A. Graham, for Kelantan. There were still hopes of bringing Trengganu in, for London was suggesting H.W. Thomson, the District Officer, Kuantan, for this post. Lansdowne agreed to the appointment of Graham in Kelantan in early March 1903, provided that Thomson should be his assistant there. Thomson at least could be regarded as a Swettenham nominee, even if he was in the junior post.⁸¹ With this agreement on Advisers, a further plan for Swettenham to visit Bangkok to compare the different agreements was dropped.⁸²

The Siamese remained a thorn in Swettenham's side: in February 1903 he reported to London, on the basis of information supplied by informants in Trengganu that the Siamese were still trying to undermine British policies there, and disregarding the treaty. Lucas no doubt echoed Swettenham's views when he commented: 'The Siamese are simply treating us with the most absolute contempt.' The complaint was repeated on 16 April.⁸³

However Swettenham subsequently reported that while he was accompanying the Sultan of Pahang to the Conference of Rulers in July, the Sultan had offered to go to Trengganu to attempt to persuade his counterpart in Trengganu to sign the Treaty. This offer Swettenham said he declined, and attributed the Pahang ruler's goodwill to his recent award of KCMG. Given the Pahang sultan's attitude towards Swettenham, which has been discussed elsewhere, Swettenham's account of this episode should perhaps be treated with some reserve.⁸⁴ In the same dispatch, he appealed to Chamberlain to make strong representations to obtain the release of the Raja of Patani. Whatever else his faults, Swettenham was loyal to his friends.⁸⁵ It was reported that Graham had also pleaded for his release on behalf of the Sultan of Kelantan. Prince Damrong pointed out that the Raja of Patani had refused to sign an undertaking not to foment trouble if released. He enquired whether Mr Graham would care to return with him to Kelantan. Mr Graham replied he certainly would not.⁸⁶ The accuracy of this report was subsequently queried.⁸⁷

In London meantime the Siamese Foreign Minister was taking an aggressive line over Swettenham, for when Lansdowne complained of delays, he replied, '... the view of my Government is that the delay which has already occurred would certainly have been avoided had Sir Frank Swettenham taken steps in the first instance to cooperate with my Government in procuring the signatures of

both the Rajahs of Kelantan and Trengganu. It appears to me [he should] be held responsible for his omission to do this.'⁸⁸

Swettenham repeated his complaints in May, with the information that the Sultan of Trengganu had been told to expect a visit from Prince Damrong, to try and force him to sign a treaty with Siam. Swettenham pointed out the inconsistency in the British attitude towards Trengganu pre- and post-1895. Up to that date, Britain had not wanted Kelantan or Trengganu to be in any way recognized as part of or dependent on Siam. This policy was motivated by the fear that if Siam fell entirely to the French, Britain would find French control of these states particularly embarrassing and inconvenient.⁸⁹

It must have been with little hope of a favourable response that Swettenham invited the rulers of Kelantan and Trengganu to the Federal Council to be held in Kuala Lumpur in July 1903. Sultan Zainal Abidin of Trengganu had no hesitation in declining the invitation: he saw the spider's web and the spider all too clearly. Although the Kelantan ruler accepted initially, in the end he did not attend either. He had other matters on his mind, for his new British Adviser, Graham, was due to arrive at that time.⁹⁰

In the closing months of Swettenham's final tour of duty in the Straits, his comments on the question of Siam, Kelantan and Trengganu became steadily more bitter. In August he remarked sarcastically that since he did not know what His Majesty's Government's policy was towards Kelantan and Trengganu, he could scarcely carry it out.⁹¹ Later he wrote, 'I am entirely sick of the way the FO has thought to deal with the Kelantan and Trengganu question,' in a remarkably frank private letter to Ommaney of the Colonial Office on the eve of his departure from the Straits. He continued, 'My ambition was to gather Kelantan and Trengganu, Patani and Kedah into the fold.' He concluded that if Chamberlain had had his way, this might possibly have been achieved.⁹² He was however saved the indignity of being incriminated in instigating the Raja of Patani in his intrigues against the Siamese. The Raja very properly refused to succumb to further Siamese pressure and sign a new document which would have incriminated Swettenham.⁹³

There were indications that Swettenham thought well of Graham, who set about his administration of Kelantan with vigour and competence.⁹⁴ However Graham did not get on well with Duff. The uneasy arrangement whereby Kelantan paid for Advisers, appointed by Siam, but British by nationality under a secret agreement with Britain, continued till 1909. Only then did Siam concede all its rights to Kelantan and Trengganu. Even so, it was not until 1914 that Trengganu finally agreed to accept a British Adviser.

In the closing years of the nineteenth century, the Siamese considered, and with reason, that they were fighting to retain political independence from both France and Britain. It was therefore inevitable that they should be intensely suspicious of Swettenham, who greatly diminished his chances of success by his high-handed treatment of them. The episode proved that although Swettenham was undoubtedly an able administrator, as a negotiator on an even field, his skills were limited. He remained bitter about Siam and his failure. Indeed, as late as April 1946, some three months before his death, in an introduction to a new edition of his *British Malaya*, he expressed the hope that Siam, in recompense for its support of Japan in the Second World War, would be compelled to hand over 'from its bondage' to British rule, the state of Patani.⁹⁵

NOTES

1. FO 422/56:54 Swettenham to Chamberlain, secret of 12 February 1902. See also FO 422/56:55 Tower to Lansdowne, secret of 8 February 1902. *STD*, 24 February 1902.
2. CO 273/282:371 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 14 February 1902.
3. CO 273/282:429 Swettenham to Chamberlain, telegram of 22 February 1902.
4. *STD*, 24 February 1902.
5. CO 273/282:453 Swettenham to Chamberlain, telegram of 26 February 1902.
6. CO 273/282:455 ff. Swettenham to Lucas, private of 26 February 1902 enclosed in Swettenham to CO, secret of 2 March 1902.
7. CO 273/282:455 ff. Swettenham to CO, secret of 2 March 1902, being his official dispatch, accompanied by Promemoria 1 (CO 273/282:484 ff.), Promemoria 2 (CO 273/282:494 ff.) and Promemoria 3 (CO 273/282:506 ff.) The Promemoria were detailed accounts written down immediately after Swettenham's three meetings with the Siamese King.
8. *Ibid*.
9. *STD*, 25 February 1902.
10. It is unfortunate that the Siamese account of this meeting, which survives in the form of an account by Damrong in the Thai National Archives, Bangkok, ref. No. R.5M62/50-61, Memorandum of the meeting between the King and Swettenham, February 24-25 R.S. 120 [1902], NAT. should not be available.
11. *STD*, 18 November 1948. Article by J.N. McHugh on the Swettenham silver collection. See *Footprints*, pp.119-20 for Swettenham's own account of the incident.
12. FO 422/56:173 Memorandum by Swettenham of May 28, 1902, dispatched in Swettenham to Chamberlain, 29 May 1902.
13. FO 422/56:197 Swettenham to Lucas (CO), secret of 11 June 1902.
14. FO 422/56:82 Tower to Lansdowne, confidential of 8 March 1902. See also FO 422/49 Tower to Lansdowne, telegram of 7 March 1902.
15. FO 422/56:82 *Ibid*.
16. FO 422/56:49 Lansdowne to Tower, telegram of 8 March 1902.

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17. FO 422/56:54 Swettenham to Chamberlain, secret, telegram of 10 March 1902. FO 422/56:98 Tower to Lansdowne, secret of 17 March 1902.
18. FO 422/56:61 Tower to Lansdowne, telegram of 29 March 1902.
19. FO 422/56:112 Memorandum of 28 March 1902.
20. *STD*, 1 and 11 March 1902, *PGSC*, 20 February 1902. For details of the terms of the Duff agreement, see Shaharil Talib, formerly L.R. Robert, 1973a, op. cit., pp. 104-5.
21. FO 422/56:61 and 71 Tower to Lansdowne, 29 March, and telegram of 9 April 1902.
22. FO 422/56:119 Tower to Lansdowne, 9 April 1902.
23. FO 422/56:94 Swettenham to Chamberlain, telegram of 17 April 1902. The full text is in Kobkua, 1984, op. cit., App. D., pp. 138-9.
24. FO 422/56:124 Swettenham to Lucas, secret of 17 April 1902. FO 422/56:128 Swettenham to Chamberlain, secret of 21 April 1902.
25. FO 422/56:138 Devawongse to Phraya Prasiddhi, 25 May 1902.
26. FO 422/56:128 Swettenham to Chamberlain, 16 May 1902.
27. FO 422/56:147 Lansdowne to Tower, confidential of 5 June 1902.
28. CO 273/286:621 ff. FO to CO, 11 June 1902.
29. FO 422/56:173 Swettenham's memorandum to Tower, 28 May 1902.
30. FMS AR 1901, HC's letter to Chamberlain, 19 June 1902, para. 10.
31. CO 273/283:141 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 16 May 1902.
32. CO 273/283:132 ff. Swettenham to Lucas, private of 15 May 1902. CO 273/283:179 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 27 May 1902. The terms on which the Raja of Kelantan requested British protection are set out in FO 422/56:196.
33. CO 273/283:232 Swettenham to CO, 3 June 1902. CO 273/283:256 Swettenham to Lucas, private of 4 June 1902, CO 273/283:270 ff. Swettenham to CO, secret of 10 June 1902.
34. FO 422/56:146 Swettenham to Chamberlain, telegram of 3 June 1902.
35. FO 422/56:146 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 4 June 1902.
36. FO 422/56:162 Chamberlain to Swettenham, telegram of 6 June 1902.
37. FO 422/56:195 Swettenham to Chamberlain, secret of 7 June 1902.
38. CO 273/283:670 Swettenham to CO, confidential of 28 August 1902.
39. FO 422/56:191 Phraya Prasidhi to Lansdowne, 8 July 1902.
40. FO 422/56:199 Swettenham to Chamberlain, telegram of 14 July 1902. He responded in more detail and hotly later: FO 422/56:275 Swettenham to Chamberlain, secret of 23 August 1902.
41. FO 422/56:202 Sir E. Monson in Paris to Lansdowne of 16 July 1902.
42. FO 422/56:197 Swettenham to CO (Lucas), secret of 11 June 1902.
43. *Ibid.*
44. FO 422/56:194 CO to FO, secret of 15 July 1902.
45. FO 422/56:204 Lansdowne to Archer, by then Consul in Bangkok, confidential of 21 July 1902.
46. Swettenham to Chamberlain, 15 July 1902, Chamberlain to Swettenham both in CP, 15 September 1902.
47. CO 273/283:706 ff. Swettenham to CO, secret of 2 September 1902.
48. FO 422/56:240 CO to FO, secret of 30 August 1902.

49. FO 422/56:241 FO to CO, secret of 2 September 1902. FO 422/56:24 Chamberlain to Swettenham, telegram of 2 September 1902.
50. FO 422/56:245 Archer to Lansdowne, telegram of 6 September 1902. FO 422/56:245 Phya Sri Sahadheb to Lansdowne, 8 September 1902. See also FO 422/56:247 Bertie's Memo, 8 September 1902.
51. CO 273/283:778 ff. Swettenham to CO, secret of 10 September 1902, with separate memoranda on Kelantan and Trengganu (repeated in FO 422/56:337 ff.) FO 422/56:254 Exchange of cables between Swettenham and Chamberlain, 11-12 September 1902. *STD*, 8, 9 and 10 September 1902.
52. CO 273/283:790-7 Swettenham's memorandum on his secret visit to Kelantan, enclosed in Swettenham to Lucas, secret of 18 September 1902. See also *STD*, 9 September 1902.
53. FO 422/56:256 Phya Sri Sahadheb to Lansdowne, 16 September 1902.
54. FO 422/56:263 Manchester Chamber of Commerce to Lansdowne, 18 September 1902, for example.
55. FO 422/56:364 Swettenham to Chamberlain, 7 October 1902.
56. FO 422/56:313-6 Text of agreements and exchange of notes, 6 October 1902. The agreements are also in Allen, Stockwell and Wright (eds.), 1981, op. cit., vol. 1.
57. FO 422/56:319 ff. Monson to Lansdowne, 7 October 1902, enclosing details of the treaty with France.
58. CO 273/284:63 ff. Swettenham to CO, 11 October 1902 and CO to Swettenham's cabled reply, 12 October 1902. FO 422/56:323 Chamberlain to Swettenham, telegram of 8 October 1902. See also *STD*, 14 October 1902, quoting an article from *The Times* on the Siam situation.
59. FO 422/56:324 Chamberlain to Swettenham, secret of 10 October 1902.
60. FO 422/56:392 Swettenham to Chamberlain, secret of 9 November 1902.
61. CO 273/284:25 ff. Swettenham to Lucas, 12 October 1902.
62. CO 273/284:98 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 14 October 1902. FO 422/56:336 Swettenham to Chamberlain, telegram of 11 October 1902.
63. CO 273/284:118 ff. Swettenham to CO, secret of 20 October 1902. This is also in FO 422/56:370 ff.
64. CO 273/284:105 CO to Swettenham, telegram of 19 October 1902.
65. CO 273/284:118 ff. Swettenham to CO, secret of 20 October 1902. See also FO 422/56:351 Swettenham to Chamberlain, telegram of 19 October 1902. *STD*, 20 October 1902.
66. CO 273/284:128 ff. as above.
67. FO 422/57:2 Paget to Lansdowne, 1 December 1902.
68. CO 273/284:135 ff. Swettenham to Lucas, 22 October 1902.
69. *Ibid.*
70. CO 273/284:171 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 24 October 1902.
71. CO 273/293:756 Memo on meeting with Siamese representative in London. See also CO 273/296:93 Memo of interview between Siamese Foreign Minister, Phya Visutrkosa and Sir Thomas Sanderson, 3 February 1903.
72. CO 273/293:763 ff. Memo prepared by the Foreign Office dd. 10 April 1903.
73. CO 273/293:756 ff. Memo from Lansdowne of 16 April 1903.

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74. CO 273/284:135 ff. Comment on Swettenham to Lucas, 22 October 1902, CO 273/284:171 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 24 October 1902, CO 273/284:203 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 2 November 1902 and ditto 206, telegram of 4 November 1902.
75. CO 273/284:203 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 2 November 1902.
76. FO 422/56:398 Swettenham to Sultan of Trengganu, 5 November 1902.
77. FO 422/56:398 Sultan of Trengganu to Swettenham, 12 November 1902.
78. CO 273/284:216 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 12 November 1902.
79. CO 273/293:40 Swettenham to CO, secret of 16 January 1903.
80. CO 273/284:729 ff. Swettenham to CO, secret of 30 December 1902. See also CO 273/293:746 ff. Swettenham to CO, confidential of 28 April 1903. For his complaints, see CO 273/294:395 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 20 June 1903 and CO 273/294:420 Swettenham to CO, secret of 23 June 1903. FO 422/56:385 Paget to Lansdowne, telegram of 8 December 1902.
81. H.W. Thomson had joined the FMS Civil Service only in 1896 and was not really senior enough to hold an Adviser's post.
82. CO 273/293:56 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 21 January 1903, and CO 273/293: 756 ff. Memo prepared by FO, 10 April 1903. CO 273/296:234 Lansdowne to Paget, 2 March 1903.
83. CO 273/293:437 Swettenham to CO, secret of 25 February 1903. CO 273/293:717 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 16 April 1903.
84. FO 422/57:154 Swettenham to Chamberlain, secret of 7 August 1903.
85. *Ibid.*
86. FO 422/57:157 Paget to Lansdowne, confidential of 2 September 1902.
87. FO 422/57:163 Paget to Lansdowne, confidential of 21 September 1903.
88. CO 273/296:298 Phya Visutrakosa to Lansdowne, 20 March 1903 printed in *Siam and Malay States, Foreign*, 24 April 1903.
89. CO 273/293:31 Swettenham to CO, secret of 13 May 1903. He was subsequently advised that Damrong was not about to make such a visit, CO 273/193:182 Swettenham to CO, secret of 28 May 1903.
90. *MM*, 14 and 17 July 1903.
91. CO 273/294:905 Swettenham to CO, secret of 19 August 1903.
92. CO 273/294:708 ff. Swettenham to Ommaney, private of 4 October 1903.
93. FO 422/57:163 Paget to Lansdowne, confidential of 21 September 1903.
94. Swettenham's approval of Graham was recorded when Graham passed through Singapore. CO 273/294:420 ff. Swettenham to Chamberlain, secret of 23 June 1903.
95. *British Malaya*, 1948 ed., p. viii.

The Johore Railway

Few episodes in Swettenham's official career have aroused as much comment as his handling of the Johore Railway. Swettenham's career had always been marked by his enthusiasm for improvements in communications, railways in particular. Under his influence, if not his active involvement, railways had been constructed to link Butterworth with Kuala Lumpur and Seremban. It was only natural to wish to extend that system to Singapore, the economic fulcrum of the Peninsula. There had been an investigation in 1890, when Sultan Abu Bakar signed a convention agreeing to pay for a preliminary survey of a line. The work was to be undertaken by British engineers, working under Straits supervision. On completion, the Sultan was to offer no concessions for the construction or maintenance of the railway until the Straits government had decided whether it was prepared to share the cost.¹

The problem was primarily a political one: how to deal with Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore, who had always foiled British attempts to establish their influence directly in the state. This he had done by a combination of astute political manoeuvring in London on his visits there, and by ensuring that successive Singapore Governors seldom had grounds for complaint about his behaviour.

Moreover, in 1885, Abu Bakar, or more probably Abdul Rahman (also known as Dato Sri-Amar Di-Raja) who had become his personal adviser, executed the master-stroke of appointing in London an Advisory Board. As a result of these manoeuvres, Abu Bakar, ably assisted by Abdul Rahman was able to prevent the implementation of the relevant Clause 3 in the treaty of that year, which allowed the Straits government to appoint a British Resident Agent to reside at Abu Bakar's court in Johore Bharu. This, combined with his direct association with London as a welcome personal guest of Queen Victoria, served the Sultan as an unofficial buffer against the more pressing demands of the Straits administrators. Swettenham later described him as a man who 'played his cards better than anyone else in these parts.'²

The whole question was reopened by Abu Bakar's death on 4 June 1895 in Baileys Hotel, London. This was particularly untimely for Johore, as it occurred just when the Straits administration was negotiating Federation. The long-term prospects for Johore had received some remarkable publicity in knowledgeable circles in UK only two months earlier with the following suggestion, as preposterous as it was malicious, 'He [Abu Bakar] will probably be the last of his line as Johor is understood by the terms of his will, to pass to the British Crown on his decease.' This rumour was spread by none other than Henry Norman, evidently acting with Swettenham's connivance.³

Substantial further ammunition was provided a mere two days after Abu Bakar's death, by a second leader in the *Daily Chronicle*, for which Norman was working. The timing suggests that Norman was keeping a sharp eye on developments at Baileys Hotel and the leader had been written in anticipation of Abu Bakar's demise, in close liaison with Swettenham. Abu Bakar, the article asserted, was 'of plebeian birth,' and 'as a potentate he belonged to the realm of *opéra-bouffe* [comic opera].' Johore should now be added to the Protected Malay States, and the royal family pensioned off.⁴ The article repeated Norman's suggestion made earlier in the year. The authorship would have been apparent to those familiar with his book. There was, additionally, slightly more than a suggestion that factions within the Johore court opposed Ibrahim's accession.⁵ It seems unlikely that Swettenham was actively collaborating with these dissident elements, but he was no doubt aware of them.

Lucas, who had doubtless read Norman's book in the previous two months, and perhaps feared serious trouble if the implications were drawn to the attention of the Johore court circle, was conciliatory, and advised initial caution: give the young man time to show himself. Fairfield, an opponent of Swettenham, went much further. He minuted acidly:

The *Daily Chronicle*, in an article abusive of the CO boldly advises a gross breach of faith and resumption of the state [Johore] out of hand. The article is of course quite contrary to the principles of that journal and must have been admitted by the editor unwittingly. I attribute it to a Mr Henry Norman, who ordinarily confines himself to the Literary Department of the paper. Mr Norman travelled in the East some years ago for the Pall Mall Gazette, and stayed for 8 or 9 months with Mr F.A. Swettenham at Perak, whose views he reproduces very faithfully when he writes on Malayan affairs, and he evidently looks at this question from the point of view of the proposed Swettenham Federation of the Malay States.⁶

The Colonial Office confirmed it would stand by its engagements, and not try to take advantage of Ibrahim's inexperience. Such a course would be 'ungenerous' and a 'breach of faith' after the late Sultan's unswerving loyalty to the Queen.⁷ The risk of Johore falling under direct British control was averted, not for the last time. It was scarcely an auspicious start to Swettenham's relations with Abu Bakar's successor, his young and inexperienced son Ibrahim.

The Colonial Office decided to play safe: they would for the moment make no further demands under the 1885 treaty, and maintain the niceties by offering a salute to the funeral cortège and a guard of honour: 'it need only be volunteers.' Later that month, Lucas replied to an enquiry by Herbert, by now retired from the Colonial Office and Chairman of the Johore Advisory Board, on the question of a loan, concluding that it would not be timely to raise the subject.⁸ The status quo was thus allowed to continue. At the end of the year, Swettenham and Norman returned again to the attack, in a further article in the *Daily Chronicle*.⁹ After explaining the proposals for Federation, the article reverted to the Johore issue with an attack on the late Sultan Abu Bakar, and on the Colonial Office, for failing to impose a Resident on his death. The following year, Lucas raised the matter yet again with Herbert, but was assured there was no chance of Johore coming into the Federation.¹⁰

The idea of a railway remained in abeyance for a further three years, when Swettenham suggested linking the railway in Negeri Sembilan with Johore Bharu. The Sultan might allow the FMS to advance the whole capital cost, run the line and the FMS might pay Johore 2 per cent until the line yielded 5 per cent on the capital. The alternative, he considered, was for Johore to finance the line, but allow FMS engineers to construct it. He hoped construction could start in 1902. The cost, Swettenham believed, would be \$10 million for the 176 miles of line required. In late 1899, he requested permission to take the matter up with the Sultan of Johore. The Colonial Office noted that the proposal had been sent to the Johore Advisory Board for its comments.¹¹

By this time, Herbert had been joined on the Advisory Board by Sir Cecil Smith. This was a further piece of astute manoeuvring, almost certainly by Abdul Rahman who had by now established a position of great influence with the young Sultan Ibrahim. The Sultan was very suspicious of these proposals, rightly fearing that their acceptance would compromise Johore's independence. Herbert, though favouring the proposal in principle, found himself obliged to advise the Sultan in the best interests of Johore, even though this might, and on this occasion did run against the interests of the FMS. Lucas later summed up the position as follows:

... all the difficulties in this case have arisen from the intervention of an Advisory Board between this protected Malay ruler and the High Commissioner at Singapore with whom and through whom alone there ought to be dealings with the British Government. The matter has been complicated by the personality of Sir R. Herbert, to whom I, for one, owe the utmost attention and regard, which has made it difficult for me to advise action contrary to what were evidently his very strong wishes.¹²

Desultory discussions continued, involving the Advisory Board in London and the Colonial Office. From the Peninsula, Treacher forwarded a report on the subject, which reached London. Lucas commented that until the question of who was to construct the railway had been resolved, the matter should be 'put by.'¹³ In August 1900, Sir James Swettenham, by then on leave in UK was consulted by the Colonial Office on the question. Yet little progress was made till his younger brother became Governor in 1901.¹⁴

Reference has been made elsewhere to the problems which arose from the Sultan's expulsion from the Singapore Sporting Club.¹⁵ It is not unreasonable to suppose that Swettenham's personal relations with the Sultan at this time were not of the easiest: an important point when subsequent volte-face are considered.¹⁶ At the same time, Swettenham, in an attempt to extend his power base, was agitating for control of the engineers who were to construct the railways, both in Johore and elsewhere in the Peninsula. In particular, he was anxious to ensure that the Crown Agents, who were accustomed to handle such matters, were in this case to be treated as consultants only. The loyal Lucas commented, 'I can only say, as I have said before, that in my opinion Sir F. Swettenham should be allowed to have his way.'¹⁷

In June 1901 Swettenham again took up the question with some vigour. He recapitulated his discussions in London with the Johore Advisory Board in the previous year. The existing FMS railway staff would have completed current works within eighteen months. If they were to undertake this additional work, decisions were needed promptly, to enable survey work to start at once. It would be most satisfactory if the line could run as part of the FMS system. Once again the question was referred to the Johore Advisory Board.¹⁸ At the end of September 1901, Swettenham again returned to the offensive.¹⁹ He reiterated the need for FMS to build the railway, with Johore guaranteeing only 2 per cent of the cost. The Sultan, he added, disliked the idea: not only did it make him dependent on the FMS, but it also precluded him from personal pickings in the course of construction. He further reported that the Sultan was in touch independently with a Mr Barry who had offered

to find funds, and a company to undertake the railway construction on a 5 per cent basis: such a scheme, Swettenham added, would ruin the state. The Sultan was due in London shortly to discuss the matter. Herbert meantime suggested that the state pledged its opium revenues to the Straits Settlements, which in turn would guarantee the FMS 2 per cent on the construction cost of £1.25 million, to be undertaken by FMS.²⁰

A separate letter at the same time from Swettenham to Chamberlain threatened tougher measures. He deplored the Sultan's lack of co-operation, threatening that if this continued, Article 3 of the 1885 Agreement should be invoked, under which Johore would be obliged to accept a Resident Agent. Swettenham concluded that the Sultan was in the hands of financiers and unscrupulous advisers. The letter ended, curiously, with a postscript to the effect that the *Datuk Menteri* of Johore had recently visited him, to report that the Sultan, after some hesitation, had agreed to allow the Advisory Board to decide on the construction of the line. The *Datuk Menteri* himself favoured construction by FMS. This can have been no more than a temporary feint by Johore, for no more was heard of the plan. The Colonial Office for its part agreed to mild pressure, but opposed the idea of sending a Resident Agent.²¹

Meantime the Sultan, writing from Frankfurt, began to realize he was on weak ground socially. In his letter to the Colonial Office he informed them he was coming to see Herbert and Smith of the Advisory Board over his absence from Singapore at the time of the royal visit, because of his behaviour at the Singapore Sporting Club. He concluded by hoping that Chamberlain would give him the necessary friendly support and assistance to ensure that he made no similar blunder in future, and to recover the high social position which his status demanded. Chamberlain, despite appeals from Herbert and Smith, was unsympathetic, but did agree to see him when Parliament reconvened from the summer recess.²²

Towards the end of 1901, counter-proposals were revealed, when a Mr Rutherford Harris wrote to the Colonial Office.²³ Mr G. Pauling, who had visited Malaya and stayed with the Sultan, had put forward proposals for the line. These were now with the Advisory Board in London, which, he alleged, was in the process of supporting his and Pauling's recommendations, that Johore should guarantee four per cent interest on a loan of £1 million for the railway. Johore with Pauling's assistance would construct and operate the railway.²⁴ The Advisory Board had very different ideas, according to Herbert, who pointed out that Rutherford Harris, in partnership with Pauling, did not inspire confidence. If the Sultan showed signs of adopting his proposals, he should be threatened

with a Resident Adviser.²⁵ The Colonial Office, agreeing to this strategy, noted that it should be left to Swettenham to handle.²⁶

At much the same time Swettenham reported privately to Im Thurm that he had learnt that the Hongkong & Shanghai Bank in London had been approached by the Sultan for finance. They had consulted their Singapore branch, which warned against the scheme. Swettenham concluded by urging that the Sultan be told firmly that the FMS would build the railway: it was absurd that the Sultan could hold up such a scheme: 'His state only exists by reason of his proximity to Singapore,' adding darkly, 'and Mr Chamberlain has only to say what has to be done.'²⁷ In extensive minutes on this letter, dated 28 November 1901, the Colonial Office maintained that the views attributed by Rutherford Harris to the Advisory Board were wrong, and that the Colonial office were determined the FMS should build the line. Of the £1 million cost, £100,000 was to go to the Sultan personally, together with certain unspecified grants of land, to Mr Pauling and his friends.²⁸ Swettenham later commented, 'I know nothing of this land grant, but if it were made I should hardly describe it as "the Sultan making every effort to open up his country."²⁹ Chamberlain advised Swettenham that a threat to appoint a British Agent under the terms of the 1885 Treaty was unjustified, unless imperial interests were seen to be involved.³⁰ Lucas made the same point. Yet he felt that the Sultan, 'ought to be taken in hand' and advised that if he insisted on going ahead with his own plans, the British government would reserve the right to take independent steps, an unspoken threat that a British Resident Agent might be imposed on him. The point was reiterated more succinctly by Ommaney.³¹

By March 1902, Swettenham wrote gloomily that the Sultan was unlikely to consult him over the railway, for he would only take advice which coincided with his own interests: but he, Swettenham, would do his best if approached, reiterating, that from his own twenty-five years' experience of railway building, it was essential that FMS should do the work.³² A visit to inspect railways in the north of the country in April led to similar conclusions. In his dispatch on this, he included critical articles on Pauling's railway work in Borneo. The *Straits Times* had obliged by publishing a few days earlier an uncomplimentary account of travel on the Jesselton railway, constructed by Pauling.³³ To add to the Sultan's embarrassment, the Legislative Council, at Swettenham's prompting, saw fit at this juncture to discuss and pass Sultan Ali's Land Bill. The legislation simply provided for the government to administer, on behalf of the descendants of Sultan Ali, who had fallen on hard times, certain derelict lands in Kampong Glam. Sultan Ali was the son of Sultan Hussein, who had been usurped in

his throne, well over half a century earlier, by the ancestors of Sultan Ibrahim. Swettenham naturally supported the bill to assist Sultan Ali's descendants. It was a convenient way of drawing attention to an episode which Sultan Ibrahim would rather have forgotten.³⁴ Meantime the Sultan was to leave London at the end of April, to return home.³⁵ His behaviour both in London, and in Ceylon on the way back was deplorable, and led to a hardening in the attitude of the Colonial Office towards him.³⁶

The Sultan was still most anxious that he should be allowed to see King Edward VII, and it may have been this factor which caused him to modify his truculent attitude towards Swettenham and the Colonial Office in 1902. Swettenham had the upper hand in this matter, for he had been authorized to refuse to facilitate the meeting 'until he [Sultan Ibrahim] had done some work for his country.'³⁷ Swettenham later thanked Chamberlain for putting into his hands the means of bringing a certain amount of pressure onto the Sultan. It was not clear exactly what means were used, but presumably it had to do with the Sultan's reception by the King.³⁸

Two points by now are evident: first, that Swettenham, in a manner consistent with his behaviour elsewhere, was up until this point pressing for some form of British control to be placed on the Sultan. Secondly it is clear that his relationship with the Sultan was far from cordial. Any change in these relations must suggest either that Swettenham was suddenly persuaded to change his attitude by the personal charm and persuasion of the Sultan, or that a deal was done. The latter explanation seems the more likely.³⁹

Just such a change of attitude seems to have occurred in June and July 1902. The Sultan was at this time assisted in his negotiations with Swettenham by representatives of Pauling & Co. On the ground in Singapore was Mr Barry, who had been involved in negotiations with Swettenham in September of the previous year. He was reporting back to a Captain Lawson in London, brother of a Colonel Lawson at that time with the army in Singapore.⁴⁰ The Lawson brothers convinced Swettenham that they had the confidence both of the London financiers and the Sultan. Moreover, according to Swettenham, 'Captain Lawson, speaking confidentially expressed the wish of the London financiers to come to an arrangement which should be entirely satisfactory to me.'⁴¹ Just how satisfactory this arrangement was to be, was not yet evident. If a private deal was done between Swettenham and the Sultan, it seems unlikely that Swettenham would at this stage have risked direct negotiation with him. Barry and Lawson would have made excellent go-betweens.

There followed a series of negotiations between Swettenham and the Sultan, in the course of which there appeared, unexpectedly,

to be full agreement on all aspects of the scheme, except for one point: the Sultan remained anxious to raise the money for the railway from an English syndicate. He seemed scarcely concerned that it would cost 5 per cent, rather than the 3 per cent earlier offered by the FMS government, and Swettenham, who claimed to have satisfied himself that the Sultan could pay, seemed suddenly unconcerned at this most unbusinesslike approach. Swettenham in his discussions also mentioned the matter of the loan of £50,000 which the Sultan had tried to raise through the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank. The Sultan, Swettenham reported, seemed annoyed that news of the discussion should have spread.⁴² For the benefit of Chamberlain, Swettenham concluded that the reason for the Sultan's change in approach was that the syndicate had convinced him that the capital could not be found without British Government approval.

This was explained as an error by one of the Sultan's advisers. However Swettenham did ascertain from papers produced by Lawson that financial involvement in the form of a loan from FMS, at 5 per cent, with representation on the Railway Control Board would be welcome. Swettenham concluded that it would be unwise to let slip an opportunity for so favourable an investment and requested approval in general terms, as he was arranging for the alternative investment of Malayan funds.⁴³ Fragmentary correspondence which survives between Swettenham and Lucas suggests that Swettenham had been authorized by Lucas to threaten the imposition of a Resident on Johore.⁴⁴ A further letter a day or two later indicated that while Lucas had agreed Swettenham might use such a threat, Chamberlain on behalf of the Colonial Office, had not specifically authorized him to carry this out.⁴⁵

Then came a triumphant cable from Swettenham to the Colonial Office in mid-August: 'Sultan of Johore accepts all my conditions for railway. If you agree the matter is settled.'⁴⁶ The solution was not to be so simple, for counter-suggestions on financing now came from the Johore Advisory Board in London.⁴⁷ The involvement of the Advisory Board greatly complicated what might otherwise have been a relatively straightforward deal between the Sultan and Swettenham. Despite Lucas' advice that such an arrangement be finalized, other demurring voices in the Colonial Office prevailed, on the grounds that to ignore the Board would be to demean it in the eyes of the Sultan.⁴⁸

By October the Advisory Board had got into its stride. It was in no doubt that the Sultan must be extricated from the hands of his financial advisers. If they were allowed to be involved, they would pander to his every extravagance. It might also prevent the FMS getting control of the line later. The FMS would do better to finance

and run the whole project. In the meantime, in order neither to offend the Sultan, nor demean the Board, once Swettenham had approved the concept, the matter would be put to the Advisory Board, who would then strongly recommend such a course to the Sultan. If he refused to accept this advice, Swettenham should seek an interview with him, and invoke the infamous Article 3 of the 1885 agreement, providing for the appointment of a British Adviser at Johore Bharu. Chamberlain believed that 'the mere hint of the adoption of this course would be sufficient to put an end to his opposition.'⁴⁹

If Swettenham already had some idea of the potential rewards, to himself personally, of coming to a mutually satisfactory arrangement with the Sultan through his European advisers, the Sultan in the autumn of 1902 apparently had none. He continued to prevaricate. Could half the finance be raised by Johore, subject to the approval of his financiers, the balance to be raised by FMS, with management to be in the hands of Johore? Swettenham arranged to meet the Sultan on 16 December, by which time even the Sultan's adviser, Dato Mohamed bin Mahbob, pleaded with Swettenham and against the Sultan for total FMS financing. In the course of the meeting, Swettenham examined the contract which had been produced by Barry for the Sultan to sign, and was appalled. It was a scheme of the kind that the Straits Settlements could never contemplate. At the end of the meeting, the Sultan asked Swettenham to write out the revised terms which Swettenham could recommend. These were that all the finance was to come from FMS, at 3 per cent, there was to be no sinking fund, and once the return exceeded 4 per cent on capital invested, the excess over 4 per cent was to be shared equally between Johore and the FMS. The FMS share was to be treated as an offset of the loan. Supervision and management was effectively to be through the FMS, though with certain concessions of a largely cosmetic variety. These proposals Swettenham left with the Sultan, claiming that at least he had not threatened to impose an Adviser. This he undertook to do if the Sultan showed further reluctance to sign, adding that he felt it was a matter he could best tackle personally with the Sultan.⁵⁰ Herbert was impressed with Swettenham's apparent ability to head off the Sultan, and wrote to this effect to his colleague on the Advisory Board, Smith.⁵¹

If the contention is correct, that Swettenham had an idea of the personal deal to be made out of this arrangement by summer or early autumn 1902, it was fully understandable that he should resent the interference of the Advisory Board. It was not surprising that he criticized them, though it was curious that he should be so unaware of conflicts of interest as to suggest that they were sacrificing FMS

interests for those of Johore. It was precisely those Johore interests that the Board had been established to protect. Swettenham claimed to have negotiated terms similar to those he had dictated to the Sultan at an earlier date, only to find that the Advisory Board had rejected them for no good or evident reason.⁵² Two days later, Swettenham reported with some satisfaction that the Sultan had accepted his terms.⁵³ Meantime an agreement over the Johore Railway was announced by Swettenham in Legco.⁵⁴ On Boxing Day, he forwarded the original letter from the Sultan approving the proposal.⁵⁵ The Sultan came alone on 18 December, and Swettenham found him 'very much more cordial and amenable than when he was accompanied by Datoh Mohamed.'⁵⁶

There was one further complication: the Sultan's choice of a contractor, in the form of Pauling. They had to decide whether he was to be taken on by the FMS, or prepare to face claims for loss of contract. Herbert, as Chairman of the Advisory Board was most concerned on this point, as well he might be with the prospect of a private suit against him for £150,000.⁵⁷

There followed a series of acrimonious letters from Swettenham. He would have nothing to do with Pauling, despite the Sultan's advice that he was now committed to this contractor, with the assent of the Advisory Board. The Sultan made the feeble excuse that in earlier discussions with Swettenham, he had forgotten to make clear his commitment to Pauling. Notwithstanding a lawyer's letter on Pauling's behalf to the Secretary of the Advisory Board, threatening an action for inducing breach of contract, Swettenham pointed out firmly to the Sultan that as he had no means of raising the money himself, and the FMS would certainly not assist, the deal was bound to collapse. He could, Swettenham concluded, do what he wanted about the Johore Railway, but it certainly would not be linked to the FMS system.⁵⁸ This produced a pained reply from the Sultan.⁵⁹ Herbert meantime had written to the Sultan on two successive days, indicating, first, the nature of his own negotiations with Pauling, and in the second letter, the serious effect which a breach of promise by the Sultan would have on the state.⁶⁰

Subsequent correspondence indicated that Swettenham and the Sultan came to an agreement that Swettenham should approach Pauling himself, presumably using the same arguments he had used against the Sultan a few days earlier, to persuade Pauling not to proceed with litigation. It is interesting to note that the opponents of Pauling cited the unsatisfactory work Pauling had undertaken in North Borneo, to link Jesselton with Tenom. Yet even as late as 16 March, the Sultan was still attempting to defend Pauling.⁶¹

It seems likely that this was the point at which Swettenham first reached his private understanding with the Sultan over the land concession. The Sultan was in a dilemma over his relations with Pauling, who was threatening legal action. At the same time Swettenham could certainly use the threat of imposing a Resident Adviser, even if he had no authority to implement the threat. He was in a strong position to achieve what he wanted, both for the Colonial Office and himself. As a result he sent a draft agreement to the Sultan on 18 March, and reported the position a day later.⁶² The pressure on the Sultan was now eased for a few weeks, while Swettenham dealt with the tin crisis.⁶³ The Sultan took advantage of the respite to depart for a holiday to Australia.⁶⁴

If Swettenham had by now reached a private understanding with the Sultan, it would be necessary to fine-tune the date of his departure from the Straits Settlements to maximize the time he served there, and thus his salary. At the same time, while he wanted to ensure that the Sultan kept his word about the concession, it was important that Swettenham should be out of the limelight and in retirement when news of the concession became public.

At the end of 1902, Swettenham's attitude towards the Sultan was cordial. By July 1903 the atmosphere suddenly changed for the worse. If Swettenham's personal ambitions of a concession were to be achieved, it was necessary that pressure be maintained on the Sultan, preferably by the Colonial Office, rather than personally. He renewed the campaign vigorously in early July, in a dispatch to the Colonial Office, regretting a decision by the Sultan not to incorporate the Johore Army into the Malay States Guides. He added to this a tirade against the Sultan personally. He asserted that the few good qualities the Sultan possessed, he had inherited from the European blood in his veins. His father had been of a similar disposition, and only avoided scandal because of his influential contacts in Singapore. With every trip to London the Sultan became less and less amenable to advice from the Governor. He concluded with the suggestion that the Sultan was contemplating the use of funds from the sale of revenue farms in the state to go it alone with the railway. The Colonial Office dutifully clucked disapproval: 'How long can we allow the state to be left in the hands of its very undesirable Sultan?' and resolved to consult in detail with Swettenham on his return to London.⁶⁵ For Swettenham it must have seemed very satisfactory, but for one point: the Sultan was not in Johore to sign the agreement.

The pressure was maintained by a further dispatch enclosing two copies of the proposed convention, with an additional memorandum dealing with the Pauling complications. The convention provided that it should only come into effect once

Pauling's claims were settled. Meantime Swettenham requested authorization to obtain the Sultan's signature, before his own departure in October. Unfortunately for Swettenham, the Sultan had departed four months previously, saying he would be away for three months only, and still showed no sign of returning to what would evidently be a tough reception by the Governor. The Colonial Office reiterated its view that the matter should first be discussed personally when Swettenham returned to London. Even before he departed, Swettenham must have had misgivings that his concession might not materialize.⁶⁶ The Sultan, perhaps conscious of this stay of execution, then returned to Johore. Meantime Smith wrote to Lucas, suggesting that Swettenham, before he returned to Britain, should personally visit Johore and advise on conditions there, 'for you may have to take some action as regards Johore very shortly owing to the conduct of the Sultan, who is, I gather, still disporting himself in Australia with a "gaiety" lady whom he styles Sultana.'⁶⁷ Swettenham was consequently instructed to pay a visit a few days later.⁶⁸

However he did not visit Johore till almost eight weeks later, towards the end of September 1903, and had no time to prepare his report till he was on board ship the following month, returning home. The Sultan, uncertain of what it might contain, felt discretion to be necessary, and stayed away from Swettenham's farewell festivities in early October, citing 'indisposition' as his excuse.⁶⁹ Swettenham's report contained another volte-face. After the July dispatch, it would not have been surprising had Swettenham recommended an Agent. Strangely, while scathing in his account of Johore, he did nothing of the kind: 'There is no doubt that the so-called administration of Johore is a farce, but the personnel is just clever enough to make it look like reality to the general spectators ...,'⁷⁰ and he concluded that as a Malay state, the British government had little cause for interference, even though British administration would have been a great improvement. On this occasion he alleged that the Sultan had an Eurasian mother who was blamed for the young man's less desirable characteristics. Swettenham added that the young Sultan misbehaved himself in public, behaviour which other Malays of good family regarded as unforgivable.⁷¹

In the meantime Pauling of the independent contractors was becoming increasingly restive at what he regarded as encroachment on his Johore territory by the Colonial Office. As previously mentioned, he had summoned his lawyers to allege that Swettenham, knowing the Sultan was committed to Pauling, had encouraged him to breach that contract by making an award elsewhere. In January, the London solicitors, Slaughter and May

renewed their protestations on Pauling's behalf. Officials in the Colonial Office were concerned about scandal: one pointed out that the Sultan was insensitive to scandal, while another commented perceptively that the case would probably resolve itself in blackmail.⁷² Finally the Colonial Office conceded the case, and loaned the Sultan £15,000 to pay Pauling off.⁷³

If Swettenham had not managed to pin the Sultan down before his departure, he must have been pleased that the Colonial Office, on his return, and doubtless at Lucas' instigation, empowered him to handle all the Anglo-Johore Railway negotiations himself. The Colonial Office wished only to see a copy before it was signed. Once again there were problems, for in February 1904 the Sultan suddenly left London for Paris. Swettenham urged the Colonial Office, through Lucas, to have him recalled at once in strong terms to sign the convention.⁷⁴ This invitation the Sultan declined. He was, he wrote, awaiting the arrival of his three Malay State Councillors, to help him complete negotiations. The Colonial Office and Swettenham were furious. Swettenham was beside himself at the possibility he might have been double-crossed by the Sultan. He scribbled intemperate remarks in the margin of the letter ('stupid', 'rubbish'), and offered to go to Paris himself to retrieve him.⁷⁵

Lucas in his minute suggested that if the Sultan did not return and sign the agreement, Article 3 of the 1885 Agreement should be invoked yet again to place an Agent in Johore, 'our intention being that the Agent shall grow into a Resident.' It was noted that the Sultan would soon have been absent from Johore for a year, 'and it is time that this young rascal were taught that he owes something to us and to his own people.' 'It is high time to put an end to this farce,' minuted the Permanent Secretary.⁷⁶ At this moment, Lucas re-entered the fray with a further minute, indicating he had again been in touch with Swettenham, who believed the Sultan would heed a second summons from Paris, and offered yet again to go and collect him. It was crucial to get an immediate settlement. The Sultan was summoned on 7 March, and had an interview at the Colonial Office on 11 March, Swettenham and Lucas being amongst those present. Lucas, who prepared the minute, recorded that the Sultan promised to sign the convention as soon as his advisers arrived from Johore.⁷⁷

It has been pointed out that these changes are *prima facie* odd. The Sultan was somewhat discourteous in his first reply to the invitation to come to the Colonial Office, citing the need to consult his advisers. So incensed were the Colonial Office that they felt obliged to threaten him with a Resident. Yet from the point of view of the Sultan, to consult his colleagues was not illegal. Indeed under the State constitution he was bound to consult his advisers 'in

all affairs and cases concerning the interests of the country and the people.⁷⁸

The explanation, it has been suggested, is that Swettenham had managed to suggest to the Sultan a mutually beneficial deal.⁷⁹ Swettenham would receive a generous concession of land along the trace of the railway, in exchange for which he would use his best offices to keep a British Resident or Councillor out of Johore and to keep Johore out of the Federation. Such an arrangement would explain the 'unexpected cordiality' which marked the meeting of the two men in 1902. During 1903, the Sultan had considered various counter-proposals from Pauling and Barry, while Swettenham did his best to discredit them. At the same time Swettenham visited Johore, and spoke of the British government's right to impose a Resident. This had the desired effect. With the prospect of the concession secure, and, as we shall see in a later chapter, with matrimonial affairs pressing, Swettenham felt safe in retiring as Governor, even then he⁸⁰ was not due to retire for two more years. There is evidence he was offered the Governorship of Kenya, but refused when he heard the place was not rich in potential revenue.⁸¹ The mild expressions of regret, which greeted his decision to retire on this occasion contrasted markedly with the consternation expressed by Chamberlain, when he had suggested the same idea in 1898.⁸²

It has been supposed that Swettenham made one last attempt to persuade the Colonial Office to relax regulations over land ownership. On being told he would have to dispose of land in the country, or face a transfer out of Malaya, Swettenham chose to resign rather than surrender the lucrative Johore concession. This position would explain his deputy's cryptic comment some years later, when referring to Swettenham's early retirement: 'I realised at the same time that there is no inducement for you to return, it is all the other way about.'⁸³ Such a course would also explain his fury when Sultan Ibrahim threatened to renege on his private understanding in February 1904.

This theory adequately explains why Lucas, who was probably Swettenham's close accomplice in these deliberations, supported Swettenham in urging that the matter be decided at once, together with Swettenham's proposal to collect the Sultan from France, and raised the question of an Agent for Johore. Yet when it appeared that such a threat might actually be enforced, he urged moderation. The threat was potent, but its implementation would have removed any chance of Swettenham getting his concession. There would be no further incentive for the Sultan to keep his side of the bargain: indeed there might well be every incentive to reveal in public facts embarrassing to Swettenham.

It is unclear precisely how active the Sultan had been. Certainly Swettenham's resignation changed the whole complexion of the deal for him. He had been bullied by Swettenham for almost eight years, ever since he succeeded to the throne in 1895. It seems possible that he attempted to change the railway convention, either to avenge himself on Swettenham, or to promote a more favourable deal for himself in the commercial community. Barry, the consulting engineer, owned another concession, and by 1907 the Governor noted that the boundaries of this concession had moved and expanded considerably over the years as the routes changed.⁸⁴

This, it has been suggested, was in Sultan Ibrahim's mind as he waited for the arrival of his advisers.⁸⁵ When they arrived, the Sultan summoned a meeting of Herbert, Smith and the advisers, known as State Councillors. The advisers were referred to scathingly by Herbert as his 'brown members of the board.' With their assistance the Sultan proposed a series of amendments to the text of the convention. Swettenham, who was also present, must have been speechless with fury but powerless to act.

The precise course of the negotiations during these months is unclear.⁸⁶ It soon emerged however that the Sultan, in addition to wanting a railway, was still most anxious to be presented to the king when the details were worked out. Herbert was induced to make this request, which was promptly parried by the Colonial Office: 'Mr Lyttelton feels however that the escapades which rendered the sowing of his wild oats by the Sultan a matter of so much undesirable notoriety are of much too recent occurrence to justify him in standing sponsor to Johore before the King!' He would be presented the following year if he behaved himself.⁸⁷

At this point Swettenham faded temporarily from the Johore scene. The Sultan and the Colonial Office were concerned, for different reasons, about the Advisory Board. The Sultan appointed two new members without consulting Herbert, Smith was disgruntled, as was even the Menteri Besar of Johore. British dissatisfaction reached greater heights, when it was disclosed that the Sultan was planning, apparently with Herbert's and Smith's approval, to establish a Johore State Development Corporation, to receive an absolute monopoly of Johore's resources for twenty years: 'The Sultan is selling his birthright for a mess of pottage ... one of the worst things of the kind I have ever seen,' fumed one of the Colonial Office officials.⁸⁸

There was additional concern that the main participants in the State Development Corporation were unnamed members of the Advisory Board, apparently Colonel Durand and Sir Charles Evan Smith. The Colonial Office feared they would be obliged to take over the state and buy out the Corporation, on exorbitant terms.

Lucas, significantly was hesitant: 'I do not think we have any *locus standi* for objecting, nor am I clear that the existence of the Co. will make it more difficult to get rid of the board.'⁸⁹ The Colonial Office moved swiftly and effectively to abort the scheme. The Sultan returned to London in the summer of 1905, and after a series of recriminatory letters, the board resigned *en bloc* on 20 October 1905.⁹⁰

Coincidentally, Swettenham's personal activities at this time appear to have been the cause of private comment and censure. G.E. Morrison, the famous journalist and scandal-monger of Peking recorded in 1905 that Lady Brownrigg had told him of Swettenham's questionable reputation in money matters.⁹¹ She must have learnt of this from her father, Sir Cecil Smith. He had probably heard, through the Advisory Board, of Swettenham's proposed financial involvement, and warned him privately that such involvement was unwise and unfitting. If he did so, the warning had no effect.

It took some time for the final bombshell to register. This was intentional, for Swettenham had observed what happened when the Colonial Office got wind of proposed concessions such as the Johore State Development Corporation. However he knew better than most that while for the moment the Colonial Office could exert pressure, ultimately it was the Sultan who signed concessions, which were legally binding. It was therefore not until March 1906 that it came to the notice of the Colonial Office that by an agreement entered into on 14 November 1905, a bare three weeks after the resignation of the Advisory Board, the Rubber Estates of Johore Ltd. had been granted 25,000 acres along the proposed new railway line. Of the four directors, one was Colonel Durand, formerly of the Advisory Board, one was Arthur Lampard, at that time the leading light in Harrisons & Crosfield, and one, the vendor of the area, was Swettenham himself, who received 10,000 £1 shares fully paid.⁹²

The Colonial Office noted grimly that the concession was objectionable, and that Swettenham's action would prevent the Colonial Office from seeking his advice in future.⁹³ For good measure, Anderson noted that Swettenham should not act as interpreter in a meeting which was being arranged between the Sultan and the Colonial Office. Moreover, the same official added:

If the S. of S. were asked [by the Sultan] which concession he objected to, the answer would be 'that granted to the former High Commissioner whom all the Malay princes were taught to look upon as their guide, philosopher and friend.' We can hardly prefer such a request [i.e. that the concession be disallowed] without giving good general grounds and the real

reason — that we do not want the bloom rubbed off the plum before it falls into the British lap — would hardly recommend itself to His Highness.⁹⁴

Lord Elgin, Secretary of State, was more restrained, but chilly: 'I cannot quite understand Sir F. Swettenham taking this concession.'⁹⁵ The disillusion was mutual, for in early 1907, Swettenham wrote bitterly from his hunting box in Market Harborough to Hugh Clifford: '... the CO people make me so sick I swore I would never go there again to offer advice which is perfectly unheeded.'⁹⁶ He broke his oath with remarkable regularity for the next forty years.

There was however a further spiteful twist to this remarkable story. Since his retirement, and perhaps even before, Swettenham had been working on his *British Malaya*. This was perhaps the most important book he wrote: it incorporated to the full his theories on colonial development, and was also to become the classic handbook for all who wished to learn of the country, till the early 1950s, well after Swettenham's death. It was first published in 1906, and it may therefore be assumed it was already with the printers by November 1905. In it, Swettenham recounted at some length the unifying story of the Johore intrigues from the beginning of the century till 1867. In essence it was an account of how Sultan Ibrahim's father and grandfather contrived to outwit the descendants of Sultan Hussein, whom Swettenham regarded as the rightful ruler: 'It is not a pretty story, and it has never yet been told.' It must, as intended, have made Sultan Ibrahim distinctly uncomfortable.⁹⁷

NOTES

1. CO 273/170:101 ff. Ommaney to CO, 16 July 1890.
2. CO 273/294:336 ff. Swettenham to CO, 19 October 1903. For general accounts of Johore at this period, see E. Thio, 1967, 'British Policy Towards Johore: From Advice to Control,' *JMBRAS*, 40(1):1-41, and Keith Sinclair, 1967, 'British Advance in Johore: 1885-1914,' *JMBRAS*, 40(1):93-110.
3. Norman, 1895, op. cit., p. 63.
4. *Daily Chronicle*, 6 June 1895, p. 4, second leader.
5. Gullick, 1992a, op. cit., p. 267, fn. 113 quoting Mohd. Sarin bin Haji Mustajab's Ph.D. thesis, 'The Impact of Colonial Rule in Johore: A Case of Social and Political Adjustment,' University of Kent, 1986.
6. CO 273/210:257-67 Minute by Fairfield dated 6 June 1895 on Abdul Rahman's letter of 5 June 1895, reporting on Sultan Abu Bakar's death.
7. *Ibid.*
8. CO 273/209:518 ff. Herbert to Fairfield, 24 August 1896 and minutes.
9. *Daily Chronicle*, 13 December 1895, quoted in part in *Straits Budget*, 14 January 1896, p. 5 col. 2.

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10. Thio, 1967, op. cit., p. 228.
11. CO 273/252:484 Swettenham, 20 October 1899 encl. in Mitchell to CO, 276 of 9 November 1899 and CO 273/252:585 Mitchell to CO, 289 of 30 November 1899.
12. CO 273/306:160 Minute by Lucas on 15 June 1904 on CO paper dated 30 June 1904 on railway concession.
13. CO 273/261:645 Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, 209 of 24 May 1900 and CO 273/262:360 Sir J.A. Swettenham to CO, 345 of 25 August 1900.
14. CO 273/265:613 Advisory, August 1900 enclosing Sir J.A. Swettenham's reply of 2 September 1900 to Im Thurm.
15. See Chapter 36.
16. CO 273/268:286 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 11 April 1901.
17. CO 273/272:702 Swettenham to CO, confidential of 12 April 1901.
18. CO 273/273:222 Swettenham to CO, 216 of 13 June 1901.
19. CO 273/274:156 Swettenham to CO, secret of 26 September 1901.
20. SSLC 1901. B151. 19 November 1901.
21. CO 273/274:160 Swettenham to Chamberlain, 26 September 1901.
22. CO 273/277:1 ff. Sultan of Johore to CO, 10 August 1901, and letters from Chamberlain, Herbert and Smith attached.
23. CO 273/277:435 ff. Rutherford Harris to CO, 16 November 1901.
24. *STD*, 8 January 1902 gives an account of the sultan's meetings in London.
25. CO 273/277:438 Minutes on Harris' proposal to CO, 16 November 1901.
26. CO 273/289:20 ff. Herbert to CO, 19 January 1902, and CO minutes, 20 January 1902.
27. CO 273/277:451 ff. Swettenham to Im Thurm, 23 October 1901.
28. *Ibid.*
29. CO 273/282:655 Swettenham to CO, secret of 24 March 1902.
30. CO 273/289:20 ff. Chamberlain to Swettenham, 4 February 1902, enclosed with Herbert's letter of 19 January 1902.
31. CO 273/277:435 ff. Correspondence on Johore Railway, Ommaney's minute dated 2 December 1901.
32. CO 273/282:655 ff. Swettenham to CO, secret of 24 March 1902.
33. CO 273/282:819 ff. Swettenham to CO, 154 of 29 April 1902. *STD*, 24 April 1902.
34. SSLC 1901 B.99. Debate of 15 April 1902.
35. *STD*, 19 April 1902.
36. Gullick, 1992, op. cit., p. 132, fn. 125.
37. CO 273/277:435-53 Rutherford Harris to CO, 16 November 1901. Ommaney's minutes of 28 November and 2 December 1901. CO 273/289:9-34 Ommaney's minute of 28 January 1902, Chamberlain's minute of 31 January 1902.
38. CO 273/283:452 Swettenham to Chamberlain, secret of 25 July 1902.
39. Here and later in this chapter, I have drawn on J. de V. Allen, 1972, 'Johore 1901-1914. The Railway Concession: The Johore Advisory Board: Swettenham's Resignation and the First General Adviser.' *JMBRAS*, 45(2):1-28.
40. CO 273/283:436 Herbert to Lucas, 1 August 1902. CO 273/283:463 Swettenham to Chamberlain, secret of 25 July 1902.

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41. CO 273/283:464 ff. Swettenham to Chamberlain, secret of 25 July 1902.
42. CO 273/283:461 Swettenham to CO, secret of 25 July 1902.
43. CO 273/283:452-70 Swettenham to Chamberlain, secret of 25 July 1902. The next four pages in this file are blank, possibly crucial papers were removed.
44. CO 273/283:493 Swettenham to Lucas, 26 July 1902.
45. CO 273/283:499 Swettenham to Lucas, 1 August 1902.
46. CO 273/283:648 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 14 August 1902.
47. CO 273/283:501 Johore Advisory Board, to Swettenham, telegram of 26 August 1902, and CO 273/283:685 Swettenham to Johore Advisory Board, 28 August 1902. CO 273/283:703 Swettenham to Johore Advisory Board, 2 September 1902 and CO 273/283:881 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 29 September 1902.
48. CO 273/283:881 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 29 September 1902 and comments.
49. CO 273/284:81 ff. CO to Swettenham, 17 October 1902.
50. CO 273/284:581 ff. Swettenham to Chamberlain, secret of 16 December 1902.
51. SP 124 Herbert to Smith, 22 December 1902.
52. *Ibid.*
53. CO 273/284:635 Swettenham to CO, telegram of 18 December 1902. See also *STD*, 19 December 1902.
54. *STD*, 22 December 1902.
55. CO 273/284:711, 715 Swettenham to CO, secret of 26 December 1902.
56. *Ibid.*
57. CO 273/284:641 Herbert to Lucas, private of 9 January 1903. CO 273/284:712 Herbert to Lucas, private of 27 January 1903.
58. CO 273/293:494 ff. Swettenham to CO, 5 March 1903, with enclosures, including his letter to the Sultan of 2 March 1903.
59. CO 273/293:549 Swettenham to CO, secret of 16 March 1903, enclosing the Sultan's letter of 12 March 1903.
60. CO 273/293:554 ff. Herbert to Sultan, 4 and 5 February 1903.
61. CO 273/293:643 ff. Swettenham to CO, confidential of 25 March 1903, and enclosures.
62. CO 273/293:621 Swettenham to CO, secret of 19 March 1903.
63. See Chapter 37.
64. *STD*, 23 March 1903.
65. CO 273/294:501 Swettenham to CO, confidential of 4 July 1903.
66. CO 273/294:515 ff. Swettenham to CO, confidential of July 1903.
67. CO 273/298:398 ff. Smith to Lucas, private of 23 July 1903.
68. CO 273/298:401 CO to Swettenham, confidential of 30 July 1903.
69. *STD*, 7 October 1903. CO 273/295:336 ff. Swettenham to CO, confidential of 19 October 1903, written on the Indian Ocean, gives Swettenham's report.
70. *Ibid.*
71. CO 273/295:336 ff. Swettenham to CO, confidential of 19 October 1903, reporting on his final visit to Johore.

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72. CO 273/298:349 Slaughter and May to CO, 23 January 1904. A further lawyer's letter was sent. CO 273/298:354 Slaughter and May to CO, 6 March 1904.
73. CO 273/302:1-4 Anderson to CO, telegram, received 1 June 1904 and Lucas' comment. CO 273/302:201-8 Anderson to CO, 283 of 15 June 1904 and enclosures.
74. CO 273/306:34 ff. Johore Advisory Board to CO, 1 March 1904, with Lucas' minutes and other officials' CO to HH Johore, 7 March 1904 and Lucas, 12 March 1904.
75. CO 273/306:39 ff. Sultan Ibrahim from Elysée Palace Hotel, Paris, to Herbert of Johore Advisory Board, 20 February 1904. In the microfilm, Swettenham's offer in the margin to go to Paris is illegible.
76. CO 273/306:34 ff. Johore Advisory Board to CO, 1 March 1904, and minutes thereon. CO to HH Johore 7 March 1904 and minutes by Anderson 2 March 1904.
77. The interpretation which follows is in line with that argued persuasively by Allen, 1972, op. cit.
78. Article xiii of Johore Constitution, quoted by Allen, 1972, op. cit., p. 12.
79. Allen, 1972, op. cit., pp. 12-3.
80. *Footprints*, p. 139.
81. SP item 58. Letter from Sir W. Taylor on 15 December 1903.
82. SP 61 and 58.
83. SP Sir W. Taylor to Swettenham, 15 February 1903.
84. CO 273/306:158 ff. Herbert to Swettenham of 4 June 1904, with Swettenham to Lucas of 1 and 3 June 1904, CO to Johore Advisory Board, 23 June 1904.
85. Allen, 1972, op. cit., p. 14.
86. CO 273/306:179 Herbert to Swettenham, 4 June 1904 filed with Swettenham to Lucas, 1 June 1904, and CO to Johore Advisory Board, 23 June 1904, *Ibid*, Herbert to Lucas, 2 June 1904. Also Herbert to CO of 29 June 1904 and Ommaney to Herbert of 27 July 1904. The final draft is filed with this despatch.
87. CO 273/306:184 ff. Ommaney to Herbert, 27 July 1904.
88. CO 273/313:365 Cox's minute on Advisory Board to CO, 10 April 1905.
89. *Ibid*, Stubbs, Ommaney's and Lucas' minutes of 11 and 12 April 1905.
90. CO 273/313:771 ff. Smith to CO, 21 October 1905 with enclosures.
91. *Morrison of Peking* by Cyril Pearl, Penguin, Australia, 1970, p. 161.
92. CO 273/320:291 ff. Anderson to CO, telegram, 2 March 1906. The fourth director was E.S. Grigson.
93. *Ibid*, 292.
94. CO 273/320:29 Anderson to CO, telegram, 2 March 1906.
95. CO 273/320:291 ff. Lord Elgin's minute.
96. Swettenham to Clifford, 13 January [1907] in Stockwell, 1976, op. cit., p. 96.
97. *British Malaya*, pp. 84-101.

Federal Conference and Farewell

At least until October 1902, Swettenham anticipated serving out his time as High Commissioner and Governor, for on 12 October he wrote privately to Lucas to thank him for his assistance in obtaining a passage allowance, and looked forward to leave in April 1903, when he hoped that they might enjoy another round of golf together.¹ However by early 1903, Swettenham's attitude had changed. The first firm evidence of this was his decision to hold a further durbar or Federal Conference, considered later in this chapter. It may be assumed that his change of mind was brought about by a combination of problems which he faced: in addition to his loss of the rulers' confidence, there were personal matters. It would be necessary soon to resolve matters with his wife, Sydney. It seems quite possible that he was still being subjected to blackmail by Walter McKnight Young. There was however one further piece of scandal which surfaced at this time, and the indications are that the adverse publicity which it generated was instrumental in Swettenham's decision to opt for early retirement.

In the middle of December 1901 Ah Kwee, also known as Chung Keng Kwee, had died. He had been one of Swettenham's co-commissioners after the Pangkor Engagement, and perhaps partly as a reward for his services there, and in the Perak State Council over the years, had for long held the lucrative Perak revenue farms, both for opium and gambling.²

There now developed an interesting scramble for these perquisites. Loke Yew had long enjoyed an involvement with the Selangor farms, and in 1900, no doubt on account of his heavy investments in Bentong, had been granted the tobacco farm in Pahang.³ Yet although he had originally made his fortune in Perak, he no longer retained close business connections there. Considerable surprise was expressed in the newspapers when it emerged that he had been granted the Perak farms at a mere \$120,000 per month. This was less than the amount which Ah Kwee had paid. Moreover no tenders had been called.⁴ It was noted that the matter had been removed from the hands of both the

Resident and the Resident-General. The only possible conclusion was that Swettenham had interfered. Further articles alleged variously that the Sultan was tricked into signing the necessary documents,⁵ thus causing great loss to the state, and that Loke Yew had been given the farms in exchange for agreeing to changes in the Gambling, Spirit and Pawnbroking Farm Regulations, curtailing the hours of gambling.⁶ It was argued that Loke Yew's interests in the FMS were so enormous that it must be to his benefit to co-operate with and enforce government regulations.⁷ The *Malay Mail*, backed by Robson, who was in business with Loke Yew, predictably took his side, refuting allegations of jobbery, and maintaining that Loke Yew was a far more worthy licensee than Ah Kwee.⁸

The Chinese business community in Perak was still dissatisfied,⁹ and a meeting was called in Taiping between the Chinese businessmen and the Secretary for Chinese Affairs. Nothing was resolved, although it became obvious to those present that the Secretariat staff were acting under instructions.¹⁰ Eventually it was announced that Loke Yew had sublet the farms at a 25 per cent profit to Perak Chinese.¹¹ Swettenham himself, who must have been at the bottom of this scandalous episode, preserved a discreet silence throughout, until the following year when one of the newspapers reported that he was being summoned home to explain his behaviour in this incident. It was confirmed there had been no tender. Swettenham responded by indicating that he was going home anyway in early October.¹² A complaint had been sent via Hong Kong, where some of the Chinese businessmen had connections.¹³

It was with a touch of contempt that he closed the whole episode a few days before his departure by reporting, to cheers in the Legislative Council in September 1903, that the revenue farms in Singapore had been relet for \$4 million between 1904 and 1907¹⁴ and the appointment of G.T. Hare, of the Chinese Protectorate to inquire into the workings of the opium and other farms, dividing his time between the Colony and the FMS.¹⁵

The first durbar had taken place six years earlier. Swettenham would have readily conceded that there were severe management problems in running a meeting of this kind, but there could be no doubt that these occasions were beneficial in bringing the rulers together. Moreover, if he was not to return from his next leave, such a conference would be his last opportunity to play a leading role at the centre of a display of considerable pomp and ceremony.

His pronouncements on Malay affairs immediately before the meeting showed a mood of increasingly world-weary cynicism:

Whilst all these improvements have been effected, the conditions of life for Malays of all classes, and indeed for all

Easterns, have been greatly improved. I think the only loss which the Malay Rajas and Chiefs could substantiate would be the power to oppress. In every other respect they are gainers. As for the Malay *rayat*, his condition under the present regime is as much better than it was under Malay rule as it is possible to conceive. The pity is that the national characteristics of Malays, make it difficult, though not, I think, impossible, for them to take full advantage of the opportunities which now lie ready to their hands. Their natural tendency is to do as little as possible, and their present prosperity is not likely to act as a spur to any form of exertion. As a people, they are certainly not wanting in intelligence; but centuries of life as they led it, in this enervating climate, environed by the bounties of nature, have combined to deprive them of all energy. Except in rare cases, they will not take the trouble to learn when they are young, and afterwards, if they have learnt, they will not exert themselves to apply their knowledge to any object which requires a sustained effort. That they possess energy is known to any one who has seen Malays engaged in any enterprise which savours of sport. They do not mind the trouble if there is only some risk and excitement in the work. These attractions are not, however, found in the ordinary everyday life of the husbandman, the clerk or the merchant; and Government work of a higher order appears to be irksome, if it entails anything like regular attendance at an Office or Court. The only gleam of encouragement comes from Java, the Malay population of that island being both hardworking and thrifty. The contributory causes to this result are over population and the absence of minerals. If we are to wait for the same causes in the Malay Peninsula, before we can hope for a similar result, the wait must be a long one. In all this, however, the Malay himself is satisfied; and, while we are anxious to see him take life more seriously, he is content with the gratification of small ambitions, and the many natural advantages he enjoys have spared him the effort to invent ideals, either of conduct or attainment.¹⁶

'A high-class Governor', he may well have been, to borrow Lucas' comment of a month or two earlier. He was now a tired one.¹⁷ Little of this was evident beyond his closest colleagues, and there was speculation in the press that on his eventual retirement he would be offered a job in the Colonial or Foreign Office, or perhaps he would even take a seat in Parliament.¹⁸

A committee was therefore set up in Selangor in February 1903.¹⁹ It was also announced that the conference was to be

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attended only by Malays.²⁰ The original estimate was for \$18,000. Needless to say, this was grossly exceeded, and the final cost was variously estimated at \$40,000-\$80,000.²¹ Moreover, shortly before the event, it was decided, at Swettenham's personal instigation, that it should be called a Federal Conference not a *darbar*, on the grounds that Federal Conference more accurately translated the Malay *meshuarat*.²² The four rulers themselves were accommodated in pavilions built in the Lake Gardens, creating four villages, each flying its own state flag. The proceedings took place in an octagonal wooden conference hall also built in the Lake Gardens. The parties of visiting Malays were to be accommodated in the recently established Malay Settlement (now Kampong Baru) in *attap*-roofed accommodation, and the indefatigable, though now ageing Raja Mahmood, Swettenham's friend of earlier years, was to be responsible for the welfare of the senior ruler, Sultan Idris of Perak.²³ It was announced that 20 July was to be a public holiday.

Only the previous year, Sultan Idris, as representative of the FMS at the coronation of Edward VII had toyed with the idea of registering his disapproval with developments direct to Chamberlain. This had been forestalled by Lucas visiting him in advance at his London hotel, to enquire 'what he wished to say in his forthcoming interview.' Idris, no fool, reassured him: 'he is not preferring complaints in any way.'²⁴ He realized that any such appeal would inevitably be referred to Singapore, and that Chamberlain would feel obliged to support Swettenham. A more effective protest could be made by addressing Swettenham personally in front and with the support of his fellow rulers. Such an opportunity had last occurred in 1897. He had no intention of missing this one.

The siting of the rulers' accommodation in the Lake Gardens enabled them easily to hold preliminary discussions. These doubtless included the manner in which Federation had circumscribed their powers in their own states, contrary to the assurances which Swettenham had given them when they agreed to Federation in 1895. Swettenham on arrival in Kuala Lumpur heard that Idris, 'intended to make a speech and express dissatisfaction with the results of Federation.'²⁵ Accordingly he arranged a private meeting with Idris, who 'disclaimed every feeling but that of entire satisfaction.' He attributed the rumour to the failure on the part of Swettenham's informant to understand Malay.²⁶ It has been suggested that Swettenham, anxious to prevent the Sultan from making a public complaint, which would indicate to the Colonial Office that he had lost the support of the Sultans, persuaded Idris to refrain from open criticism. The Sultan on his part was assured that if the rulers wished to make representations to the Colonial Office,

these would be heeded.²⁷ The result was that Swettenham had to wait, in some trepidation, for the closing speeches of the conference to hear what Idris had to say in his summing up.

The programme was similar to that of the durbar of 1897: massed bands, official addresses, polo, Malay theatre, dances and a water fête on Sydney Lake in the Lake Gardens, complete with fireworks. The detailed business of the conference was accorded low priority, with the exception of Swettenham's opening speech, which he read personally in Malay from Jawi script.²⁸

Swettenham opened the proceedings at 11:00 a.m. on Monday 20 July, with an address, which for condensation, bombast and tactlessness beat most colonial records. He started by taking credit for Federation: '... it is satisfactory to be able now, after seven years' experience, to state that the result of the scheme, for which I am mainly responsible, has proved far more successful than I anticipated.' He touched on the honour done to Sultan Idris in inviting him to the coronation of Edward VII, which was delayed and partly aborted due to the King's illness, and the satisfaction expressed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies with developments in the Malay Peninsula. He dwelt on the financial benefits which had accrued to the Federated Malay States, before reverting to bombast:

... the present position of the Malay States under British Protection is to me a source of profound satisfaction. It has entirely justified the counsel of those, who nearly thirty years ago, insisted it was the duty of the British Government to interfere and put a stop to a state of anarchy and oppression which is happily almost inconceivable in view of what we see here and all around us today.

There followed comments on plans for expansion of the railways to the east of the main range. Swettenham went on to add distinct slant to Colonial history:

I take this opportunity to emphasize a fact which the British Government has not forgotten and is not likely to forget. It is that though the circumstances demanded intervention, we came into the Malay States at the invitation of the Malay Rulers, to teach them a better form of administration. The Malay Sultans and Chiefs who are here today will bear me out in saying that we have faithfully and earnestly endeavoured to fulfil the somewhat difficult task we then undertook.

He closed with a gratuitous insult:

The Malays have in all this been great gainers, and I only regret that their national characteristics make it difficult, though not impossible for them to take full advantage of the opportunities which now come begging at their doors. If this

Conference can devise a means of awakening the dormant energies of the Malays, and can persuade them to devote themselves to any sustained effort in the way of work, it will have rendered a signal service to the Malay people and these States.²⁹

The unfortunate Sultan Idris, who was the senior of the Sultans present bore the brunt of this onslaught and was obliged to sit through two and a half days of deliberations and festivities. The detailed proceedings were handled by Treacher, who as Resident-General, chaired the main proceedings. The rulers however took the opportunity to make several telling points. These included requests that the proceedings, which were in English, should include a Malay version, and that measures be taken to increase the number of Malays in the senior grades of local government. Meanwhile Swettenham was the leading light in the social events. He headed the Governor's Staff Polo Team against a Selangor Polo Club team captained by Spooner, and held a levée in the Conference Hall in the Lake Gardens, with Mrs Treacher acting as his hostess.

At last it was time for the official closing ceremony, at which Swettenham again appeared at the head of the assembled company of Sultans, chiefs and Colonial administrators. It fell to Sultan Idris, as the senior ruler, to make the closing address. He must have given considerable thought to his response. He sketched the history of British involvement in Perak, and remarked suavely of the period after the Perak War, 'subsequently the eminent qualities of the present High Commissioner were displayed in assisting those who were loyal, and but for him the people of Perak would have been grievously afflicted.' He further claimed that after Low's leave, when Swettenham had acted in Perak in the mid-1880s, the Regent, Yusof, had urged him, Idris to press for the appointment of Swettenham in a substantive capacity to succeed Low. Idris thus skilfully and discreetly conveyed the impression that he was personally responsible for Swettenham's elevation. He mentioned Ipoh, and the railway lines which now connected it to the rest of the peninsula:

Now I notice traders can go there with great facility making the journey in a day, reclining at ease in a railway carriage, smoking their cigars, and kept cool by the rush of air caused by the swift motion of the train.

Therefore truly can the country now be called secure and settled, a result largely due to the wise administration of the present High Commissioner who inaugurated these great works.

Yet there was an inherent contradiction between the efficient binding together of the states in Federation, and remaining true to the

promises of continued independence which Swettenham himself had made when he persuaded the sultans to agree to the idea in 1895. Idris continued:

These states are now known as the *negri-negri bersekutu* (united countries) but the matter of union (*persekutuan*) I do not clearly understand ... which is the helper and which is the helped? A Malay proverb says there cannot be two masters to one vessel: neither can there be four rulers over one country.

Harking back to the Pangkor Engagement, which both he and Swettenham had attended a quarter of a century earlier, he reminded those present that the British had promised a Resident, not a Resident-General: 'It is my hope that the affairs of each state may be managed by its own officers so that the Governments may be separate entities.' At a more basic level, Idris called for more Malay participation in the administration. It had been noticed that most of the Malays in government service were at the lowest level.³⁰

Swettenham was later to describe the Sultan's closing speech as remarkable for the credit he paid to the benefits of British rule.³¹ More remarkable was undoubtedly the fact that Idris had challenged, albeit in the most allusive manner, the form of this rule. It was masterly, and, under the circumstances, the only possible response. That such points should be made by the senior ruler in the Federation, however politely, must have emphasized for Swettenham the dilemma in which he had placed himself. He had based his career on claims to be able to handle the Malays better than anyone in the British administration. Here was the leader of those same Malays taking him to task. Though Idris did not say it in so many words, the unspoken accusation was that Swettenham had betrayed their trust.

Swettenham perhaps realized he had overstepped the mark, for his reply was equally mild, with only the faintest hint of his customary sarcasm: 'While I desire to offer my sincerest thanks to the Sultan for his over-flattering picture of the part I have played in the Malay States, I would ask you to remember that Sultan Idris is my personal friend, and in what he has said, he has spoken under the influence of friendship.' He concluded by reassuring Idris that he did not support the abolition of the Residents, and reminded him that the Treaty of Federation expressly stated that previous arrangements were not to be disturbed. He concluded: 'Though I speak for myself, my Malay friends will learn, if they don't know it already, that it is a characteristic of British methods to maintain continuity of policy.'³² It may of course be argued that Swettenham in his condescending bombast, was merely reflecting the spirit of his times. Indeed other Colonial administrators of the period on occasion expressed not dissimilar views. Yet few can have

expressed themselves publicly in a manner so calculated to offend those whom they were addressing.

Swettenham's account of the conference hinted at cracks in the edifice. He referred in it to representations from the Sultans, and wrote of his wish 'to redeem a promise made to the Sultan of Perak in reference to his speech at the close of the Federal Conference.' If further evidence were needed of the poor relations between Swettenham and the two senior sultans of the FMS at this time, one needs only to look at the group photograph taken on this occasion. Both Sultan Idris and Sultan Ahmad appear to be going to great lengths to distance themselves physically from Swettenham.³³

Personalities apart, the conference of 1903 showed clearly that while the British wished to combine the Federated States into an ever tighter administrative unit, such measures were not going to prove acceptable to the Malay community. This was the problem faced by Swettenham's successors. Public decorum in the course of the conference had required that Sultan Idris show a modicum of respect for Swettenham. Without the spotlight of publicity, Idris was able to make known his feelings to the High Commissioner who had been so rude to him in public as the senior representative of the Malays. It had been planned that Swettenham should return to Perak with Sultan Idris in the royal train. Idris now declined to have Swettenham travel on the same train as he and his party. Swettenham was thus obliged to spend a day in Seremban licking his wounds, before travelling north, via Perak to Penang. It was an ignominious and not widely publicized conclusion to what had undoubtedly been a grand occasion.³⁴

What did the future now hold for Swettenham? Theoretically he had another two and a half years before retirement. If the Conference of Rulers was any indication, it would be marked by increasingly outspoken attacks and criticisms by Sultan Idris, as protagonist of the Malay cause. The fact that Swettenham had reached a dead end in his dealings with the Malays must have been a major contributory factor in his premature departure from the Straits. Rumours of his retirement on grounds of ill health circulated regularly. In official correspondence they were often coupled with a consideration of his salary, as a useful way of applying pressure. Thus in 1899 in an exchange of dispatches between Mitchell and the Colonial Office, discussing salaries generally, Lucas sounded a warning note in his minute, stating: 'Swettenham talks of retiring. I hope he will not do so, but his health is very doubtful.'³⁵ By 1903, such rumours were becoming more insistent. Swettenham's health was bad, and he would soon retire.³⁶ Then, in early July, he was forced by adverse publicity over the Perak revenue farms to admit that he was going home in October.³⁷ The British papers began to

echo the rumours. The *Daily Mail* added its own criticisms: Swettenham had failed in his negotiations with Siam and Johore.³⁸ Eventually an announcement confirmed Swettenham's departure for 12 October.³⁹ It is difficult in the light of all these reports not to conclude that Swettenham was preparing the Peninsula for his departure. Thereafter, the various celebrations indicated that he had no intention of returning. He made a visit of farewell to Malacca and Port Dickson in the early days of October.⁴⁰ There were no official farewell visits to Perak, Selangor or Pahang: further evidence of strained relations with the Rulers.

However the Rulers were unable to avoid farewell visits to Singapore, though they doubtless kept to themselves the relief they must have felt at the prospect of Swettenham's departure. Sultan Suleiman of Selangor was absent, probably involved with arrangements for his own installation, while the Sultan of Johore, preoccupied with railway matters, was indisposed.⁴¹ The home team was represented in Singapore by the loyal Treachers and E.W. Birch, returned from British North Borneo. The *Straits Times* celebrated the occasion with a special supplement which included a large portrait of Swettenham as part of a polo team.⁴² The *Malay Mail*, in a wild speculation, anticipated that Swettenham would become Permanent Under-Secretary at either the Colonial or the Foreign Office.⁴³

The farewell banquet, held on 7 October, took place in the Town Hall. The room, which seated only 170 was crowded and overheated. There was no punkah or electricity supply, but each place setting was supplied with a palm-fan. Under such circumstances speeches lasting one and three quarter hours must have been excruciating. John Anderson of Guthries acted as host, and in his eulogy stressed Swettenham's contributions to Singapore. He also, interestingly, attacked the Municipal Commissioners, and the home board of the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company.⁴⁴ Swettenham in his reply stressed the Federated Malay States. He chose, in the presence of Sultan Idris, to draw attention to the ruler's speech at the Federal Council, congratulating Swettenham as one who had been accepted as a friend by the Malays: a position not easy to achieve. In a further dig at Johore, he forecast that that state would shortly accept an offer by the FMS to build a railway across the territory.⁴⁵ Two days later, on 9 October there was a ball in his honour, also held at the Town Hall, attended on this occasion by the Sultan of Johore. The following day the unofficial members of the Legislative Council recorded their tributes to Swettenham in unmemorable, treacly speeches. Swettenham responded in kind.⁴⁶

Swettenham finally departed from Singapore, never to return, on 12 October 1903, accompanied by Barry and Bosanquet, ADC

and Secretary respectively, on the *Annam*, and amid scenes of considerable flummery, which included an informal farewell reception in the ship's saloon.⁴⁷ Apart from spending an unscheduled hour on a reef at Pulau Laut, the journey to Colombo was uneventful. There, Swettenham stayed briefly with the Governor, Sir West Ridgeway and his wife, while Bosanquet let slip that 'for aught he knew the rumours [of Swettenham's retirement] might be true.'⁴⁸

Swettenham's first public appearance on his return to UK was to attend the Straits Settlements Association Annual Dinner on 2 December, at which he was the guest of honour. In the course of the evening it was announced that a portrait of him would be painted and hung in the Victoria Memorial Hall, when that building was complete. This was interpreted as a clear indication that he would not be returning to the Straits. The portrait was to be subscribed for by bankers, merchants and others, in England and Germany, who were connected with the Straits Settlements. There were to be no subscriptions raised from the Straits Settlements and the FMS.⁴⁹ His failures over Siam still rankled, and caused him to make some caustic comments on Siam at the dinner. These were picked up by the Siamese press, which speculated, not without justification, that his intransigent hostility towards that country was possible grounds for his early retirement.⁵⁰

At some stage in the evening of 2 December he met Lucas, and quite possibly sat next to him at the dinner. Almost certainly he handed to Lucas at the end of the evening his official letter of resignation addressed to the Colonial Office, for by the following day Colonial Office officials were commenting on it. In his resignation letter, Swettenham mentioned his thirty-three years' service 'of an unusually trying kind ... [which] ... must shake any constitution' and begged leave to retire 'before I become a burden on the country whose interests I have endeavoured to serve.' Lucas loyally minuted, 'This is the close of a remarkable career and we are losing a conspicuously able and successful administrator, whose services can ill be spared.' He went on to recommend Swettenham be considered for a GCMG.⁵¹

The acknowledgement of his resignation, when it came was strangely muted, addressed to Swettenham who had by then retreated to Wrexham for Christmas. Lyttelton, successor to Chamberlain as Secretary of State for the Colonial Office had learned 'with very deep regret' of Swettenham's decision to resign, and desired 'to express his high appreciation of the distinguished services which you have rendered to the Empire.' To the Officer Administering Government in Singapore a letter was sent on the same date, paying tribute to Swettenham's 'unrivalled acquaintance

with the affairs of the Malay Peninsula,' 'his intimate knowledge of the character of the native peoples' which 'qualified him in a unique degree for the high position to which HM was pleased to appoint him.'⁵² It was remarkably mild: all concerned knew a great deal more than they were prepared to disclose in the minutes.

The official announcement that Swettenham would not be returning was made on 15 December, mentioning that he was due to retire on 12 January 1904.⁵³ Predictably this news provoked further speculation of new posts for Swettenham. The position must have been well understood in Kuala Lumpur at least, and the date of the announcement notified in advance to Robson of the *Malay Mail*. How else to explain that paper's leading article on 16 December 1903, reporting Swettenham's retirement and assessing his contribution to the country?⁵⁴

NOTES

1. CO 273/284:25 ff. Swettenham to Lucas, 12 October 1902.
2. *PGSC*, 13 December 1901, *PP*, 14 December 1901, *STD*, 14 and 16 December 1901.
3. *PP*, 7 April 1900.
4. *PP*, 9 September 1902, *STD*, 11 September 1902.
5. *PP*, 20 September 1903
6. *PP*, 18, 23 September, 2 October 1902.
7. *STD*, 3 October 1902.
8. *MM*, 29 September 1902.
9. *STD*, 7 October 1902.
10. *PP*, 14 October 1902.
11. *PP*, 18 December 1902.
12. *STD*, 8 July 1903, quoting *Straits Echo*.
13. It is significant that there is no mention of this incident in correspondence with London, or in any surviving correspondence in Malaysia.
14. *PSSLC* 1903 B.102. 4 September 1903.
15. CO 273/292:85 Swettenham to CO, confidential of 9 October 1903.
16. PPC 1819:5 FMS AR. 1902, HC to Chamberlain, 11 July 1903 para 7.
17. CO 273/293:404 Lucas' comments on Swettenham to CO, confidential of 18 February 1903.
18. *MM*, 4 June 1903.
19. *STD*, 13 February and 27 March 1903.
20. *MM*, 12 March 1903.
21. SSF 804/03 and *MM*, 11 August 1903, *PP*, 21 July 1903.
22. SSF 2413/03.
23. SSF 804 and 1920/03.
24. CO 273/285:249 ff. Memo by Lucas of 30 June 1902.
25. CO273/295:163 ff. Swettenham to CO, 517 of 25 September 1903, reporting on the Conference.
26. CO 273/295:164-76 Ibid.

Federal Conference and Farewell

27. Gullick, 1992, op. cit., pp. 59 and 148, suggests that Swettenham's interest in the outcome of this discussion was so great, that it would be unwise to place too much reliance on the accuracy of his report in despatch 517 cited above.
28. CO 273/295:163-76 Swettenham to CO, 517 of 25 September 1903 and SGG 1903, pp. 778 ff. This is repeated in HCO 1404/1904. See also newspaper reports, *PP*, 2, 16, 21, 23, 25 and 28 July 1903, *MM*, 17, 18 and 21 July 1903 and *STD*, 15, 18, 22 and 28 July 1903.
29. HCO 1404/1904.
30. *Ibid*.
31. *British Malaya*, p. 291.
32. *Ibid*.
33. See photo on p. * of 1903 conference. Swettenham was careful in *British Malaya*, 1948 ed., p. 304, to reproduce another photograph of the same occasion, in which he was visibly in conversation with Idris on his right.
34. *MM*, 27 July 1903.
35. CO 273/251:191 Mitchell to CO, 145 of 31 March 1899.
36. *PP*, 3 March 1903, *MM*, 3 and 6 March 1903, 11 July 1903, *STD*, 16 May 1903, *PP*, 28 May 1903.
37. See p. * above.
38. *PP*, 27 August 1903, quoting *Daily Mail*, London, *MM*, 24 August 1903.
39. *MM*, 16 September 1903.
40. *STD*, 3 October 1903, *PP*, 6 October 1903, *MM*, 5 October 1903.
41. *MM*, 9 October 1903.
42. *STD*, 7 October 1903. The photo has unfortunately not been preserved, but, per *STD*, 30 December 1903, was subsequently published in New York, no date given.
43. *STD*, 8 October 1903 quoting *MM*
44. Makepeace, Brooke and Braddell, 1921, op. cit.
45. *STD*, 8 October 1903.
46. SSLC 1903. B 124-5. 10 October 1903.
47. *PP*, 17 October 1903.
48. *STD*, 13 and 28 October 1903.
49. *STD*, 4 December 1903 and 5 January 1904.
50. *STD*, 13 January 1904, quoting article in *Siam Observer*.
51. CO 273/298:431 Swettenham to CO, 2 December 1903. Lucas' minute of 3 December 1903. He was to wait till 1909 for this award.
52. *Ibid*. Letters to Swettenham and OAG, Singapore, both of 16 December 1903.
53. *STD*, 15 December 1903. FMS Blue Book, 1924 indicates his date of retirement as High Commissioner as 15 April 1904.
54. *MM*, 16 December 1903.

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1904-1946

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THE HISTORY OF THE

REPUBLIC OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

FROM 1776 TO 1876

BY

W. W. HUNT

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The Divorce that Failed

There had been speculation at the time of Swettenham's departure as to the possible reasons why he might not return at the end of his leave in January 1904. One reason at once became evident: on 25 January 1904 Swettenham petitioned for divorce from his wife Sydney on the grounds of her adultery.¹

Before we consider this issue in greater detail, it is necessary to attempt to reconstruct Sydney's life since she was dispatched in ignominy, apparently pregnant by another man, from Perak in 1894. The birth of a stillborn child the following year cannot have helped her mental state: it seems likely that she behaved with much indiscretion. Although Swettenham had decided not to live with her, he 'occasionally visited his wife when in England.'² He was probably too busy to concern himself, if he cared, at what she might be doing to while away the time as she approached the age of forty.

On 31 January 1899 she was for the third time in her life certified, on this occasion on an urgency order, and admitted to a nursing home, Otto House, in Hammersmith, from which she was discharged in mid-October that year. She had then taken up residence at 18 Selwood Terrace, in West London.³ Given her history, it is reasonable to suppose that even if she was not legally certifiable, she was at this time in an excitable and unbalanced frame of mind. That she was also lonely, after five years estrangement from her husband there can be no doubt. We learn from the diaries of Morrison of Peking that when he came home on leave, his friend Taffy Gwynne, editor of the *Standard* had confided to him that Lady Swettenham had attempted to seduce him. Independently Morrison ascertained from Lady Brownrigg, daughter of Sir Cecil Smith, that in certain London circles Lady Swettenham had a reputation for such behaviour.⁴ News of this, by rumour, if not direct account must have reached Swettenham in Singapore. It is possible that Morrison himself may have alerted Swettenham to Sydney's misbehaviour, or passed word of it to Singapore society, for he visited the town twice, in December 1901.⁵ Yet Sydney's behaviour was not so scandalous as to have put her beyond the pale

of polite society in London, for in April 1901 she was reported as having attended a dinner given by the McCallums in London.⁶

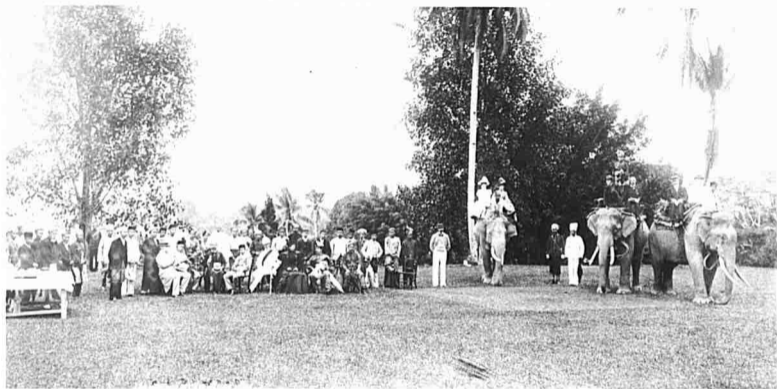
Swettenham's premature retirement took effect on 12 January 1904. Whatever he had suspected or learnt of Sydney's behaviour in the ten years since their separation could not with propriety be made grounds for a contested divorce action before his official retirement. The fact that petition proceedings were filed less than two weeks after his retirement indicates that inquiry agents must have been employed several years earlier to collect information on his wife's conduct. Indeed Swettenham may have summoned his lawyer out to Singapore while he was still Governor, for consultations. With such sensitive matters and the risk of libel this would have been preferable to the delay of two and a half to three months required at that time for an exchange of letters.

It is just possible that initially he had hoped that the case might not be defended by Sydney, and that it would pass through the courts with the minimum of publicity. Under such circumstances, Swettenham could then return, if not to Singapore, to a further senior post before retirement. If lawyers' letters had not been exchanged while Swettenham was on his way back from Singapore, then correspondence must have been brisk on his reaching England. The outcome cannot have pleased him, for he was forced into a position where publicity was inevitable. In the divorce proceedings filed on 25 January 1904, Swettenham alleged that his wife had on various occasions committed adultery both in Selwood Terrace, and at a hotel in Dover, with Ernest Henry Mander. The affair was not concluded by her breakdown in 1899, for she had met him again at the end of that year, and sporadically thereafter up to 1903.

A stockbroker by profession, Ernest Henry Mander was born in 1865, and thus some eight years younger than Sydney Swettenham.⁷ His career on the Stock Exchange began in the mid-1880s, and in 1892 a marginal note on his application for membership records that he had been clerk to I. Pollack & Co. From 1893-6 he appears to have been associated with Paul E. Schweder & Co., after which he became a limited partner in this company. Limited partnerships which became popular in the 1890s operated in highly speculative fields, such as South America and South Africa. Mander was associated with the South African business. Such stocks were known as kaffirs, and there was a major boom in these up to the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War. This was followed by a brief flicker of revival at the end of the war in 1902, after which the market finally collapsed, causing many investors and speculators to lose their fortunes. Even if Mander's personal finances were not affected by these violent fluctuations, he must have had a tense, anxious time attending to the affairs of clients



75. The first F.M.S. Durbar, Kuala Kangsar 14-17 July 1897. Seated (L to R): Hugh Clifford (Resident, Pahang); J.P. Rodger (Resident, Selangor); Sir Frank Swettenham (Resident-General); Sultan Ahmad of Pahang; Sultan Abdul Samad of Selangor; Sir C.B.H.Mitchell (Governor of S.S. and High Commissioner for F.M.S); Sultan Idris of Perak; YAM Tuan Tuanku Muhammad of Negeri Sembilan; W.H.Treacher (Resident, Perak).



76. On the residency terrace, Kuala Kangsar, Perak, July 1897. Sir Frank Swettenham is standing with hands behind his back next to an elephant.

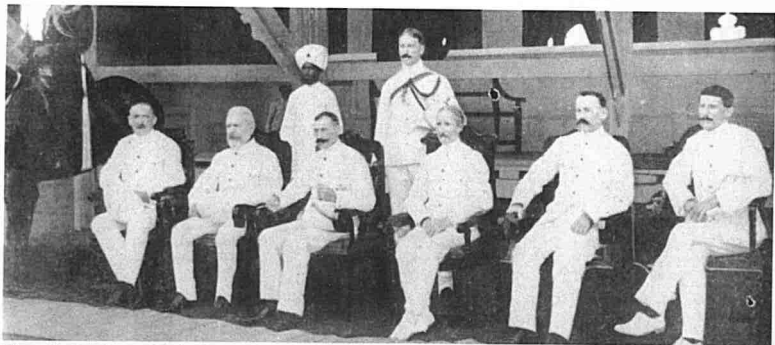
77. Ex-Sultan
Abdullah of Perak
ca. 1890s.



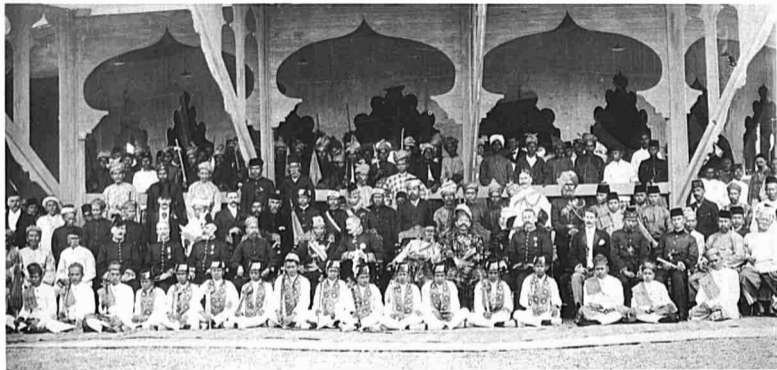
78. S i r
F r a n k
S w e t t e n h a m ,
ca. 1898. This
photo is from
the frontispiece
of *Unaddressed
Letters*.



79. Sir James Swettenham, Admiral Sir Henry Keppel and Captain Duff, his ADC.



80. Group photo of Federal Conference, Lake Gardens, Kuala Lumpur, 20-25 July, 1903. Seated (L to R): H.C. Belfield (Resident, Selangor); J.P. Rodger (Resident, Perak); W.H. Treacher (Resident- General); the Sultan of Selangor; the Sultan of Perak; Sir Frank Swettenham (Governor SS and High Commissioner, F.M.S.); the Sultan of Pahang; YAM Tuan Muhammed of Negeri Sembilan; W. Egerton (Resident, Negeri Sembilan); D.G. Campbell (Acting Resident, Pahang).



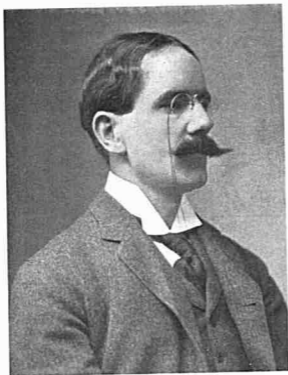
81. British Officials at the Federal Conference, 1903. Seated (left to right). H.C. (later Sir Henry) Belfield, Sir Frank Swettenham, High Commissioner; J.P.(later Sir John) Rodger, BR Perak; W.(later Sir Walter) Egerton, BR Negeri Sembilan; D.G. Campbell, BR Pahang. (Courtesy Foreign and Commonwealth Office Library, London).



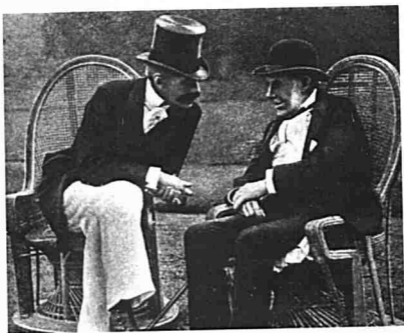
82. Work on Perak Railway at Gunong Pondok.



83. Newly constructed Perak Railway.



84. Alleyne
Ireland.



85. Sir Frank Swettenham and Admiral Sir Henry Keppel
in Singapore, 1903.

The Divorce that Failed

who were losing money, or risked doing so. Such was the background to the period in which he became involved with Sydney Swettenham, culminating with the divorce action of 1904.

He continued to move from firm to firm in subsequent years, and his residential addresses near unfashionable Cromwell Road from 1892-1909 suggest a bachelor of limited means. Around 1909 he married Emily Graham Greenish, a lady with considerable funds at her disposal. The marriage did not last long, for in 1914 Mander died of cancer, leaving only £380 and a widow who retained affectionate memories of him throughout her long life. To perpetuate his memory, she bequeathed a valuable clock to the Victoria and Albert Museum, to be known as the Ernest Henry Mander bequest.

From these brief details, we can conclude that Mander was probably a restless and rash young man of charm and perhaps good looks. How he first met Sydney Swettenham is unclear, but it is worth noting that one of her younger brothers, G.F. Holmes, was a near contemporary of Mander's, and lived in the same neighbourhood at Redcliffe Gardens with his mother, for a year or two in the late 1880s. It is probable that Sydney stayed there at that period. Of her, we may conclude that, unbalanced though she may at times have been during this period, she certainly had the charm, and, one must assume, the looks, in her late thirties and early forties, to attract and hold the affections of a younger man on what seems to have been a semi-permanent basis.

Swettenham must have been greatly surprised and alarmed when he found that his wife and Mander actively contested his allegations of adultery. He was required to file further particulars, which he did on 26 February 1904. Although he cited times with dates and addresses when his wife and Mander were seen together, these were still considered insufficient. On 18 March 1904 he was required to provide yet further information, which still failed to satisfy the court. On 16 April 1904, the case was dismissed, and Swettenham was obliged to pay the co-respondent's costs.⁸

Why did Swettenham, or possibly his lawyers, fail to ensure that their charges of Lady Swettenham's adultery stood up to court scrutiny? Although adultery is not a crime, it was at the turn of the century a serious allegation which brought more discredit on those concerned than might be the case today. As a result the courts required a higher standard of proof than was usual in civil cases. Up to 1902 it was safe to supplement specific charges with more general allegations, without being faulted by the inability to furnish details in support of the general allegations. Until that time, practitioners seem to have relied on a case decided in 1858.⁹ In that case the husband had alleged one specific act of adultery and had

added allegations of adultery, without details of time and place in the ensuing two months. The defence had applied for particulars of these later allegations and been refused. The judge said, 'It is not at all desirable to fix a party to a particular day when the witnesses may make a mistake as to the precise day, though in other respects, they are telling the truth.'

However in 1902 a further case was heard in the Court of Appeal, and the decision altered the effect of the law, considerably stiffening evidence requirements.¹⁰ The lady in the case, a Mrs Hartopp, who was presumably living apart from her husband, had spent the period from April 1901 to February 1902 at a cottage near Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire. Here she was 'visited almost daily by the co-respondent and committed adultery with him.' This was all the petition had to say. In response to an order for better particulars the husband said that the co-respondent often stayed to dinner and 'was in the habit of seeing the respondent in her bedroom and boudoir and remaining alone with her for hours.' 'On several occasions' (no dates) the parties came back from the hunting field and 'were in the pink bedroom alone ... the visits were so frequent that the witnesses were unable to fix the dates ... they were frequently out driving and riding together ... the court will be asked to infer that adultery had been committed during the above period.'

The defendants objected that this information did not amount to 'particulars' and the Court of Appeal upheld their objection, saying that if a petition alleged adultery over a period the petitioner should 'elicit from the witnesses whom he intends to call' some statements (of dates, etc.) that amount to 'particulars.' Swettenham's lawyers may have planned the case without taking account of the Hartopp decision. They gave specific instances on three occasions in 1900, but were unable to be specific in respect of the other alleged instances, which they had quoted to suggest a sustained indiscreet association. The Registrar who made the order in Swettenham's case had been the leading Counsel for Mr Hartopp.

Far worse was to come, for on 2 May 1904, Sydney wrote to her husband, then at Aberdunant, Dremador, N. Wales as follows:

Dear Frank,

I need not tell you how much I have suffered by your recent proceedings against me although I knew that they could only end in one way. Why are you always so hostile to me? I assure you that I have but one wish, and that is to do my duty. I bear no resentment about the past, and I am only too anxious to let all bygones be bygones. I beg you to believe this, and to return to me, and let us live together again. If you do I promise you to do all I can to make you happy in every way and I hope you will not refuse this request.

The Divorce that Failed

Yours always,
Sydney Swettenham

To this Swettenham, doubtless after taking legal advice, replied in glacial tones on 6 May:

Dear Sydney,

Your letter of May 2 has been forwarded to me, and I hardly see that there can be any profitable discussion of the proceedings. Hitherto I have not been in a position to act independently, because my own concerns had to be subordinated to others of greater importance; the circumstances of my employment, my public duties, and the necessity which was upon me to live in a distant and unhealthy country have probably been against us, but after ten years of separation it is more than ever impossible for me to accede to the wish you now express. To this refusal, which is definitive, I do not wish to add anything which it would be kinder to leave unsaid. Let us say that any fault is mine; but there are some mistakes which are more unpardonable than faults, and if I agreed to your request I should be responsible for making a mistake of that kind. When, in 1894, I declined to join you, I said the decision was unalterable, and nothing has occurred, or could occur, to change that determination.

Frank Swettenham

Four days later on 10 May 1904, having received her husband's letter of rejection, Sydney instituted proceedings against her husband for the restitution of conjugal rights. On 25 October 1904 the judge granted a decree in support of her application.¹¹ Three days later, on 28 October 1904, Lady Swettenham was again certified on an urgency order, and admitted to Chiswick House, Middlesex, remaining there, or in various other London institutions till 1 May 1912, when she was discharged as recovered. The strain must have taken its toll on Swettenham as well, for in the middle of the month he was reported as unwell.¹²

Sydney Swettenham was by no means inactive while certified, for in 1907 and 1908 she wrote a series of letters to the Colonial Office.¹³ The first, which does not survive, was registered on 17 April 1907, and apparently recommended that the Chinese community should have been represented on the Colonial Conference. The ever-loyal Lucas, not yet retired, minuted: 'This should not have been registered — the poor lady is I believe out of her mind. I have destroyed it.' Further letters survive from 1908, written from The Priory, Roehampton, where she was then staying. They are rambling and erratic, culminating with an extraordinary and pathetic letter to the Secretary of State requesting that she be made Governor of the Straits Settlements, 'as I know I should be an

acceptable figurehead of Colonial Office policy there.' Curiously, there is in this series of letters, insofar as they have survived, only one tangential reference to Swettenham himself, who from this time onwards appears to have supported her financially, but left her entirely in the hands of her relations: a rapidly diminishing band, as most of her immediate family had died. It fell to a cousin, Montague Price, a banker, to be responsible for her in her periods of lunacy up to 1938.

The story is not an attractive one. Behind the legal caution evident in their exchange of letters it is possible to discern the intense unhappiness of Sydney, her loneliness and her husband's lack of sympathy. Swettenham at all times put his job before his marriage, except when he thought he saw a chance to rid himself of a wife who had become an insufferable burden. The weight of that burden can be judged when we consider that despite his social aspirations he was prepared to forgo two years at the apogee of his career in order to terminate it. He failed, and was obliged for the next thirty-five years not only to be responsible for maintaining Sydney, but also to endure her letters. But more painful still must have been the various scenes and escapades in which she became involved. As her legal husband, it fell to him to pick up the pieces.

NOTES

1. PRO reference no. is J77/808/4553, Index J78/6.
2. *The Times*, 26 October 1904.
3. 1938 Divorce file.
4. Pearl, 1970, op. cit., pp. 158, 161.
5. *STD*, 16 and 23 December 1901.
6. *PP*, 3 May 1901, *STD*, 6 May 1901.
7. Information on Mander comes chiefly from:
 - (a) The annual bound volumes of applications for membership of the Stock Exchange.
 - (b) Annual volumes of particulars of members and firms.
 - (c) R.E. Melsheimer, *The Law and Customs of the Stock Exchange*, 4th edition, 1905.
 - (d) A.H. Woolf, *The Stock Exchange: Past and Present*, 1913.
 - (e) F.W. Hirst, *The Stock Exchange*, 1948.
8. PRO file J77/808/4553, Index J78/6.
9. *Boddy v. Boddy and Grover* [1858] 28 LJ P & M 16.
10. The case concerned was *Hartopp v. Hartopp and Cowley* [1902] 71 LJP 78.
11. *The Times*, 26 October 1904.
12. *MM*, 17 October 1904.
13. See CO 273/335.

Letters to the Editor

Swettenham's life in retirement was marked by his indefatigable letters to the press: signs of a lonely man seeking a role in his life. Even before his misdemeanours over the Johore Railway Concession caused him to be banned from the inner counsels of the Colonial Office, Swettenham, freed from the constraints of the civil service, was anxious to make his name known to the public at large as the eminent, olympian expert on imperial policy. In these letters, he was at pains to stress that he was not a politician. While these exercises certainly brought his name to the attention of the public, they also brought him into controversy.

Before his retirement there had been straws in the wind suggesting that the role of colonial expert would not be uncongenial. In 1902, G.T. Hare, with whom Swettenham had visited Weihaiwei in 1898, prepared a long memorandum on the Chinese Protectorate. In his covering note Swettenham endorsed Hare's suggestion that a new department be set up in the Colonial Office to do for east and south east Asia what the India Office did for the subcontinent. It was to be headed by retired colonial governors: no doubt Swettenham himself would be the leading candidate. The Colonial Office were not to be tempted.¹

He wasted no time with his first contribution in February 1904, immediately after his retirement with a letter on the subject of the import of Chinese labour into South Africa. This was one of the major political controversies of the period, for there was a serious shortage of labour at the time in the mines in the Transvaal. It provoked emotional comment both about the exploitation of cheap labour and the concomitant social vices, such as opium smoking, of the Chinese in a 'white man's country.' In his letter² Swettenham argued on the basis of his experience in the Peninsula, in favour of importing Chinese labour. He stressed that his view was not one based on party politics: 'I am not a politician and do not pretend to understand party Government.' He then took an unnecessary side-swipe at the Australians, alleging they had slaughtered the aborigines, and now refused shipwrecked Malay fishermen the right

to land on their shores. His letter concluded however, with a call for free trade: a major political issue at the time. His remarks about the Australian treatment of aborigines produced a heated response from Henry Copeland, the Agent-General for New South Wales based in London. Copeland was well known as an uproarious drunkard, who had behaved tactlessly on a visit to Malaya in the early 1880s.³ In his letter to the press, Copeland hotly denied the charge that Australia maltreated its aborigines.⁴

The controversy continued for some time.⁵ It concluded with a further letter to *The Times* from Swettenham on 24 May 1904.⁶ *The Straits Times* remarked sarcastically, 'It is understood that the post filled by Sir Frank Swettenham at the Colonial Office is known as Adviser on Chinese Affairs.'⁷ Swettenham was publicly contradicted: the tone was acrimonious and far from olympian. Further letters dealt with the importance of retaining Weihaiwei.⁸

By September he was writing about the administration of Burma, in response to an article on the subject by Alleyne Ireland.⁹ Ireland had recommended that Burma be transferred from the government of India to the control of the Colonial Office. Swettenham pointed out that there were essential differences between the case of Burma and the transfer of the Straits Settlements in 1867. He disparaged the Foreign Office with which he evidently retained poor relations since the Siam fiasco, and concluded his letter with a plea for setting up a department 'officered by men who really understand the Further East,' to explain what was happening there. Again Swettenham was clearly a suitable candidate.

In November 1904 he committed a further *faux pas*. This was the period when his former patron at the Colonial Office, Joseph Chamberlain, was advocating his controversial programme of 'tariff reform' (retaliation by the UK against import duties imposed by its trade competitors). Rather surprisingly Swettenham did not follow the Chamberlain line but argued that British colonies, such as the Straits Settlements with its cherished free trade policy, should not be dragged at the chariot wheels of home economic policy. Again he concluded with the routine disclaimer, 'I am not a political partisan.'

The editor of *The Times* thought otherwise.¹⁰ The same issue contained a leading article commenting on a speech by Austen Chamberlain on, 'the fiscal question' and criticizing the Liberal opposition for misrepresenting the Chamberlain policy. There was a side-swipe at Swettenham: 'the too common attitude ... is illustrated in a letter from Sir Frank Swettenham which we publish today. He assumes the position of an earnest enquirer and then propounds a number of questions in the style of a cross-examining counsel. He is good enough to say that he is convinced of our power and willingness to oblige him with answers.' The leader further alleged

that Swettenham had misrepresented the issue: there was no proposal to introduce imperial preference. It is possible that the phrase 'cross-examining counsel' was an oblique dig at a man who had just lost a lawsuit.¹¹ *The Times* in its strictures accused Swettenham of producing 'travesties of facts put forth by the Opposition.' Swettenham could only climb down.¹² He accepted the assurances given, but what was the purpose of the proposed Colonial Conference, if not to discuss imperial preference?

Next there was a letter on 'The Colonies and Imperial Defence' referring to a delegation from the Imperial Federation (Defence) Committee to the Prime Minister.¹³ Swettenham stated that he was not a member of the delegation: he implied that he was invited but unable to go. He pointed out that the Straits Settlements contributed 20 per cent of its revenues to imperial defence and that Ceylon and Hong Kong also made contributions. He suggested that the colonies of European settlement such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand should follow this example. This got him into controversy with the Australians again. On 23 December 1904 the Agent-General for Western Australia, W. James criticized Swettenham's arithmetic and pointed out that the people of the Straits Settlements had no voice in their government's decision to make the 20 per cent contribution. This was of course the subject of bitter controversy with the Singapore business community.¹⁴ There were further letters on the same subject.¹⁵ Swettenham's contributions to public debate at this time indicated his wish to find a platform as a professional non-political commentator on imperial policy. His attempts were not successful, but they did bring his name to public notice. These controversies may also have suggested to him, or Lane, his publisher, that a book on the achievements of colonial rule in Malaya, on which Swettenham was less likely to be contradicted, might be useful as a means of exploiting his undoubted expertise in that field. For the rest of 1905 and much of 1906 Swettenham must have been kept fully occupied with *British Malaya* and by his increasing involvement with the flotation of rubber companies.¹⁶

He remained silent till October 1906, when *British Malaya* appeared. Once again, he became embroiled, this time in controversy over The Times Book Club.¹⁷ *The Times*, being in financial difficulties, devised with the assistance of two American publishers a subscription scheme which entitled those who subscribed at a discount also to become members of The Times Book Club. The club was not owned by *The Times*, but provided a clever scheme for retailing books at a discount on their list price. Traditionally, anyone who wished to see and read a book before buying it was obliged to wait to borrow a library copy. Then if he

liked the book, he could purchase it at list price from a bookseller. The Times Book Club however purchased a large number of copies of new books as soon as they appeared and made them available immediately on favourable terms to members. At its peak the club had about 100,000 members.

When first invited to supply books in bulk to The Times Book Club, many publishers were very willing to do so. But the traditional booksellers, represented by the Booksellers' Association, made strong objections: it undercut the fixed list-price system and deprived them of much of their business in the sale of new books. *The Times* of October-November 1906 is full of letters from the relevant associations, authors, members of the club and others. The club defended its practice by stating that the fixed list-price system was a method by which publishers obtained excessive profits. The publishers involved included John Lane of The Bodley Head, Swettenham's publisher.¹⁸ They responded with letters setting out the costs of production of a book and details. In the end the publishers, through their association, yielded to the pressure by the booksellers, and introduced a standard contract by which new books were supplied at trade price on condition that during the ensuing six months the bookseller was to sell to the public at not less than the list price. Dead stock might be sold back to the publisher only.

The Times Book Club refused to buy books from the publishers on these terms and the publishers blacklisted the club and refused to supply it. The club thus faced some difficulty in obtaining the supplies of books which it required. But its managers were enterprising and not too scrupulous. They found a number of intermediaries who were prepared to help them break the embargo. Bernard Shaw went into publishing on his own account to produce one book, an edition of his three latest plays, for sale mainly to the Times Book Club. Authors with established connections with publishers were rather hesitant. Although they did not wish to quarrel with the publishers, they did wish to see their books supplied to every outlet.

Swettenham's first letter on this subject to *The Times*¹⁹ was written under the pseudonym *fatahah*, an Arabic word, in Malay form, for the first chapter (*sura*) of the Koran. But a shorter form, *fatah* is Arabic for 'the opener,' not inappropriate for an author about to breach an embargo. However the letter was apparently written to express support for the publishers' restriction on resale at a list-price discount within six months.²⁰ On 18 October 1906 *The Times* published a letter from John Lane on the detrimental effect of flooding the market with cut-price supplies of books for which there was a market overseas. Then on 25 October *The Times* carried a letter from Lane, part of which reads:

On Friday a book was published by me, bearing the title of *British Malaya* by Sir Frank Swettenham, KCMG, at 16s. net.. [he quotes a favourable review by *The Times*] ...This book is boycotted by The Times Book Club, which refuses to purchase it on the same terms that it is sold to every other library or bookseller in the country. This happens to be a publication of great historical value but, what is more to my point, it is a work that should be in every colonial and eastern public library where the English language is read

Lane went on to argue that by the time he received orders for *British Malaya* from overseas, The Times Book Club would be offering it for 39d 'which is less than it costs me to manufacture.' Hence he was justified in refusing to supply them.²¹

*The Times*²² carried another letter from Lane refuting some figures of production costs published by the manager of The Times Book Club.²³ There was no specific reference to *British Malaya* here but the club manager had denied Swettenham's assertion²⁴ that every bookseller was willing to sell to him if he accepted the standard condition on resale. *The Times* later ran a letter from Swettenham apologizing for an error due to misunderstanding.²⁵

These preliminary exchanges may have drawn the attention of The Times Book Club to Swettenham. In the meantime, Swettenham protested at Lane's refusal to advertise the book in *The Times*: 'It has nothing whatever to do with the dispute between the publishers and the Book Club ... my interest at stake.'²⁶ In this Swettenham was technically correct: *The Times* did not own the club though its registered readers were entitled to be members. In the end Swettenham published the advertisement in *The Times* himself at his own expense.²⁷

When Swettenham began to order abnormally large numbers of copies of the book Lane demurred. But Swettenham persisted: 'I have always been the largest purchaser of my own books and if I have taken a larger number this time it may be for missionary purposes.'²⁸ Lane however held back delivery of the copies which Swettenham had ordered for resale to The Times Book Club. Letters of 1 and 3 November 1906 disclose that Swettenham had ordered 260 copies and Lane just ignored them. Swettenham challenged him: 'If you decline tell me so in writing.'²⁹ But Lane could not afford to breach his contract with Swettenham, a standard option in agreements of this kind. Swettenham professed an 'attitude of absolute aloofness' to the dispute between the publishers and The Times Book Club.³⁰ But he did effectively break the blockade as far as his own book was concerned.

On 10 November 1906, *The Times* carried an indignant letter from Lane referring to an announcement, in the *Times Literary*

Supplement of 9 November, that The Times Book Club held a large stock of copies of *British Malaya*. Lane added that he did not supply this stock and he was aware that The Times Book Club had approached three authors of books published by him to persuade them to purchase copies for resale to the club. They had refused. There was no direct accusation against Swettenham but the imputation was clear enough. *The Times* then published a letter from Swettenham written to vindicate himself:

... I supplied the Book Club because to my sense of 'justice', it is not right to deny one library and bookshop and supply all others. I naturally wished the members of The Times Book Club to have the same opportunity of reading the book as is given to their subscribers by other libraries. Mr Lane might have said that I put an advertisement in *The Times* after he had refused to do so. I suppose the object of writing a book is to get people to read it, but the publisher and I differed as regards the best means to that end. He was under an obligation to which I am not a party and of the existence of which I knew nothing when I put the book in his hands. Whether the publishers are right or *The Times* is right I cannot pretend to judge, when so many intelligent people express such divergent opinions on the quarrel...Some of your 80,000 subscribers will perhaps read my book now when they can get it from their own library, and I want to give them that opportunity before it is too late.

Mr Lane uses the word 'loyalty', but I do not understand it in this connection. Loyalty to whom or to what? I am conscious of the speculative nature of the publisher's business; it has been too lightly dismissed in the recent correspondence. As I was taking a course in opposition to the publisher's advice I offered to relieve him of all financial risk in reference to my book, but on that subject he preserves a stony silence.³¹

In *The Times* of 12 November there appeared a further letter from Swettenham signed 'C' and headed *British Malaya* which commented that Lane 'makes himself ridiculous: his boycott had broken down; Swettenham was not guilty of any dishonesty.'³² The tone of this apologia from Swettenham was very different from that of a long letter, published in *The Times* of 24 October 1906, in which in effect he stated that he could see the point of view both of the book trade and of the club, but it was rather hard on authors. In passing, he admitted that he wrote the letter signed *Fatahah* a few days earlier.³³

It seems a reasonable deduction that between late October and early November, when the advertisement appeared in *The Times*

Literary Supplement, there was contact between the Times Book Club and Swettenham, probably at the instance of the former. A proposition was made to Swettenham that he should obtain a stock of copies from Lane under his contract with him and re-sell them to the club, which would publicize the book, and breach the embargo. Swettenham then went to Lane with an ultimatum: either Lane was to supply the club with copies or Swettenham would. The last sentence of the letter of 20 November must mean that Swettenham proposed to Lane that he (Swettenham), like Shaw, would be his own publisher, in the financial sense, using Lane merely as a publishing agent. Lane, a combative man, refused the proposition. Despite Swettenham's public disagreement with Lane, he continued to publish at The Bodley Head. Possibly the success of *British Malaya* which was reprinted in 1906, 1907 and 1920 enabled Lane to make a profit which overcame his other disagreements with Swettenham. Lane published Swettenham's *Also and Perhaps* in 1912.

The public bickering over The Times Book Club had scarcely died away when Swettenham wrote again at length on Chinese labour in the Transvaal, as a result of a debate on the subject in the House of Commons.³⁴ Early 1907 produced yet a further public altercation, this time on a family matter. Sir James Alexander Swettenham had by this stage progressed via the governorship of British Guiana to that of Jamaica. He married, late in life, in August 1905, Mary Emily Copeland, nicknamed 'Jamaica Mary' by the other Swettenhams, from a family based in Staffordshire.³⁵ On 14 January 1907, Kingston was struck by an earthquake and a major storm, which destroyed one-third of the town, and gave rise to fifteen hours of fire and looting. An American warship, the *Missouri* under the command of Admiral Davis was in the area at the time. In brief, Davis landed a naval party and began to take relief measures without being invited by or establishing contact with the Governor. He did however contact the Secretariat and obviously formed the opinion, in which he was supported by the mayor of Kingston, that the government lacked essential resources for coping with a major disaster. The affronted Sir James Swettenham wrote a letter to the admiral which gave great offence. The incident was adversely publicized, and Sir James was ultimately forced to resign.

As soon as the news of his brother's resignation reached London Frank Swettenham wrote a letter to *The Times*³⁶ to advise the public to suspend judgement until the facts were known. The official statement that he had resigned 'on the grounds of age' convinced no-one. Later³⁷ Frank Swettenham wrote at length to *The Times* giving his version of what had occurred between his brother and the US admiral. Not for the first time Swettenham was

publicly contradicted on questions of fact.³⁸ Swettenham, who had no firsthand knowledge of Jamaica, later wrote a detailed account of the episode³⁹ and referred to the matter again in a letter published shortly after his brother's death in 1933, and in the magazine *British Malaya*.⁴⁰

Swettenham's further letters to the press in the years up to 1914 were less controversial. In 1910 he urged the public to visit the Japanese Exhibition at Earls Court to look at the Fine Art Department.⁴¹ The following year he wrote in to urge that colonial governors be recruited from among the ranks of permanent colonial officers, in response to publicity given to the subject by debates in Parliament.⁴² In 1913 he noted that the Malay rulers and the Council of the Federated Malay States had been so generous in their offer to pay for the construction of a battleship that surplus funds would be left over. These he felt should be divided between the London School of Tropical Medicine, and a College of Tropical Agriculture, which he urged should now be established.⁴³ 1914 saw a further three letters on Ireland, India and the war and the need for guide lecturers at the Imperial Institute. In the third letter, he supported the suggestion made by Lord Sudeley, his old acquaintance of Perak days.⁴⁴ Thereafter he was reduced to silence by his post in the Censor's office.⁴⁵ However his brother Sir James Swettenham carried on the work, albeit on matters of no very great importance, and in letters considerably shorter than those of his brother.⁴⁶

By 1919, Swettenham was released from his censorship duties and was free again to write. He lost no time in resuming this activity, and even contributed two articles to *The Globe* attacking the government's reckless financial policy.⁴⁷ In *The Times* he was vocal on this and a range of other subjects.⁴⁸ To continue a detailed analysis of the letters to *The Times* alone of the brothers Swettenham over the next twenty-seven years would be tedious. They amounted to fifty-seven, forty-five of which were written by Sir Frank, and covered a wide range of subjects,⁴⁹ including, as ever, comments on the affairs of the Malay Peninsula and repeated reminders of his position as senior, if unappointed adviser to *The Times*' readers on Colonial affairs. There were letters to other papers as well.⁵⁰

Yet, as the years rolled on, not even Swettenham could be unaware of the stirrings of Malay nationalism. Such stirrings he found unwelcome, and this view was expressed in his letter commenting on Sir Samuel Wilson's report of 1933.⁵¹ He deplored the idea that the Malays be given any opportunity to gain the necessary experience for self-governing status. Rather, it was desirable to remember the British commitments of the Pangkor

Engagement, and Federation in 1895: consult the rulers on all points, encourage them, but no-one else, to feel that they were being involved in the key decisions. Such was Swettenham's attitude when in 1945 proposals were made public for a Malayan Union, the final controversy of Swettenham's long life.⁵²

NOTES

1. CO 273/284:239 ff. Swettenham to SS, 12 November 1902.
2. *The Times*, 26 February 1904.
3. 'A Few Weeks Among the Malays,' *STD*, 4 April 1883.
4. *The Times*, 4 March 1904.
5. Letters to *The Times*, on 5 and 10 March 1904, and one from a Mr Hatton of Queensland on 16 March 1904.
6. *The Times*, 24 May 1904 quoting a letter from John Turner of Caledonia Estate, Province Wellesley.
7. *STD*, 26 June 1904.
8. *The Times*, 20 July 1904, quoted in *STD*, 6 July and 18 August 1904.
9. *The Times*, 6 and 10 September 1904 for Ireland's article and Swettenham's letter.
10. *The Times*, 24 November 1904.
11. See Chapter 42.
12. *The Times*, 30 November 1904.
13. *The Times*, 20 December 1904.
14. *The Times*, 23 December 1904.
15. *The Times*, 27 December 1904 and 1 February 1905.
16. See Chapter 47.
17. Details in vol. III of the *History of The Times, 1884-1912* entitled *The Twentieth Century Test*. For *The Times* Book Club, there is a series of articles in *The Times* in October 1906 by a business efficiency expert called Shadwell.
18. Lane came from a Devonshire farming family, and was four years younger than Swettenham. Like Swettenham, he was a self-made man, who in the late 1880s moved from a job in the Railway Clearing House to establish a London bookshop and publishing business. By 1891, the bookshop and publishing business was a full-time job. Lane was described by his biographer as, 'a shrewd man of business ... keen almost to the point of meanness.' At the same time he cultivated artistic connections, and launched his career on the 'tide of aestheticism' which set in during the 1890s. Biographical details from J.L. May's *John Lane and the Nineties*, 1936.
19. *The Times*, 20 October 1906.
20. Wilkinson's *Malay English Dictionary*, 1902 edition, p. 441.
21. *The Times*, 25 October 1906.
22. *The Times*, 29 October 1906.
23. *The Times*, 26 October 1906.
24. *The Times*, 18 October 1906.
25. *The Times*, 29 October 1906.
26. JLA, 28 October 1906. For details of the John Lane Archive, see Chapter 48.

27. JLA, 11 November 1906.
28. JLA, 28 October 1906.
29. JLA, 1 and 3 November 1906.
30. JLA, 6 November 1906.
31. *The Times*, 23 November 1906.
32. *The Times*, 12 November 1906.
33. *The Times*, 24 October 1906.
34. *The Times*, 26 December 1906.
35. Mrs J. Wijsman, pers. comm. and *TOM*, 23 September and 15 November 1905.
36. *The Times*, 3 April 1907.
37. *The Times*, 20 July 1907.
38. Letter in *The Times*, 13 August 1907 from the US vice-consul at Kingston; Swettenham's reply is in *The Times*, 17 August 1907.
39. *Footprints*, p. 165.
40. The correspondence surrounding the Jamaica incident was published in a Parliamentary Paper Cl. 3403, entitled *Correspondence Relating to the Resignation by Sir A. Swettenham of his Office of Governor of Jamaica*; *BM*, May 1933; *The Times*, 27 April 1933. See also Chapter 45 for a possible association with F.E. Smith (Lord Birkenhead) on this matter.
41. *The Times*, 23 June 1910.
42. *The Times*, 2 December 1911.
43. *The Times*, 27 December 1913.
44. *The Times*, 30 March, 14 and 23 September 1914.
45. See Chapter 46.
46. *The Times*, 13 November 1914 on 'Civilians in Warfare,' 9 August 1915 on 'Banks and Gold,' 26 October 1915 on the legality of Miss Cavell's sentence, 12 November 1915 on the conduct of war in Bulgaria, 22 December 1915 on detained German ships, 30 March 1916 on 'Prisoners in Ships' and 10 April 1916 on tax deductions from dividends.
47. These are repeated in *MM*, 22 and 24 September 1919.
48. For full details of the Swettenham brothers' letters to *The Times*, 1919-1946, see Appendix.
49. Appendix.
50. See for example *STD*, 17 February 1938 reporting on a letter from Swettenham to the *Daily Telegraph* on 'Visiting Inspectors of Colonies.'
51. *The Times*, 19 October 1933.
52. See Chapter 50.

Royal Commission to Mauritius, 1909

In 1909, Swettenham was appointed to head a three-man Royal Commission to Mauritius.¹ This must have been a source of considerable gratification, for Swettenham was at pains from the date of his retirement from Singapore to be regarded as the expert on colonial matters. Yet his stock was tarnished with the Colonial Office, partly because of his deal with Sultan Ibrahim of Johore,² and partly because of his public altercation with Smith on the origins of the Federation.³ His appointment appears to have been at the instigation of Lord Crewe, an able Secretary of State at the Colonial Office, and after Chamberlain the most important influence on Swettenham's later career. His cultivation of the great and the good was again paying dividends. Nevertheless, it was evident at the end of this commission that he had done an excellent job.

The immediate occasion for the appointment of the Commission was a Mauritian request for Colonial Office sanction for a loan. Local Mauritian opinion was that the island's economy had suffered passing setbacks due to the low world price of sugar, the need to reorganize and re-equip the sugar estates with improved machinery, and the effects of natural disasters such as a cattle disease which had decimated the animal transport on the estates.⁴

However the Colonial Office had been concerned for some time about signs of more deep-rooted problems in Mauritius. An earlier loan, approved in 1907, had disappeared into the sands of Mauritian deficit budgeting. For the fiscal year ending on 30 June 1909 expenditure would exceed revenue by more than the amount of the remaining reserves. Earlier attempts at improvement or reform had run into fierce local criticism. The report of a visiting expert on re-afforestation in 1905 had created a storm for what were considered to be 'unjustifiable and offensive statements on the Mauritians' and this led to 'violent discussion ... in Council.'⁵ There had been an attempt to introduce expatriate officials into key posts such as Receiver-General (Financial Secretary) but this had led

to a 'painful incident' in the Council of Government. The Acting Colonial Secretary had been goaded into speaking his mind but the unofficial members of the council then boycotted its meetings until he was removed from Mauritius. With some difficulty, for the Colonial Office would not sanction another loan until there was an authoritative review, the council was persuaded to call for the Royal Commission. Swettenham was well qualified to investigate problems which he later identified, in his report to Crewe, as originating from 'a long succession of weak Governors ... only putting in time before taking their pensions.' He had shown his capacity in this field years earlier by his achievements in Selangor and Perak.

It is the convention to appoint the Chairman of a Royal Commission first so that he may be consulted about the choice of the other members. Certainly the formal announcement was at pains to say that the other members had not then been chosen.⁶ The full membership was announced in *The Times* of 14 May 1909, and in Parliament on 20 May.⁷ There seems to have been some difficulty and a 'delay in selecting the other Commissioner' which according to Harding, Secretary to the Commission, had held up the arrangements for the Commission's journey to Mauritius.⁸

Next in seniority to Swettenham among the members was Sir Edward O'Malley, who had held a long series of legal appointments in the colonies. In particular he had been Chief Justice of the Straits Settlements from 1889 to 1892. Swettenham was presumably acquainted with him, although not stationed in Singapore at that time. There is nothing to suggest that Swettenham and O'Malley quarrelled but O'Malley proved a difficult colleague.⁹ Braddell wrote of O'Malley in Singapore: 'He ... made himself exceedingly popular socially and with the profession. He gave a close and painstaking attention invariably to even the most trivial cases, and bestowed a careful study and consideration on his judgments, appeals against which were almost impossible.'

The difficulty over accepting that view of O'Malley is twofold. First, Braddell, in a long essay on the legal luminaries of Singapore, praised them all, sometimes in fulsome terms. They could not all have been so nice. The second problem is that O'Malley was thoroughly difficult and obstructive as a member of the Mauritius Commission, as will be related. It seems more likely that O'Malley, who died in 1932, was a self-important fuss-pot who would go to considerable lengths to avoid having to retreat from any opinion or position which he had once adopted. This was perhaps masked, and made more supportable, by courtesy and charm, 'a kindly, sympathetic man, and remembered with affection.'¹⁰ By 1909 O'Malley was a pillar of the Oxfordshire establishment: Chairman

of the Quarter Sessions and a landowner. He stood for parliament, unsuccessfully, as a Liberal in 1903,¹¹ 1906 and 1910.

The third member of the Commission, Hubert Bayley Drysdale Woodcock, KC, was a barrister, about whom little is known. It is striking that the Commission was overloaded with two lawyers among three members. In view of Harding's minute, quoted above, it seems likely that Woodcock was appointed after some unnamed preferred candidate (or candidates) had declined and that he was taken in spite of rather than because of his being another lawyer. The work of the Commission was little concerned with legal points.

Harding¹² made the point that Woodcock, like O'Malley, was unfamiliar with matters of colonial administrative practice. The only occasion when Woodcock emerged from the shadows, apart from joining Swettenham in insisting on a speedy return from Mauritius, was a letter which he wrote to the Colonial Office in 1910 from his chambers at the Temple. Sir Graham Bower, a former Colonial Secretary and Acting Governor of Mauritius, had written to Woodcock to solicit his support in opposing Swettenham's drastic proposals in relation to subsidies to the churches in Mauritius.¹³ Woodcock merely forwarded the letter to the Colonial Office. It is clear that Bower was an English Roman Catholic. He may have had some part in proposing Woodcock for membership of the Commission and Woodcock himself may have been a member of the same church. In any case, Woodcock made no distinctive contribution to the work of the Commission.

In many respects the choice of A.J. Harding as Secretary to the Commission was more important than the choice of the other two members. Swettenham noted¹⁴ that Harding 'discharged his duties admirably' and the Commission in their report praised him warmly. He must have handled his triumvirate with skill and diplomacy.¹⁵ Harding had a shrewd understanding of the political realities and murky intrigues of Mauritius, on which his minutes were very informative. He was prepared to stand up to Swettenham if he (Harding) thought that his chairman was wrong. On the vexed question of the Commission's recommendations over ecclesiastical subsidies Harding wrote later: 'The words were inserted in my draft by Sir Frank Swettenham, and though in lengthy discussions on the ecclesiastical question I more than once pointed all this out, I couldn't succeed in getting the Commissioners to alter this.'

With the membership of the Commission at length settled, Harding could round off his tentative arrangements for transporting the party, which included two professional shorthand writers, to Mauritius. Until the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Mauritius had been a busy port of call on the sea-route round the Cape to

India. Its strategic importance had led to its capture from the French in 1810. After 1869 however Mauritius was in a backwater in the midst of the Indian Ocean, by-passed by the main sea-route to South and South East Asia. This was one of the factors which had led to its economic decline in the late nineteenth century.

In 1909 it was not easy to get sea passages to and from Mauritius on a comfortable ship. Swettenham had suggested that the party should travel to Cape Town and thence to Mauritius in a vessel of the Royal Navy on the South African station. The Navy was not keen however to find cabins on a warship for this mixed bag of passengers: the shorthand writers' 'social status ... fit them for the Ward Room Mess.' There was also a fuss about messing allowances. The Navy suggested that the party should travel through the Canal to Aden and then tranship to one of the ships plying between Aden and Mauritius. Swettenham, the old hand, recollecting his first uncomfortable voyage to Singapore in 1870, would have none of this: a sea journey from Aden to Mauritius during the south-west monsoon 'would be absolute purgatory.'¹⁶ So he got his way and they went round the Cape, leaving Southampton on 22 May, arriving in Cape Town on 8 June, and at Port Louis, Mauritius on 9 June.¹⁷ They landed that afternoon in heavy rain, and were received by the authorities, leaving immediately afterwards for Le Réduit, the official residence. The following day they attended a reception held in their honour by the Governor, Sir Cavendish Boyle.¹⁸

As soon as the Commission arrived in Mauritius, Harding set about arranging an extensive and thorough programme of interviewing witnesses and visiting government departments and sugar plantations. 'Mr Harding and I made a room-to-room examination of practically every Department.'¹⁹ Formal hearings began on 22 June. In a minute written after his return Harding reported that at this point Swettenham and Woodcock insisted that the Commission must complete its work in time to leave by one of the infrequent steamers scheduled to call at Port Louis on 25 August. As a result the Commission was barely able to complete its programme of obtaining information in Mauritius and had no time to sit down and debate its conclusions before departure.

Swettenham himself impressed the Mauritians by his brisk approach, and occasionally witty or brusque repartee when taking evidence. On some bad behaviour by the boys of the Royal College, he commented: 'Tumbling out of the railway carriage would not hurt the boys, as the train does not go fast enough.' Some years later, in a Council of Government debate in 1920, Amand Eshouf paid Swettenham a back-handed compliment: 'Tout le monde n'est pas comme Sir Frank Swettenham qui rendait la

justice sur un territoire de 600 miles carrés à cheval ou à bourrique, et trouvait moyen de juger 3000 ou 4000 affaires par an. Tout le monde n'a pas comme ce phénomène des Salomon et des Saint Louis dans ses ancêtres.' (Not everyone is like Sir Frank Swettenham who administered justice over a territory of 600 square miles on horse or mule and managed to pass judgement on 3,000 or 4,000 cases a year. Not everyone has both Solomon and St. Louis in his ancestry.)²⁰

It was nonetheless a very thorough investigation, as the voluminous records attached to the Commission's Report establish. The Commission held twenty-nine formal sessions, about one every other day and questioned ninety-nine witnesses. Harding suggested that the Commission should expedite its outside work by dividing into two parties: two members in one and the third member and himself in the other. This intelligent proposal had to be abandoned, for two reasons. First, O'Malley would not accept conclusions reached in his absence. Secondly, O'Malley and Woodcock were so ignorant of the working procedure in government offices that they could not make any useful contribution by their own observations.

Swettenham's account of the major problems of Mauritius is adequate as far as it goes, but incomplete.²¹ However his other writings show that he was greatly impressed by the island, particularly the scenery and the inhabitants. The dilatory and humourless nature of the Mauritians was recorded in Swettenham's sketch, 'Dodo Island, a Part Historical Account.'²² Despite the pressure of work on the Commission, Swettenham managed to slip away to the French island of Réunion, some 200 miles away, possibly for a weekend.²³ Much of this account is concerned with descriptions, so typical of all his writings, of the dramatic scenery encountered on climbing the hills.

His two other accounts of this period in his life cover a description of the Governor's residence, Le Réduit, with further descriptions of scenery, and some history of the house and its French inhabitants.²⁴ This included a story related with relish of a late eighteenth century French governor, whose sang-froid was displayed at dinner. The 'outrageusement décolletée' young lady at his side, drinking spicy soup, coughed part of herself out of her corsage, and was restored to propriety by judicious use of the soup ladle by the Governor. A similar mixture of scenic description and light history enlivened 'Tamarin,' an account of the river and ravine of that name.

The social obligations of the members of the Commission involved the hosting of two official dinners at the Castle of Beau Bassin.²⁵ There was also a ball at Le Réduit, at which Swettenham and Woodcock were reported as among the most frequent dancers.²⁶

Finally, the day before they left the island, they all attended the local race meeting.

On his return to London at the end of September 1909, Swettenham wrote to Lord Crewe:

15 Princess St., Cavendish Square
29 Sept. 1909

My dear Lord Crewe,

I arrived here on Monday evening and am at your disposal at any time should you wish to see me.

I had given up hope of arriving at any kind of unanimous report but on the day before we reached Marseilles Sir Ed. O'Malley expressed a qualified consent to a number of minor questions. About loans and the reorganisation of the public service in Mauritius he still declines to commit himself to anything. He has a rooted objection to writing a report while the facts are fresh in our minds so I have no idea when we shall produce anything official. I send you my own very private views on a number of questions some of which cannot be touched on by the report. I thought this might be useful and save time. Please pardon the 'manner' of the memorandum for I did not write it. I dictated it to a shorthand writer.

Yours sincerely,
Frank Swettenham

It appears that on the voyage home Harding, aided by the two shorthand writers, began to draft the report: hence the statement 'We wrote our report on the voyage home and completed it in London.'²⁷ But O'Malley was difficult both on specific points in the draft and on finalizing it while at sea. Swettenham then dictated his immediate and confidential report for dispatch to Crewe as soon as he had returned to London.

Swettenham's private report to Crewe is best taken alongside material added from other sources. His main points touched on the tradition of French administration, weak governors, bloated civil service and lax control of expenditure, a poor tax regime and excessive welfare expenditure. His general conclusion was that 'large economies' were required. Harding fully supported Swettenham's view that the civil service was large and inefficient. He wrote of 'clerical staff far more numerous than the work justified ... one man could show only half a dozen entries in a cash book as his work for 4 days.'

The trouble began at the top of the civil service. Harding said that the Commission in its evidence and consultation received 'practically no assistance from Heads of Departments in considering

how expenditure could be seriously reduced ... Not only the unofficial but official Mauritians seemed to take the view that the Government must find salaries for the young men of the Colony, whether there was work for them or not.' One of the Commission's major recommendations was a drastic reorganization and retrenchment of local government departments. The reaction to this programme is mentioned below.

Swettenham, a career administrator, put his finger on what was wrong with the governorship of Mauritius. It was now overpaid in relation to the work involved. As a result it was an ideal haven for senior administrators of mediocre talents. The one exception to this succession of incompetents had been a disaster. This was Sir John Pope-Hennessy, whose explosive transit from the governorships of Labuan (1867-71), West Africa (1872-3), the Bahamas (1875-6) and then Hong Kong (1877-82) had reached its end in Mauritius (1883-9).²⁸

Pope-Hennessy's lasting contribution to the coming debacle in Mauritius had been the introduction of an unofficial majority, including elected members, in the Council of Government. This change, which involved him in controversy, led to much politicking among the local community. It also made it exceedingly difficult for the successive Governors to resist, if they were minded to at all, pressure from local interest groups. The unofficial members of the Council established the practice of passing resolutions, expressing, it was alleged, the popular will, and these were duly transmitted to the Colonial Office.

For obvious reasons the Commission decided not to stir up a hornet's nest by touching on this problem in their published report. But with the report Swettenham addressed a confidential letter to the Colonial Office. After pointing out that unofficial members of the Council were in the habit of proposing measures which entailed additional expenditure, contrary to the British parliamentary and colonial legislative convention, Swettenham continued: 'An undue proportion of the work of the administration and legislature is carried on through the medium of negotiations between the Governor in person and the unofficial members. ... [The latter endeavoured to] reduce the Governor to the position of a mere channel of communication and argument between themselves and the Secretary of State.' This undesirable situation was in part the result of the ambiguity over the status of the 'Council of Government,' a French rather than an English concept. The Commission recognized that there was no retreat from the unofficial majority but recommended stricter rules of Council procedure.

Harding's note on this letter read: 'The substance of this letter was drafted by Sir E. O'Malley who wanted it put in the Report.

The other Commissioners compromised by turning it into a confidential and separate letter. The name "Council of Government" gave great offence to Sir Edward and he spent a lot of time in research as to how it came into existence — without much positive result.' Harding's conclusion was that previous Governors 'have allowed the Legislature to encroach on the proper functions of the Executive.' Apart from wishing to clip the wings of the Legislative Council the Commission did consider it essential, and said so publicly in their Report, that the practice of appointing two unofficial members of the Legislative Council to be members of the Governor's Executive Council should be ended.

There was another underlying problem in the government of Mauritius which Harding perceived more clearly than Swettenham, if indeed the latter understood it at all. This was the partiality of the present Governor, Sir Cavendish Boyle, and his predecessors for one influential pressure group, the French creoles.²⁹

Whatever the ambiguity of 'creole', the colonists of more or less pure French descent in a French colony did regard themselves as a separate and privileged group, and held the Eurasian creoles in low esteem. This intolerance has to be borne in mind to appreciate how strong it can be. In Mauritius the French creoles had a monopoly of the top positions in public life, the civil service, the professions and commerce except insofar as they shared it with an even smaller number of expatriates, a mainly British element. The Eurasian creoles ranged from the *petit fonctionnaires* and *petit bourgeois* of the towns to artisans, fishermen and peasant farmers. They distinguished themselves from the large group of immigrant (indentured) Indian labour on the sugar estates. They professed to be Christians but Swettenham in his report to Crewe noted that 'a large number of those professing Romism believe as much in witchcraft as in the teaching of the priesthood.'

One of the incidental consequences of the French administrative tradition upheld partly, according to Swettenham, from motives of French nationalism, was that French law was uniformly applied to such matters as the ownership of property and its inheritance even though it was quite unsuitable to the way of life of those involved. This was one of the social grievances on which the Commission recommended reforms.

The Governor, Sir Cavendish Boyle, had come to Mauritius at the end of a long career in the West Indies and the governorship of Newfoundland (1901-4). He was something of a joke: Swettenham referred to him as 'Tabac' ('Smokey Jo').³⁰ The French creole political leaders had him completely in their pocket. Harding later pointed this out, though not with reference to the Royal Commission's work.³¹ Boyle had forwarded a protest from the

'Action Liberale' party (Eurasian creole) in Mauritius. Their grievance was that in the run-up to the coming elections for members of the Legislative Council the government was discriminating against them by prosecuting their newspapers for criminal libel, but abstaining from applying the same sanctions to the newspapers of the French creole faction. Swettenham drew attention to the 'amazing activities of the island press.' The press, which in true Mauritian style had the privilege of free distribution by post, was a major weapon of political argument.³²

The other Mauritian political addiction was passing resolutions at public meetings. When the Commission arrived in 1909 it immediately received copies of resolutions passed that day for its benefit on matters great and small: the topics included 'the control of weigh-bridges by government' and the 'return of the Royal College to Port Louis.'³³ When Boyle's dispatch on alleged discrimination was received, the Colonial Office prepared a reply to the effect that in a British colony justice was administered with strict impartiality. However when the file came to Harding he advised a very brief and non-committal reply since the complaint was well justified. The senior law enforcement officers were of course all French creoles.

One of the more delicate manœuvres in the implementation of the Commission's report was easing Boyle out and replacing him with a Governor who would take action. In its general comments on the report, the Colonial Office had noted that 'it is no use to ask Sir C. Boyle to carry out the R.C.'s recommendations. He neither would, nor could do it nor anything like it.' Fortunately his age made Boyle almost due for retirement, and after a suitable interval, to preserve his dignity and the authority of his office, he was replaced by Sir John Chancellor.³⁴ It is possible that Swettenham may have tried to get the job for one of his former colleagues in Malaya. When Chancellor's appointment was announced Swettenham wrote to *The Times*³⁵ to object to the practice of appointing senior army officers, former secretaries to the Colonial Defence Committee, to colonial governorships. Surely, he wrote, there were career administrators, notably in Malaya, well fitted to fill the post in Mauritius.

One of the Commission's recommendations, ostensibly on grounds of economy, was a substantial reduction in the salary of the Governor of Mauritius, to make it more suitable for younger and abler men at an earlier stage in their careers. Much of the Commission's report was concerned with economic rehabilitation, for instance of the railways.³⁶ It also recommended (O'Malley dissenting) loans for agricultural purposes to improve the sugar estates. Swettenham informed Crewe that the local planters were

'intelligent and capable' but, owing to the isolation of Mauritius, lacking in enterprise.

The necessary programme of retrenchment included changes in the system of poor relief, which, as practised in Mauritius, offended Swettenham's late Victorian conviction that no one needs to be poor. In writing to Crewe he said that 'the people have been pauperised by their habit of depending upon the Government for everything.' Swettenham persuaded Woodcock, but not O'Malley, to recommend a reduced and decentralized system of poor relief. Here Swettenham's financial hard-headedness outran his grasp of the local situation. An official at the Colonial Office commented, 'I was afraid that the proposals of the R. Com. on this subject were rather too "practical" to be practicable.' It was concluded that a decentralized system of relief would lead to 'appalling jobbery and favouritism.' This was one of the few recommendations of the Commission which the Colonial Office rejected.

The other major issue on which Swettenham's controversial realism was too much for the Colonial Office, was the 'ecclesiastical question', on which Harding had failed to persuade Swettenham to leave things alone. This was an illustration of Parkinson's Law: the amount of official time given to a subject is in inverse proportion to its real importance. But it was an interesting affair. At the time of the French Revolution in 1789, the Roman Catholic Church in France was deprived of its property. In return the State undertook to pay the salaries of the bishops and priests. This practice was extended to Mauritius, as a French colony, in 1791. When in 1810, Mauritius became a British colony, it was laid down that existing religious rights and privileges would be respected and continued. In 1909 it was contended that this vague guarantee meant that the payments to the churches were entrenched in the constitution, though this was doubted.³⁷ When the Churches of England and of Scotland sent clergy to Mauritius the privilege of the Roman Catholic Church was extended to them. The colony also paid the pensions of retired clergy and the cost of their leave passages, though neither privilege was in existence in 1810.

At Swettenham's insistence, the Commission recommended that the practice should be phased out. It should continue for clergy already on the establishment but their successors should not have it. O'Malley however again dissented. The Colonial Office foresaw trouble: 'Whatever happens there is sure to be a howl at the proposal to cut down the ecclesiastical expenditure, which will have to be faced with as much boldness as the govt. can manage.' The Colonial Office toyed with the idea of block grants to the churches but in the end this boldness melted like the summer snow and the recommendation was simply not implemented.

The cost of the ecclesiastical subsidies was a mere Rs 153,000 in a total budget of Rs 10 million. The major economies could only come from reducing the number of government departments and the number of civil servants employed in them. The Commission recommended a series of changes on these lines by which it was hoped eventually to save as much as four million rupees a year. It was also recognized that to implement these changes there would have to be some new blood. Harding's comment on the apathetic indifference of the senior officials to the Commission's work has been quoted. The first witness before the Commission was the Receiver-General in charge of public finances. He was unable to supply to the Commission any figures of the likely out-turn for the fiscal year 1908-9, which would end a few days later, or for the first half of the year, which had ended nearly six months earlier.

Harding judged that some of the ablest officials were Eurasian creoles in the middle ranks. He anticipated considerable difficulty if they were promoted to positions in which they would have to exercise authority. It was, predictably, the civil service which protested most over the Commission's recommendations. There was 'general dissatisfaction at first though some of its recommendations proved of great utility later on.'³⁸ *The Times* of 10 August 1910 carried an article by an anonymous correspondent writing from Port Louis on the Commission's report. It was a long catalogue of the grievances of the senior local civil servants whose position had been eroded since a period of retrenchment in 1873. Their work was made difficult by growing corruption and dishonesty among 'inferior officials.' The 'once excellent service has to a great extent lost its prestige and efficiency.' The Commission's most controversial recommendation on the revenue side was for a 2 per cent income tax. Swettenham wrote a note saying that he did not dissent from the principle but doubted, on the basis of his experience in Malaya, whether it would be practicable either to assess or to collect the tax.

Eventually, with two and a half pages of dissent by O'Malley on Poor Law Administration and Loans to Planters, and a note of reservation by Swettenham, a report was eventually signed by all three members of the Commission. The Colonial Office was gratified: 'very businesslike and will be of immense use to us in shaping our future policy in Mauritius.'³⁹ With considerable misgiving as to who might be allowed to see it before publication, advance copies were dispatched in May 1910 to Boyle, with strict instructions not to show it to anyone. It was published simultaneously in London and in Mauritius on 22 June 1910.⁴⁰ It had a rather mixed reception in Mauritius. Action Liberale (the Eurasian creoles) passed resolutions at public meetings to welcome

selected passages. Edwardes wrote: 'The Civil Service was very unfortunate. The Commissioners pushed their idea of amalgamation of posts beyond working possibility; salaries were reduced, while those of small functionaries were fixed at such figures as would discourage competent youths desirous of joining the Service.'⁴¹

Sir John Chancellor, the new Governor, was fortunate: his delayed arrival coincided with a strong recovery in the economy of Mauritius. There were two good sugar harvests in succession and the world market price of sugar rose. So there was money to play with for agriculture, irrigation and a co-operative bank. The Mauritians went back to politics: in the elections of 1911 the conflict between the two factions, the Oligarques and the Democrates, were unusually violent. But in 1912 the Mauritius Turf Club, through which every one bought tickets in each Calcutta Sweepstake, celebrated its centenary amid general rejoicing. It was back to business as before. Chancellor proved a better governor than his predecessors. He made no secret of the fact that he was instructed to implement the recommendations of the Commission: '... frank, very kind, severe but impartial, he visited the whole island, and proceeded slowly in putting into force the numerous changes. Accompanied by his gracious wife, they both soon won the deep esteem of all the colonists.'⁴²

When the Birthday Honours list appeared in November 1909⁴³ Swettenham was elevated to GCMG, and the following year received a silver inkstand from HMG.⁴⁴ Not for the first or the last time, for the Official Press Bureau was to be a longer and sterner test, he had shown what an able administrator and organizer he was. It is clear that the real burden of a rapid but very thorough investigation fell on his shoulders, though undeniably with valuable aid from Harding. We do not know how he manoeuvred O'Malley into a qualified acceptance of the general findings. O'Malley may by 1910 have been more concerned with the coming excitement of the general election, in which he was a candidate. Although Swettenham's judgement went a little astray on a few points the outcome as a whole was a first-rate achievement.

There was however a sinister postscript to Swettenham's visit to Mauritius. Reference has been made elsewhere to his interest in the accoutrements of death. Evidently he found in Mauritius a kindred spirit, quite possibly the Librarian of the Mauritius Library, with whom he subsequently corresponded.⁴⁵ There appeared among Swettenham's papers after his death an account in English, immaculately typed on government-crested notepaper, of a police interrogation. It dealt with a flagrant case of necrophilia, committed by a group of Mauritius Indians near a town in the south of the island. The details left nothing to the imagination.⁴⁶ It is

understandable that the typescript on government-crested paper should have slipped through the sifting of Swettenham's papers by his relatives after his death. It is less clear why Swettenham himself should have preserved the document over so many years and through evident successive siftings of his papers. One is led to conclude that it had continued to hold some fascination for him.

NOTES

1. See *Footprints*, p.146.
2. See Chapter 40.
3. See Chapter 48.
4. The main sources for this chapter are:
 - (a) The Commission's Report, printed and laid before Parliament. (Command 5185) Vol. 42 House of Commons Papers 1910: ZHC 1/7410 at PRO, Kew. This includes a verbatim report of the hearings in Mauritius, public and private, at which 99 witnesses gave evidence, (Command 5186) and copies of the written memoranda submitted to the Commission (Command 5187). In total they run to almost 800 pages.
 - (b) Summary of the main points in *The Times*, 23 June 1910.
 - (c) Four chapters in Swettenham's *Also & Perhaps* mainly on the colourful background of Mauritius and its scenery.
 - (d) *Footprints*, pp. 148-9, inaccurate insofar as the visit did not last several months.
 - (e) *The History of Mauritius, 1507 - 1914* by S.B. de Burgh-Edwardes, 1921.
 - (f) CO series on Mauritius, CO 167 and 171 at PRO, containing letters and memoranda by Swettenham and minutes by A.J. (later Sir John) Harding, Secretary to the Commission.
 - (g) *Dictionary of Mauritius Biography*, published by the Société de L'Histoire de l'Île Maurice: entries on Swettenham, (No. 20, May 1947) and O'Malley, (No. 10, July 1943).
5. Burgh-Edwardes, op. cit., p. 100.
6. *The Times*, 6 April 1909.
7. *The Times*, 21 May 1909.
8. See minute by Harding in CO 167/791.
9. See character sketch by Braddell in Makepeace, Brooke and Braddell, 1921, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 219-20.
10. See portrait of him in *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, facing p. 220.
11. *MM*, 17 September 1903.
12. See below.
13. See below.
14. *Footprints*, p. 146.
15. Harding had obtained a First in Natural Sciences at St John's College, Cambridge in 1900 and had entered the CO in 1901. In 1909 he was assistant

- private secretary to the Secretary of State: the sign of a young civil servant already marked out as a 'high flyer'. He spent his entire career at the CO rising to be Director of Colonial Audit in the 1930s, with a knighthood. He died in 1953. Again this is a sign of Lord Crewe's personal involvement in the Commission. Harding was no doubt a useful personal aide to a busy minister.
16. CO 167/791: letter of 5 May 1909.
 17. Not 21 June as stated in *Footprints*, p. 148. See also *Planters & Commercial Gazette: Overland Mail* (Mauritius), 26 May 1909.
 18. *Planters & Commercial Gazette*, 26 May 1909.
 19. *Footprints*, p. 148.
 20. *Dictionary of Mauritian Biography*, entry under Sir F. Swettenham.
 21. *Footprints*, pp. 147 and 149.
 22. *Also & Perhaps*, p. 143.
 23. *Also & Perhaps: 'Cilaos'*, p. 215.
 24. *Also & Perhaps: 'Le Réduit' and 'Tamarin'*, pp. 179 - 214.
 25. *Dictionary of Mauritian Biography*, entry under Sir Edward O'Malley.
 26. *Planters & Commercial Gazette*, 22 July 1909.
 27. *Footprints*, p. 149.
 28. See James Pope-Hennessy's fascinating biography of this storm petrel among proconsuls in *Verandah: Some Episodes in the Crown Colonies, 1867-1889*. He had married the only and much-loved daughter of Sir Hugh Low. This did not prevent him from quarrelling with Low.
 29. The word 'creole' as used in French colonial society is ambiguous. According to the *Petit Larousse Français* it means 'personne de race blanche, née aux colonies'. For a person of mixed, that is Eurasian descent the correct term is 'métis' (defined as 'issu de races différentes'). However métis has come to bear the same disparaging sense as 'half-caste' in English: it is not polite to use it in relation to a Eurasian. Hence 'creole' comes to mean both pure French colonists and those Eurasians who adopt the European lifestyle.
 30. *Footprints*, p. 147.
 31. See minute on a dispatch of 18 October 1910, CO 167/794.
 32. *Footprints*, p. 149.
 33. CO 167/789 Dispatch of 13 July 1909.
 34. *Footprints*, p. 149 refers incorrectly to 'Sir John Challoner'.
 35. *The Times*, 2 December 1911.
 36. *Footprints*, p. 147.
 37. The history of the matter is explained at paragraphs 204-6 of the Commission's report.
 38. Burgh-Edwardes, 1921, op. cit., p. 104.
 39. Minute by Collins of the CO.
 40. *The Times*, 23 June 1910 has a summary.
 41. Burgh-Edwardes, 1921, op. cit., p. 104.
 42. Burgh-Edwardes, 1921, op. cit., p. 106.
 43. *The Times*, 9 November 1909.
 44. List of Effects with Barclays Bank Trustee Dept. Typescript in possession of Mrs J. Wijsman.
 45. Papers in the possession of Datuk Lim Chong Keat.
 46. SP 41.

High Society

By the end of 1904, Lady Swettenham was safely out of the way, certified, if not with Swettenham's connivance, then certainly to his great relief, in a mental institution where she was to remain for eight long years. Swettenham was now free, though not as free as he would have wished, to take up and enjoy his life of early retirement.

Apart from his two government jobs, in Mauritius in 1909 and in the censor's office during the First World War,¹ Swettenham's major concerns in his retirement were his writing, his involvement in the rubber industry, his self-assumed role as an expert on matters colonial, and his cultivation of aristocratic acquaintances.² His autobiography made little mention of the first three, but devoted considerable space to his aristocratic contacts.³

Allen had this to say on the aspirations of colonial governors, now two a penny in England, and in particular on Swettenham:

Treated as viceroys in their own territories, they were only barely squires after retirement, unless they had sufficient means to buy their way into higher society. Swettenham, the product of only a minor public school and himself no aristocrat, was very well aware of this. After his retirement, partly on account of his wealth and partly through his fame as a *raconteur*, he gained access to certain circles where no mere ex-governor would ever automatically have been admitted (as he was at pains to show in *Footprints in Malaya*...)⁴

On Swettenham's income, we have the evidence from his divorce proceedings in 1938: the figures quoted then showed an annual income, which could not have changed much over the years, of some £3,800 gross. This would need to be increased tenfold to offer a valid comparison with current figures, indicating that he lived in very comfortable circumstances. But these were not adequate to buy his way into the very plutocratic Edwardian circle with which he mingled. He did not, for instance return the hospitality of his grandee friends: for we may be sure he would have mentioned it in *Footprints* if he had. His address immediately after his retirement was in North Wales, perhaps to be away from the embarrassment of

his divorce proceedings in London, possibly to be close to his brother, William, who had by then settled there. By 1910 he gave an address near Cavendish Square. Yet there is no indication that he ever owned property in London: indeed the only residence he owned was a house in Staines, which was let: no fit base for entertaining the great and the good. No doubt the cost of keeping Sydney in a nursing home over the years proved a considerable burden on his finances, and precluded sumptuous London accommodation. It may have been Sydney's costs which obliged him in 1912 to sell at Sotheby's his substantial collection of Japanese prints, apparently collected in 1881 on his visit there.⁵ The sale was a major one, for it was scheduled in the catalogue to stretch over seven days. The collection was described as 'comprising a great number of fine and rare Triptychs by the most important Ukiyo-Ye Masters such as Kiyonaga, Shumcho, Shunzam, Shunnan and Utamoro ...'⁶ Sales of Japanese collections were not rare in those days, but this one was outstanding: it realized £2,510-8-6d.

There were other factors which contributed to his social success. An analysis of the various individuals he mentions generally indicates the basis of his acquaintance with them, and gives some idea of how he spent his time. Swettenham's evident enjoyment of country sports, and careful cultivation of acquaintances whether made in the hunting field and shooting during his leaves, or in Malaya, provided a number of friends: Lord and Lady Ullswater, Sir William and Lady Eden, Lord and Lady Lonsdale, to mention but three, fall into this category.

The Lonsdales were close friends, imposed on a very receptive Swettenham while in Singapore by Lord Curzon, at the time Viceroy of India.⁷ Swettenham recorded his first visit to their home in Lowther, Yorkshire, in August 1904, an event to be repeated annually till the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.⁸ The visit of 1911 was recorded in some detail. The occasion was the grouse season, and a photograph of the time shows Swettenham in tweeds on the moors with various other members of the house party, including ex-King Manoel of Portugal and Lord Lonsdale himself.⁹

Summer expeditions to Scotland included visits to the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland, in Caithness, fishing, shooting grouse and deerstalking, which Swettenham compared to shooting a serow in Malaya. In the winter, Swettenham continued his hunting with the Pytchley, staying on occasions with Lord and Lady Annaly at Holdenby House. The satisfaction which he derived from this social activity is evident from the enthusiasm with which he described such exploits.¹⁰ He was a welcome guest, for in addition to his enthusiasm for hunting, and his undoubted skill as a shot, he

brought to these parties his accounts of an adventurous life spent in a distant part of the world. His stories lost nothing in the telling as the years passed.¹¹ His presence must have made a welcome and lively addition to the stuffy house parties in the shires: for him it offered a pleasant diversion from his solitary life in a London house full of oriental objets d'art.

Some of his friends were artistic or literary lions: Sir William Eden was an amateur painter. The choice of the artist for the portrait commissioned at the Straits Settlements Association dinner, which Swettenham had attended shortly after his return from Singapore in 1903, lay with Swettenham himself. A number of his friends had sat for John Singer Sargent, R A, the famous portrait painter, then at the height of his powers. His high reputation, combined with his well-placed and illustrious clientele, whom Swettenham might thus meet, must have made the choice an obvious one. The two men became firm friends,¹² and Swettenham subsequently acquired other paintings by him, including one of a canal in Venice affectionately inscribed, 'To my friend Sir Frank Swettenham.'¹³

He happened to be painting the portraits of a number of my friends, and it was interesting to watch these pictures grow day by day to completion, and hear the discerning comments on the frames of mind in which his sitters presented themselves to a man whose brush recorded characters as well as features.¹⁴

Sargent, at Swettenham's request, arranged for a copy of the Singapore portrait to be made. It is believed he entrusted this work to a colleague, J. Cooke. However, half-way through the exercise Sargent became so dissatisfied with his colleague's work, that he undertook its completion, completely repainting the canvas, and changing the uniform to match a newly introduced version. This copy Swettenham retained.¹⁵

Swettenham is represented as the epitome of the Edwardian proconsul. Dimly seen above the tropically clad figure is the base and lower section of a huge globe, symbol of Empire, and falling over the French bergère are the tributes of a subject people, magnificent Malaysian brocades collected by Swettenham himself and now in the museum at Kuala Lumpur. The full-length version also includes an ivory baton (Swettenham's badge of office), unrolled documents, a topi, and a leopard-skin rug. Writing of this last portrait at the 1905 New Gallery exhibition, Frank Rinder commented: "In portraiture there is nothing comparable, as a brilliant realization of character and accessories, with Mr Sargent's Sir Frank Swettenham." The lithe military figure, in white linen

suit, accustomed to command, has here authority in a composition full of threatening accessories.¹⁶

A more recent assessment reads:

The design, one of Sargent's grandest, certainly owes something to Van Dyck in the heroic conception of the figure, set off by swirling accessories, and in the sonorous colour. But the portrait is held together by the force of Swettenham's personality. That he is more than just a bureaucrat or man of action is suggested in the NPG portrait by the claw-like hands tensely gripping the edge of the chair.¹⁷

By contrast the Singapore portrait, as may be seen from the illustration depicts a man who lacks both the vigour and the slightly sinister quality of the second painting.

Yet a third portrait is also recorded. This was unveiled in Kuala Lumpur by Anderson on 27 September 1906.¹⁸ It was initially hung in the Town Hall, and was subsequently moved to King's House, now part of Carcosa Seri Negara. The catalogue note continues:

What appears to have been a copy of the Singapore portrait, listed by Mckibbin as by J. Cooke, formerly hung in the King's House at Kuala Lumpur; it is said to have been returned to the Crown Agents in London between 1958 and 1961, but is at present untraced. Two later charcoal drawings of Swettenham are recorded, one dated 1919.¹⁹

There were also agreeable social duties of a literary nature: in 1913, Margaret Brooke, Ranée of Sarawak and consort of the second white Raja, Charles, published *My Life in Sarawak*. She was almost the same age as Swettenham, and, like him had first travelled to the east in the days of Sir Harry Ord. Who better to write a preface than her old friend, Swettenham?²⁰

Swettenham's not inconsiderable reputation as a writer must also have helped in his acquaintance with men such as Kipling, de Lara, a singer, Percy Landon, special correspondent of *The Times* overseas, and George Moore. Lady Randolph Churchill was a friend whose acquaintance with Swettenham dated back to a visit to Perak in 1894. She also wrote books, which gave them further interests in common. It is perhaps significant that at the time he renewed acquaintance with her in London in the early years of this century, she was no longer Lady Randolph Churchill, as he liked to suggest: she had remarried after Randolph Churchill's death, and was merely Mrs George Cornwallis-West. He explained at some length²¹ how he formed part of her group attending a fancy-dress ball at the Albert Hall. Through her, Swettenham gained entrée to some of the London drawing rooms of the period, for she was one of a number of society hostesses of the period whose social

pretensions depended more on their husband's wealth rather than their blue blood.

The most striking example in this category was Emerald, Lady Cunard, with whom Swettenham stayed on several occasions,²² as did Mrs Cornwallis-West. Lady Cunard had been rebuffed in her attempts to enter society in New York, and later in London, until she attracted the attention of the Prince of Wales.²³ Nevertheless, her house parties were notorious for their sexual promiscuity: 'romantic intrigue was not an uncommon element.' Although she 'was well established as a fashionable hostess ... there were still certain doors which remained obdurately closed to her.'²⁴

In her struggle to get into society, 'one of Maud's [Emerald's] first champions was Mrs Charles Hunter.'²⁵ Again one finds a link: Swettenham stayed as a guest of the Hunters and he mentions Hill Hall, a seventeenth century mansion in Essex.²⁶ The Hunters were extremely rich and also owned a large house and estate in Yorkshire, where they entertained literary and artistic celebrities, including Henry James and George Moore.²⁷ Mary Hunter let it be known that her mission in life was to spend her husband's abundant money. It was a remark which gave the flavour of the Cunard-Hunter circle.

The list of Lady Cunard's regular visitors at Nevill Holt, in Northamptonshire, included Francis Meynell, like Swettenham, one of John Lane's authors, Somerset Maugham, the explorer, Frijdhof Nansen and 'Swettenham the oriental scholar.' That description disclosed the route by which Swettenham entered this circle. These would-be artistic plutocrats were in search of literary lions. Swettenham, at the peak of his reputation as a writer of books and stories on Malaya, fitted the specification. He was moreover a connoisseur of Oriental art, another current fashion, and a distinguished ex-colonial governor. Swettenham offered to the Cunard-Hunter set the advantage that he could not look down a long aristocratic nose at their social pretensions: he too was a climber. Moreover he had become accepted in aristocratic houses to which the notorious Lady Cunard herself might not be invited. He gave her own parties a little more tone.

Another hostess in this category was Lady Sackville of Knole, in Kent,²⁸ where she entertained at weekends, a mixture of the rich, the diplomatic, and men such as Swettenham, for she knew how to make people talk.²⁹ Swettenham described Knole as 'the most wonderful house I have ever seen,' and wrote warmly of Sackville hospitality.³⁰ Here he met von Kuhlmann, the German ambassador, with whom he shared a common interest in Chinese ceramics.³¹ Curiously there is no entry in the Knole visitors' book to suggest

that the two had stayed there at the same time; perhaps a further lapse of memory when Swettenham wrote *Footprints*.

Social life in London was not without its attractions. Here again, connections established in Singapore proved valuable, and indeed pleasurable. We met among Swettenham's later visitors to Singapore in March 1903 Gertrude Bell, and her brother Hugo. Despite Gertrude Bell's initial hesitations about Swettenham in Singapore, the two had maintained their links by correspondence. With the embarrassments of Swettenham's attempted divorce out of the way, a more breezy approach was in order. She had turned the formality of her earlier mode of address into a blend of flippancy and flattery: 'My dear Excellency and best of letter writers,' one letter starts, and continues, like most of the correspondence in a warm, affectionate, and learned tone, discussing politics, work she is doing, and, later, her travels. By 8 November 1904, in the second letter within a week she writes of receiving a letter from him which she had no time to read before leaving for the theatre:

I might as well have taken it with me and dropped it unopened in the streets for all the comfort it brought me. No, that is ungrateful, I loved it really. But you see, dear Sir, I find myself reading between the lines — oh I know you, do I not? and therefore how can I help it? — and if I read right it is not on the road to happiness that you are travelling and misfortune is long enough, even though it only has one s. And since this aspect of the question is what chiefly concerns me (if I were to be frank with you I should say what alone concerns me, but you would think me too much a woman, and I choose to be neither man nor woman) why then what you say leaves me with a heavy heart, with a heart string tighter than concert pitch. And believe me how I feel the strain of the strings. So that which I long to counsel you I dare not, lest I should not ring quite true. There, that is enough, I can do nothing but accept the inevitable for you. But it takes more courage than anything one has to accept for oneself. I at any rate in a month I shall be gone and I may write my comments in the sea or on the sands and the wind will no doubt pay full attention to them, after a manner which is much the same as yours, I may say in passing. So please think well of me for another month and then you need think no more ...³²

The timing and tone of this passage, one of the most personal in the series, suggest that Swettenham had written to her at length of his matrimonial problems. That she enjoyed receiving his confidences and offering advice there can be no doubt. Nor can we doubt that at that moment she at the very least enjoyed a special place

in his affections. There follows a gap in the series of extant letters, for which the letters themselves give no reason. It seems probable that letters of a much more personal nature were removed and destroyed by Swettenham. By the time the correspondence resumed, she was in Jerusalem.³³ She related her travels between there and Konia in Turkey in a series of longish, cheerful letters.

That she continued to be concerned for his happiness is clear from a later letter, dated only 'Monday 13th.' After six pages of politics, she changed the subject abruptly:

So much for politics.

From you to me, my friend and from me to you there are no thanks. Search your mind — have I thanked you? I never shall. But I claim a right which is mine by — conquest to hear you are happy, tell me you are happy. I shall rejoice to hear. I do not ask you to tell me when you are sad for I hope that that is now over. And besides you would tell me.

In another letter, she continued the same theme:

My dear Excellency, I feel so pleased and happy that I must tell you before I go to bed, and thank you for being such a dear. But I won't thank you for your friendship because it was inevitable and must have happened, if we had not met in this incarnation, then in the next or the one after. And you need not thank me for mine since there is clearly no credit to either of us. But when I rejoice and go light heartedly about my life, I know that one of the reasons is that I am yours ever affectionately,

Gertrude³⁴

The correspondence continued, at least till 1909, punctuated by references in her diaries to meetings with him to discuss political and imperial questions, and, occasionally his appearance at the quayside to see her off on her travels.

This correspondence is of interest, for even though we only have Gertrude Bell's side of it, it reveals in a way not evident anywhere else, that Swettenham did have friends in at least one of whom he confided. Furthermore the very fact that he felt the need to confide in a very much younger, though doubtless understanding, woman suggests that he may even then have felt some remorse about the way in which he had treated his wife. Overall the evidence suggests that Swettenham could be charming with women, and usually was. In one of the blackest chapters of *The Chersonese with the Gilding Off*, Emily Innes spoke kindly of Swettenham: one of the very rare instances of a compliment to an official, and more remarkable since, according to Douglas, Swettenham as auditor had been very critical of James Innes' accounting.³⁵

It is less easy to ascertain Swettenham's political connections. Certainly there were casual meetings at country houses with senior politicians. He mentioned for instance, meeting Bonar Law at the Ullswater's house in August 1914, just before the outbreak of the First World War.³⁶ Yet curiously he makes no mention up to 1914 of F.E. Smith, later Lord Birkenhead, with whom later he was to form such close ties in the Official Press Bureau. Smith,³⁷ a successful, if flamboyant, London barrister, of Liverpool origin, was elected to Parliament in 1906, and rapidly established himself as a leading light in the Conservative opposition. They could well have met at the house of their mutual friend, Lady Cunard. Mention has been made of the embarrassing incident when Sir James Swettenham was forced to resign as Governor of Jamaica over his impolite letter to Admiral Davis. Evidence suggests that the Swettenham family's association with Smith began at this earlier period.

In August 1905 and again in 1906, F.E. Smith had taken a party of friends and relatives on a holiday trip to Jamaica. Smith was not the kind of man to hide a light under a bushel. It is evident that Sir James Swettenham and his wife were hospitable to the visitors. 'On September 27 (1905), their last night on the island, the party gave a ball in honour of the Governor, Sir Alexander Swettenham and his wife at the Constant Spring Hotel. There were seventy-five guests and the dancing continued until two o'clock in the morning.'³⁸ When Sir James Swettenham's resignation over his reaction to the American landing became public, a letter appeared in *The Times*, under the name of another Conservative MP, but possibly prompted by Smith.³⁹ The Conservative opposition, as is the way in these matters, did its best to embarrass the Colonial Secretary, Winston Churchill, and he stonewalled. Churchill and Smith were close personal friends and it is not surprising that Smith took no further part in the ritual harassment of an embarrassed government spokesman.

The coincidence of dates is striking: a letter to *The Times* from Frank Swettenham on 3 April and a parliamentary question by Smith on 10 April. It would be natural that when the news of this family disaster reached Frank Swettenham he should, in the absence of his brother in Jamaica, turn to his influential friend, the scourge of the Liberal Government, Smith to co-ordinate the campaign to clear the name of his brother and suggest that the government had over-reacted to the affair. But there are other possible connections. As a busy lawyer and politician Smith used his junior counsel and law pupils 'to devil for him politically.'⁴⁰ Smith may have turned to Swettenham for briefing on colonial matters.

Finally, for Swettenham's social life of this period, we have his own writings to draw on. The key volume was *Also and Perhaps*, published in 1912, and, to a lesser extent, his earlier *Unaddressed Letters*. Many of the sketches in these volumes are written in so arch and precious a style as to be scarcely readable today, and it is difficult to decide whether they are based on actual experience, or simply pretentious fantasizing by a lonely man. Some of the sketches are concerned with the relationship between a man (Swettenham hardly bothers to conceal himself in this role) and an unnamed lady or ladies, at different times. It is at least clear that on occasion Swettenham drew on actual experience in writing these episodes. Thus in 'Coincidences' there are passing references to the vicissitudes of the divorce courts.⁴¹

The first four episodes of *Also and Perhaps* are probably linked, in Swettenham's mind and perhaps in his experience. Two of them⁴² are set in the context of holidays in France and Italy. One may assume that Swettenham did take holidays of this kind even if one doubts the stories which he sets in this context. In 1928 he went on holiday abroad in August despite the crisis over Sydney's breakdown in Saigon. At a much earlier stage he described a leave from Malaya spent in Italy.⁴³

If he did go on these holidays, or some of them, in the company of a lady, what can one deduce about her status? She was obviously his social equal, and 'Also' in *Also and Perhaps* implies contacts at London social gatherings. It seems unlikely that she came from his aristocratic acquaintance. Yet she was not merely a mistress from a lower social class. It is more probable that if she was a real, not an imaginary figure, she was like Swettenham from the middle class with the background of a broken marriage: like him a lonely person for whom surreptitious trips to colourful foreign countries was a welcome distraction.

As the retirement years drew on, Swettenham's life became increasingly lonely. Estranged from his wife, he had no legitimate children. Nor is there any indication that he established any rapport with the children of his brothers and sisters, a curious situation for a man who prima facie by virtue of an exciting life would have had every possibility for establishing himself in the role of favourite uncle. His remaining official post must therefore have been doubly welcome to him. To this we now turn.

NOTES

1. See Chapters 44 and 46.
2. For the first three see Chapters 47 and 48.
3. *Footprints*, pp. 142-6 and 150-5.

4. Allen, 1972, op. cit.
5. See Chapter 16.
6. Sotheby, Wilkinson and Hodge Catalogue 1416 for May 1912.
7. *MM*, 15 April 1903.
8. *Footprints*, pp. 150-1.
9. *The Tatler*, 11 October 1911, in the library of The Royal Commonwealth Society, ref. Widow Y 3031 C. now in Cambridge University Library. See Plate .
10. *Footprints*, *passim*.
11. Ann Fremantle, *The Three-Cornered Heart*, New York, Viking, 1971, pp. 187-9.
12. *Footprints*, pp. 141-2 and *STD*, 4 December 1903.
13. Christie Manson and Woods Sale Catalogue, 22 November 1946.
14. *Footprints*, pp. 141-2.
15. It passed after the death of the second Lady Swettenham to the National Portrait Gallery in London, where it now hangs.
16. *Art Journal*, 1905, pp. 182-3.
17. *John Singer Sargent and the Edwardian Age* exhibition jointly organized by National Portrait Gallery and Leeds Art Galleries, 1979, from the catalogue entry by John Lomax and Richard Ormond.
18. *MM*, 27 and 28 September 1906. This portrait vanished in the 1960s.
19. *TOM* mentioned the Kuala Lumpur portrait on 3 March 1919. One of the charcoal drawings may be tentatively identified as that produced as a frontispiece to the Institute of Medical Research Commemorative Volume, 1900-1950. Detailed specifications of the National Portrait Gallery painting from the Lomax and Ormond Catalogue are as follows:
 Oil on canvas, 170.8 x 110.5 (67.25 x 47.5") Signed and dated (bottom right): John S. Sargent 1904.
 Provenance: Bequeathed to the National Portrait Gallery by the sitter, 1946, with a life interest to his widow, who died in 1971.
 Exhibition: London 1926 (322), repr. 'Souvenir', p. 47.
- Literature: Charteris, 1927, p. 271 (where confused with the Singapore portrait); Mckibbin, 1956, p.125; Mount, 1955, p. 438; Ormond, 1970, p. 253 (note to plate 94); NPG Report, 1967-75 (1976), plate 42.
20. Preface by Swettenham to Margaret Brooke, *My Life in Sarawak*, Methuen 1913.
21. *Footprints*, p. 145.
22. *Footprints*, p. 146.
23. See *Emerald & Nancy: Lady Cunard and her Daughter* by Daphne Fielding (Marchioness of Bath), 1968.
24. Fielding, op. cit., p. 22.
25. Fielding, op. cit., p. 31.
26. *Footprints*, p. 142.
27. Fielding, op. cit., p. 31.
28. Born the illegitimate daughter of an earlier Lord Sackville, she had acted with outstanding success as her father's hostess, while he was British Minister

- in Washington in the 1880s, then married her first cousin, the legitimate heir to the title. She had thus become the châtelaine of Knole.
29. I am grateful to Lord Sackville for extracts from the Knole visitors' book. For an account of Knole in this period, see *Lady Sackville* by Susan Mary Alsop, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1978.
30. *Footprints*, pp. 153-4.
31. *Footprints*, p. 154.
32. Bell to Swettenham, 8 November 1904. Stoodley Papers, p. 593.
33. Stoodley Papers, p. 601, 1 February [1905] 'Jerusalem'.
34. Stoodley Papers, pp. 602-50, '95 Sloane Street, Monday.'
35. Innes, 1885, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 190.
36. *Footprints*, p. 155.
37. F.E. Smith was the son of a successful Liverpool estate agent, who was a member of the Conservative oligarchy which dominated Liverpool in the late nineteenth century. He distinguished himself at Oxford and soon became a very successful member of the Bar, specializing in rating, liquor-licensing, divorce and some other fields. When Joseph Chamberlain left the Conservative Government in 1904 to promote his 'tariff reform' programme he came to Liverpool, where Smith attracted his attention. With Chamberlain's support, Smith was adopted as the Conservative candidate for the winnable seat at Walton (Liverpool). Despite the Liberal landslide of 1906 Smith was elected. In the debate on the Address he made what was acclaimed as the most brilliant maiden speech of his time, savaging the Liberals and deflating them in their moment of victory. He soon came to the fore of the depleted Conservative parliamentary opposition. In particular he was an influential figure in the 'parliament crisis' over the powers of the House of Lords from 1909 onwards.
38. *Life of F.E. Smith First Earl of Birkenhead* by his son (the second Earl), 1959, p. 115: p. 134 records the second visit in 1906 without mentioning the Swettenhams.
39. *The Times*, 11 April 1907.
40. *F.E. Smith: First Earl of Birkenhead* by John Campbell, p. 162.
41. *Also and Perhaps*, pp. 63-82.
42. *Also and Perhaps*: 'The Kaleidoscope of Life', pp. 11-22 and 'The Wind and the Whirlwind', pp. 35-52.
43. *Footprints*, p. 100.

The Official Press Bureau

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 provided Swettenham with a task which was in some respects the climax of his career: joint director with Sir Edward Cook of the Official Press Bureau. Insofar as the British government had a Chief Censor during the war, Swettenham and Cook shared that position. It carried him as far into the corridors of power as he ever got: he was on occasion dealing with senior ministers of the wartime government.

This was a far from easy job, and to understand the initial problems in its establishment, mention must be made of the role of the press in wars at the end of the nineteenth century. There had never previously been any form of press censorship or propaganda campaign, although adverse comment worldwide and at home during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) had shown the need for presenting news in a systematic fashion. It was said that a press cable passing through London gave to the Germans the vital information which enabled them to crush the French army at Sedan in 1870. There had been general discussion of the need for an organization such as the Bureau during the contingency planning which preceded the war, but nothing definite emerged from it.¹

As soon as war broke out on 4 August 1914 the British government used its ownership of the telegraph cable system to impose a control on all cables passing through the network. Yet this left unresolved the question of how the new censorship was to be operated. The decision to establish the Bureau was announced, in true British fashion, to the inner circle of politicians at a dinner of the 'Other Club' on 6 August 1914, and to Parliament by Churchill as First Lord on the following day. The 'Other Club' was a dining club established by Churchill (then Liberal Minister) and F.E. Smith, whom we have already met, as a means of bringing leaders of the two sides together informally at a time of bitter political controversy over such matters as Home Rule for Ireland and Lloyd George's Budget of 1909. Sir George Riddell, Deputy Chairman of the club and Chairman of the Newspaper Proprietors' Association

(NPA), as well as Chairman of The News of the World, attended the dinner on 6 August at which Kitchener was in the chair. Those present included Churchill, Smith, Bonar Law, Lord Stamfordham, the King's Private Secretary, and Lloyd George.²

Kitchener announced that there was to be a Press Censor who would be Smith. Riddell told Smith that the only person fit for the job was 'The Almighty, and even He would be criticised:' a prophetic judgement. On the following day Riddell saw Kitchener, who told him that Smith's job was to 'see that nothing dangerous goes into the newspapers ... we must make the English people understand that we are at war.' Smith and a handful of censors from the army and navy set up in a basement off Whitehall, and there was chaos. Swettenham said that as soon as he read of Smith's appointment, presumably in the newspapers of 8 August, he offered his services to Smith who accepted them.³ It is significant that Swettenham turned to Smith for a wartime job and that Smith took him on to a very small and personal staff. It emphasises that Smith and Swettenham already knew each other before they became associated at the Bureau in August 1914. His only other senior aide was his brother, Harold Smith, like himself a barrister and a Conservative MP.

Smith soon came to grief in this tricky post and left it to serve in France. He was succeeded by Sir Stanley (later Lord) Buckmaster, Solicitor-General in the Liberal government before the war. Swettenham stayed on but Buckmaster brought in as his aide Sir Edward Cook, a former editor of national newspapers of the Liberal persuasion. Although Cook had been out of Fleet Street, at any rate as an editor, for some years, he was an influential and respected figure among journalists. Swettenham and Cook were unpaid assistant directors to Buckmaster at this time. Buckmaster too found it difficult to avoid severe criticism from the press. Smith as Lord Birkenhead wrote later that 'in the critical years 1914-1915 he discharged, with incomplete success (as others had done before him) the unthankful duties of Director of the Press Bureau.'⁴

In a government reshuffle in May 1915 Buckmaster went to the House of Lords as Lord Chancellor. The press was all too willing to make collective protests. Editors of all the London papers except *The Times*, attended a meeting at 10 Downing Street on 1 April 1915, when complaints about the supply of information and censorship had reached crisis level. Riddell went as NPA representative and mentioned that those present included Asquith, as Prime Minister, McKenna (Home Office), Churchill (Admiralty), Buckmaster, Cook and Swettenham. It is likely that this *démarche* led to the decision to delegate the direction of the Bureau to Swettenham and Cook as joint directors. On 9 June 1915

Swettenham and Cook were appointed joint directors of the Bureau, responsible to the Home Secretary. They served in this capacity until the Bureau was closed down on 30 April 1919. They were equal in status and had no formal allocation of duties between them.

In the autumn of 1914 the Bureau moved to the Royal United Service Institution in Whitehall. It occupied this building as its offices until 1919. The original and central function of the Bureau was the censorship of all cables, passing in or out through the UK network. The work of censoring the cables was done by a staff of military and naval officers and a few civilians. In addition the Bureau had other less precise duties to perform. There was no formal censorship of the press, but regulations made under the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) restricted the freedom of the press in various, not very precise, respects. It was up to the press to avoid infringing the DORA regulations. If a newspaper so wished, it could submit its material to the Press Bureau for informal clearance, and possibly advice, before publication. What the Bureau had approved would not be the subject of a prosecution if it infringed the regulations. The third function of the Bureau was to issue to the press, including numerous correspondents of American and other foreign newspapers, the government's official announcements, in particular the daily communiqués from various military headquarters. At the start of the war the army refused to have correspondents accredited to its headquarters in the field. Later, the dispatches of correspondents at those headquarters were censored by military staff on the spot. There was an independent postal censorship, with which the Bureau maintained liaison, but this was not part of the Bureau's function.

Riddell summed up the central problem of the Bureau as being the fact that it was 'only a shield and recording angel for the naval and military censors.' He added that 'the Press were always fighting for more freedom, while ... mysterious and unknown personages acting through the medium of the Press Bureau ... were always insisting on the necessity for secrecy.'⁵ Apart from the basic objection to censorship in any form, the press complained of delays in the processing of their cables or material submitted for clearance. They often did not understand the importance of economic data. If for example a news item disclosed that a new petrol storage point had been established at a port, this might give the Germans a target for a Zeppelin raid.

The newspapers were in competition with each other for 'scoops' and their most bitter complaints were of unfairness. If paper A was careful to submit an item for clearance and advised not to publish it paper B might chance its luck and publish the same item, without being prosecuted. Cook and Swettenham frequently

had to point out that it was the Director of Public Prosecutions, not the Bureau which decided whether to prosecute. In January 1918, for example, *The Times* submitted an article on electricity supply for clearance and was advised not to publish. *The Times* staff pointed out that the same article had already appeared in a less widely circulated technical paper. It was an inherently unfair system. Swettenham replied that he entirely agreed so long as censorship of news (other than cables) was 'voluntary'. The newspapers strongly resisted proposals, which were not pressed, for a compulsory censorship of news items.

There were all sorts of incidental problems. There were complaints by the services over sensational newspaper placards in the streets. German agents used the 'agony' columns of papers such as *The Times* to slip through messages which conveyed a meaning not obvious from the text. The newspapers were asked to watch for apparently meaningless announcements and messages, and to check on the identity of the sender, but they objected to this. Soon after the outbreak of war the Stock Exchange reopened and cables flowed giving market information. This too could cover coded messages.

Not all the Bureau's files of correspondence with individual newspapers have been preserved but the complete files relating to *The Times* have been kept 'as a file illustrative of relations of the Bureau' with a leading national newspaper.⁶ Some editors were co-operative and understanding; others were hostile and unhelpful. In February 1918 the editor of the *Morning Post* wrote to complain of some excisions from a cable but added 'our relations have been so good, and the censorship under you and Cook so utterly impartial ...'⁷ Both joint directors valued and worked patiently and very hard to preserve the confidence and goodwill of the press.

The 'briefing' of the press, which was the other main function of the Bureau, also presented its problems. Although they had no allocated duties it fell to Cook as a journalist to conduct their extensive correspondence with the Foreign Office, at senior civil servant level. If it was deemed necessary to address the Foreign Secretary personally, both Cook and Swettenham signed the letter. They also attended high-level conferences together when possible. Swettenham seems to have dealt with much of the work of keeping the censorship system going. The press was most unwilling to receive background information by collective briefing, although it was the fairest method. They much preferred to persuade a minister to give them an 'exclusive' interview, bypassing the Bureau. The directors had to protest against these practices.

In addition to Swettenham and Cook, there was an Assistant Director, F.H. Mitchell, and a Secretary, R.G. Oliver, in mid-1915.

The latter two dealt with much of the routine correspondence. The cable censorship staff, which was the largest component, comprised four censors and about thirty assistant censors. They worked eight-hour shifts to keep the Bureau in operation twenty-four hours each day. It appears that the scrutiny of a cable was entrusted to an assistant censor, but he consulted the censor on duty in case of doubt.⁸

In May 1917 the Bureau censored 29,167 cables, one every one and a half minutes throughout the month. The average length of a cable was 123 words, often in condensed language, which might be English, French or Italian. The Foreign Office tried to persuade Swettenham to accept cables from Russian correspondents in Russian instead of French. He replied that if this concession was made the Foreign Office must supply the Bureau with censors competent to read Russian. The Foreign Office did not pursue its suggestion, and as a result much of the reporting from Russia at this time was undertaken by Arthur Ransome.⁹ In addition to some 50,000 proofs submitted voluntarily in 1916, the Bureau dealt with 140,000 photos, sometimes seven hundred in one day.¹⁰

The military and naval censors were officers on the establishment of their service. There was no problem with the army censors who accepted that they must comply with the directives of civilian directors, who were responsible to the Home Office for what they did. The naval censors however were a thorn in the flesh of the directors throughout the war. As they were on the Admiralty establishment, they took the line that their orders came only from the Admiralty. Rear-Admiral Sir Douglas Brownrigg wrote: 'The Directors of the Press Bureau tried on several occasions to sever the connection between the Navy Room in the Bureau ... and my office.'¹¹ Brownrigg had been appointed by the Admiralty, where he remained, to ensure that the Admiralty kept operational control.

The attitude of the naval censors derived from the days when Churchill was at the Admiralty. Swettenham wrote in 1917:

When Mr Churchill was First Lord there were squabbles almost daily between the Admiralty and the Press Bureau, and Mr Churchill threatened to remove the Press Censors. When he found that Naval censoring would be carried on without them, he changed his mind, but the Naval Censors, who are paid by the Admiralty, have always regarded the Admiralty as the only authority with whom they are concerned ... The Military, though paid by the War Office, accept the instructions of the directors without demur.¹²

This passage was written at a time when a serious blunder had been made by the naval censors which had been reported to the Admiralty but not to the directors of the Bureau. This had led

Swettenham to ask the senior naval censor, Captain Fortescue, for a list of the naval censor staff, 'their duty roster' and the allocation of work between them. Fortescue did not flatly refuse but referred Swettenham to an official list which did not give the information requested. This irritated Swettenham so much that he wrote a formal protest to the Permanent Secretary at the Admiralty. There is nothing to show that it improved the situation.

The other staff problem was the uncertain quality of the individual censors, whether from the armed services or civilian sources. Discipline was tightened. If an assistant censor made a mistake or other misdemeanour he was warned. If he did not improve he was dismissed. By these means, largely under Swettenham's control, the technical standard of performance was improved and kept at an acceptable level. In reviewing a book, which Cook later wrote, Headlam, who was a civilian censor from September 1915 to the end of the war, wrote:

The confusion arising from the first improvisation had been unspeakable. The resulting delays, the lack of uniformity in censoring, and some glaring instances of arbitrary dealing with Press property, aroused intense irritation and suspicion.¹³

Riddell summed up the work of the Press Bureau as follows:

One thing is certain; everyone did his best and what he thought was right. Sir Frank Swettenham and Sir Edward Cook worked like galley-slaves, and no two men were ever subject to more vituperation. There is no doubt that the war killed Cook — a gentle, kindly, sensitive creature — although I believe it is fair to say that he suffered more from his encounters with the military authorities than he did from the criticism he received at the hands of the press. Swettenham was made of tougher fibre — a genial, witty cynic, with a gift of mordant sayings — and still survives to tell the tale. Even if the system were wrong, Sir Frank and Sir Edward did their utmost to make it a success. It was unfortunate that a spirit of hostility developed between the Press and the Press Bureau. Under the circumstances it was perhaps inevitable. Constant criticism tends to harden the hearts of the criticised, and to compel them to be on the defensive.¹⁴

Coming from an outsider and an opponent this is high praise. Headlam offers the view of a subordinate, but an academic: 'Sir Frank Swettenham was an experienced administrator, a man of strong character and literary ability, Sir E. Cook a brilliant journalist, a man of affairs as well as a man of letters.' Nor did Swettenham forget old friends. H.C. Ridges, the Chinese Secretary in Selangor in 1891, when McKnight Young was becoming restless, had by now fallen on hard times, and Swettenham found

him a job at the Press Bureau.¹⁵ Similarly Swettenham was frequently approached to use his influence on behalf of individuals who were in some manner being ill-treated by the press. Arthur Asquith had occasion to do this, on behalf of B.G. Freyburg, hero of the Naval Division, to stop erroneous reports about Freyburg in the newspapers.¹⁶

The performance of the Bureau was outstanding. It made no major blunder, unlike the Admiralty, which stumbled badly in its handling of the announcement of the battle of Jutland. The sheer volume of letters which Swettenham and Cook wrote, to explain, to correct, to mollify, is truly impressive. For two men in their sixties their output was astounding. Nor did his job prevent Swettenham from the occasional appearance on the social scene. In February 1916 he took time off to attend the funeral of Sir Cecil Smith, his former colleague and boss in Singapore, even though acrimony in later years over the origins of Federation had driven them apart.¹⁷

One man remained critical of Swettenham's work. This was the young Arthur Ransome, who was travelling in Russia as a journalist in 1916-17. He was a perceptive observer and reporter of the tumultuous events in Russia at the time. Ransome was in close touch with William Peters, an economist on a Carnegie scholarship working in the Russian ministry of trade and industry. They were aware of developments which could lead to revolution. He had spoken to the Foreign Office about this on a visit to UK at the end of 1916. The implications were serious, for a revolution would almost certainly lead to Russia's withdrawal from the First World War. Unfortunately, Swettenham and his censors saw to it that no reports about the desperate military and political conditions in Russia reached the British press. It was thus much easier for the officials in Whitehall to ignore the signs of impending danger. This set Britain on a course of ignorance and complacency where Russia was concerned.¹⁸

The last aspect of Swettenham's work at the Press Bureau which deserves mention is his harmonious relationship with Cook, at a time when they must both have been under strain. Cook was not an easy man to get on these terms with. Mills, his biographer, who had worked under him on a newspaper, wrote:

Many who came into superficial contact with Cook complained of a lack of warmth and sympathy. He was likened to a glacier or an iceberg exhaling chilliness into the surrounding air. I confess to some very slight experience of this sort in the early days of my association with Cook. But my prevailing impression of Cook is one of genial summer sunshine rather than winter glaciation ... a sunny happy nature (though he had few friends).¹⁹

Cook died in August 1918. As Riddell says he was probably exhausted by his traumatic experiences. As soon as he was free of the burden of running the Bureau he had applied himself to writing an account of its work²⁰ which was a completed but unpublished manuscript at his death. Swettenham helped Cook's brother prepare the book for publication. When Mills was writing his biography of Cook, Swettenham wrote to him as follows:

I feel his loss keenly for a wiser, kinder, truer gentleman it would be hard to find, and I never met another man with whom I would have shared the directorship of the Press Bureau. With him it was to halve the troubles and double the pleasures of that strange post ... It did not need five years of the closest association to show me that he was one of the best, the kindest and the wisest of men. I don't think we were any of us lazily inclined, but he always tried to do more than his share of the work, and often succeeded.²¹

It is a relationship which shows up another side of Swettenham, so often revealed as hard, cold and selfish, as well as telling us something about Cook. It was no doubt in view of Swettenham's distinguished contribution to the workings of the Bureau that he was, in August 1917 made a Companion of Honour, a new category of award established in that year. Swettenham was among the first recipients. Although initially it lacked the standing which it now enjoys, there can be no doubt that in Swettenham's case he was a worthy recipient, in company with a number of others who had performed meritorious work during the First World War.²²

NOTES

1. Report on the origin and work of the Bureau prepared in 1915: C7680 of 1915, PRO Kew, and another note on its history, HO 139/17.
2. Sir George Riddell, 1933, *Lord Riddell's War Diary 1914-1918*, p. 9.
3. *Footprints*, p. 155.
4. Lord Birkenhead, *Contemporary Personalities*, p. 153.
5. Riddell, *op. cit.*, pp. 16 and 24.
6. PRO Kew, HO 139/5.
7. PRO Kew, HO 139/12.
8. PRO Kew, HO 139/8.
9. See pp. 666, 668 below.
10. *TOM*, 18 September 1917, reporting an interview given by Swettenham to Mr Edward Marshall, an American publicist, on the work of the Bureau.
11. Rear-Admiral Sir Douglas Brownrigg, *The Indiscretions of a Naval Censor*, p. 8.
12. PRO Kew, HO 139/11.
13. Headlam's review in the *Quarterly Review*, July 1920 of Sir E. Cook's *The Press in Wartime*, published posthumously, Macmillan, 1920.
14. Riddell, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

15. Robson, 1934, op. cit., Chapters 2 and 31 above.
16. Lady Cynthia Asquith, *Diaries, 1915-1918*, London, 1968.
17. *TOM*, 18 March 1916. See also Chapter 48.
18. H. Brogan, 1985, *The Life of Arthur Ransome*, pp. 113-4, where he refers to 'a notably stupid ex-colonial official called Swettenham.' Ransome later made his name as the author of children's books.
19. J. Saxon Mills, *Sir Edward Cook K.B.E: A Biography*. Constable & Co. London, 1921.
20. Cook, 1920, op. cit.
21. Mills, 1921, op. cit., pp. 285-6.
22. The article in DNB and his obituary in *The Times*, 13 June 1946 incorrectly recorded this award as being given in 1919.

The Rubber Industry and Unsolicited Advice

We touched in an earlier chapter on Swettenham's role in Perak and Selangor in encouraging European agricultural enterprises, chiefly coffee cultivation.¹ However Swettenham's attitude to rubber in the early years of the industry was dismissive, if not derisory. This is ironical, for the rubber industry was in the years of his retirement to be his abiding interest, not to mention his main source of income after his government pension.

Rubber seeds had first arrived in the Straits Settlements, from Brazil via Kew Gardens in the 1870s. From the Singapore Botanical Gardens in the late 1870s and early 1880s small supplies of seeds were sent to the Residents in Selangor and Perak. As noted, those sent to Selangor were acknowledged: but no more was heard of them.² Martin Lister had asked for rubber seeds for his Negri Sembilan estate in 1881, and later joined T. Heslop Hill in planting a small area of rubber on Weld Hill in Selangor, now part of Kuala Lumpur. Yet there was little further attempt to promote the industry.³ The main reasons for this lack of interest were twofold: rubber trees took at least five years from planting till latex could be harvested, and, until H.N. Ridley set to work in Singapore to prove otherwise, collection of latex was only possible on a restricted basis by haphazard cutting of the trunks. This limited not only yields, but the life of the trees. However those which went to Perak were planted out by Sir Hugh Low, unlike Swettenham, a botanist in the 'Government Gardens' at Kuala Kangsar which he carefully cherished.⁴

Swettenham claimed to have been staying with Low shortly after the first seedlings arrived in Perak, and recollected being taken out by Low after dinner to view them, and other latex-bearing trees planted on a trial basis in the Residency garden at Kuala Kangsar. He stressed his role in the establishment of the industry as early as 1902: 'In 1884 I collected seeds from one of the half dozen trees planted by Sir Hugh Low. I planted them at Kuala Kangsar in

Perak, and the result is a plantation of 300 trees which have already supplied the neighbourhood with hundreds of thousands of seeds.⁵ The area thus planted extended from the Christian Cemetery, containing graves of those killed in the Perak War, to the old District Office.

The claim was repeated years later.⁶ Swettenham was doubtless at pains to cover up a less illustrious episode in his career, for in the early years, his hostility to rubber, and to its chief advocate, H.N. Ridley, of the Singapore Botanic Gardens, was proverbial. Ridley arrived in Singapore in 1888, convinced of the future for rubber. During the 1890s he showed how substantial increases in yield could be obtained, without long term detriment to the trees, by the regular and systematic tapping which is adopted nowadays. He recorded in 1911:

He [Swettenham] did not believe in the value of the cultivation till he left Singapore Previously when at length I had worried the planters into trying this cultivation, a Dyak was told to ascend to the top of one of the old trees of Sir Hugh Low's date and get some rubber. The Dyak did so, and came back and said there was none. Soon after, down came over one hundred of the finest trees in the Peninsula. Mr R. Derry then attacked the rest of the trees and took out a quantity of first class rubber and sold it in London at a good price, and stopped the reaction against rubber which set in immediately the story was published that an official had proved the Para tree worthless.⁷

Swettenham had previously been at pains to prevent Ridley's appointment as Forest Officer in Perak in early 1895, when he intervened to ensure that a man more congenial to him should be appointed to the post.⁸ Ridley was told off by Swettenham for paying too much attention to 'exotics.' Ridley himself later recorded that 'It was due to Sir Frank that Para rubber was not planted in abundance ten years earlier than it was.'⁹ That Swettenham's role in the early years of the industry was, to say the least, not outstanding may also be inferred from another source. Oliver Marks, who had been recruited by Swettenham, writing in 1927 on the early years of the industry, when Swettenham was still very active, makes no mention of Swettenham's name.¹⁰

In the late 1890s, the coffee industry was in decline, hit both by a disastrous drop in prices, and by pests and diseases, which all but annihilated it as an estate crop. Small owner-planters, then in the majority, faced extremely hard times. It was then that rubber came to the rescue, for thanks chiefly to Ridley, sufficient was by then known of its cultivation to make it a worthwhile estate crop. In

addition the advent of the motor car in the West ensured a growing market for the end product.

It was not until 1898 that Swettenham officially mentioned the planting of rubber as an alternative.¹¹ At about the same time, land was being made available for rubber planters coming into the country from Ceylon, at a premium of 10 cents per acre in Perak.¹² Swettenham as Resident-General had by now moderated his hostility. Yet he was also of the view that the planters by failing to help with the construction of roads, even when they themselves were the main beneficiaries, were their own worst enemies.¹³ By 1899, in a report submitted to Mitchell, Swettenham went so far as to confirm that rubber had been widely planted.¹⁴ Significantly at this time the rubber planters became a force in state matters, and managed to obtain for themselves representation on the Selangor State Council.¹⁵ Yet it was not until 1903 that Swettenham, by now High Commissioner, could bring himself to more than a lukewarm mention of the developments in the rubber industry: 'The prospects for rubber are so good that, unless some unforeseen disaster happens, the future is full of promise for those who have taken up this cultivation.'¹⁶

If Swettenham in his last eight years in Malaya and Singapore was slow to recognize the value of rubber, he was certainly fully aware of the importance of an adequate labour supply. Problems over labour form a constant refrain to his annual reports of the period.¹⁷ The tone of his comments was peevish. After noting that the Chinese labour supply for the mines reacted to conditions in China, as well as to the price of tin in Malaya, he remarked, 'It is certainly rather curious that while the Chinese have come in hundreds of thousands, without any special protective legislation, the poor of British India seem to prefer starvation at home.'¹⁸ The position improved in 1900.¹⁹ Yet by 1901, Swettenham complained bitterly that despite exorbitant expense on the part of the Straits government, the position was appalling: 'The Government here has done so much with such indifferent success that I do not see how any improvement can be expected unless the Government of India will render some active assistance.'²⁰

It was also to his credit that he realized the importance of studying the tropical diseases, chiefly beri-beri and malaria, which at that time were decimating the work-forces on the mines and estates in the country. It was thus that he became involved during his last years before retirement, both as Resident-General and High Commissioner, in the establishment of what became known as the Institute of Medical Research. Initially it was known as the Pathological Institute.

While he was Resident, Perak, in the early 1890s there had been talk of a medical congress in Malaya, together no doubt with the possibility of some form of research institute. The issue was again raised in an anonymous letter to the press in 1897.²¹ The first official mention came in late 1898, when money was being raised for what was to become the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. The Federated Malay States and the Straits Settlements were urged to contribute. The former, headed by Swettenham, preferred the idea of a school of tropical medicine in Kuala Lumpur. This was endorsed by a medical conference held in Kuala Lumpur between 1 and 3 December 1898. Swettenham, conscious of the acute malaria problem, would have preferred a Malaria Commission. But even that would have to compete for funds with the railways. Swettenham also made the point that a research institution based in Kuala Lumpur would be far better able to study tropical diseases than one in London. Finally, however, the Legislative Council agreed to support the London institution: the FMS contribution was fixed at \$5,000.²²

The episode stimulated interest in the Peninsula, for later that year Swettenham proposed the establishment of an institute in Kuala Lumpur to deal with beri-beri and malaria. Sir Michael Foster and Dr Manson who advised the Colonial Office in London on medical matters were to be consulted, and Swettenham estimated that the cost, excluding the building, would not exceed \$25,000 over three years. He proposed further that several Eurasian or Chinese youths be employed to assist the pathologist. They might, he added, be chosen from local youths who were sent to be trained as apothecaries in Madras.²³ Meantime the *Malay Mail* publicly announced the establishment of the Pathological Institute at the instigation of Swettenham. Two months later, amidst further signs of fraternal rivalry and at the instigation of Swettenham's elder brother James, it carried a review from the *British Medical Journal* which clearly indicated that Sir James had had a major hand in the establishment.²⁴

Affairs proceeded smoothly, with Dr Hamilton Wright being appointed to head the institute. Meantime Dr Malcolm Watson was sent to London for training: training which was to stand him in good stead, for he it was who subsequently worked out the malarial cycle transmitted through the *Anopheles* mosquito.²⁵ Swettenham's role in this was, uncharacteristically, in the background, but supportive. Thus in 1900, when he was on leave, Swettenham wrote direct to the Colonial Office endorsing an appeal from Wright for equipment.²⁶

The Institute was reported as complete in mid-1901, and shortly afterwards, Wright was promoted to be Director.²⁷ Swettenham and Treacher made an official visit on 12 September

1901.²⁸ Back in London in 1904, Swettenham continued to take an interest in medical matters, though not always an enlightened one. At a lecture by Ronald Ross on malaria which he attended at the Colonial Institute in early 1904, Swettenham ridiculed the precautions of screening bedrooms against mosquitoes, and boasted he had never taken any of the recommended precautions. At a subsequent meeting not long after, Manson, by now Sir Patrick, described Swettenham as an amiable cynic, whose deeds were wiser than his words.²⁹ Despite the activities of the Institute for Medical Research, as it became known, the loss of life from malaria on rubber estates being opened in the Klang Valley including those owned by the Highlands Group, of which Swettenham was Chairman, was appallingly high. In certain of the years up to 1910, mortality exceeded 25 per cent per year.³⁰ The Institute of Medical Research, in celebrating its fiftieth anniversary with a volume of essays on its work, dedicated the book to Swettenham, 'who saw the need and fostered the means for medical research in Malaya,' and used a pencil drawing of him as a frontispiece.³¹

The collapse of the coffee industry, combined with the increasing market for rubber in the West produced a surge in the development of the rubber industry during the first decade of the twentieth century. The number of rubber companies floated annually with sterling capital rose from eleven in 1905 to a peak of seventy-nine in 1911.³² How did Swettenham come to be involved in the twelve or so companies on the boards of which he sat, in almost all cases as chairman? In the first decade of the century, his still recent practical experience in the Straits government gave him unrivalled access to businessmen operating in the area, not to mention his local contacts established during thirty years of service. The first company with which Swettenham became associated after his retirement appears to have been the Anglo-Malay Rubber Co. Ltd.³³

Anglo-Malay was a company within the Harrisons & Crosfield secretariat. Arthur Lampard, one of the more energetic of the Harrisons partners had in early 1903 helped to launch the first of many public companies on the London Stock Market, with the declared object of growing and producing plantation rubber, on Pataling Estate in Selangor, previously owned by W.S. Bennett. The task of flotation had been hard at first, but by 1905 it would have been evident that the initial cautious forecasts would be well exceeded. Emboldened by this success, Lampard and the other partners in Harrisons & Crosfield decided it was desirable to bring together a number of small privately owned estates to create a larger company. Swettenham, who, it appears, had no personal interest in the formation of the company, was approached to become chairman, a post which he held for some forty years.³⁴ Evidently a suitable

figurehead was required to head this substantially larger flotation, which involved eight estates, covering 6,330 acres, of which 1,713 were planted, though not all with rubber. The launch was a great success, the shares going to a substantial premium immediately after issue. It seems not unreasonable to suppose that this first and successful involvement with Harrisons & Crosfield made Swettenham confide in Lampard details of his own agricultural problem. This of course was the concession of 25,000 acres for agriculture in Johore, granted by the Sultan, under circumstances which have been considered earlier.³⁵

The company, the Rubber Estates of Johore Ltd., which was floated in February 1906 'merits notice because it called for the subscription of £115,000 in £1 shares at par, payable 2/6d per share on application, 2/6d per share on allotment and the balance in calls as and when required to take up and start the planting of rubber on a grant of 25,000 acres of virgin jungle to be selected from any unoccupied ground in Johore in five blocks of 5,000 acres each.'³⁶ As we have seen, Durand of the Johore Advisory Board and Lampard were among the members of the board of directors, with Swettenham as chairman. The three blocks chosen were two of 10,000 acres each near the Gemas and Labis railway stations, and one of 5,000 acres which had the Liang Liang railway station on it. To add to the fury of the Colonial Office, the Sultan undertook not to grant land to anyone else on the same favourable terms during the ensuing seven years, and was entitled to one-fifth of the £10,000 worth of £1 shares issued in consideration for the land. By 1913 the company was paying dividends. However it did not deliver the financial bonanza which Swettenham had expected, for the costs of development were far higher than anticipated. Over the years the undeveloped land was sold off to finance later development. The records indicate that Swettenham gradually reduced his own shareholding to nil by 1935.³⁷ It is possible that the funds were required to meet the demands of his wife.

Anderson had his revenge on Swettenham for the latter's financial misbehaviour in Johore, for when the first FMS Annual dinner took place in London in June 1906, Anderson, with Treacher on one side and Swettenham on the other, delivered a speech in which he castigated company promoters.³⁸ By the end of August 1906, the involvement of Swettenham and Treacher in particular, in rubber company flotations, was becoming increasingly unacceptable. The local press quoted an article from the *Allahabad Pioneer* attacking a former Governor of Ceylon who had done the same. There should be regulations to prevent retiring Governors from commercial involvement in enterprises in territories where they had served. Swettenham was not mentioned, but the moral was clear.³⁹

The year 1906 must have been a busy one for Swettenham, for it saw the launching under his chairmanship of another company, Highlands & Lowlands Para Rubber Co. Ltd. Some years before, William Wellington (Tim) Bailey, like many other planters, had left Ceylon with the collapse of the coffee industry there. Since his arrival in Selangor he had worked partly as a contractor, partly as a speculator, applying frequently for blocks of land from the government. He must have been an old acquaintance of Swettenham. By 1906 he owned, in partnership with Sir George Murray, Lowlands Estate, one of the only two estates close to Klang. The other property was Batu Unjor Estate, adjacent to Lowlands, and managed by E.V. Carey on behalf of its owner, Loke Yew. Anderson, when making his first visit to Klang, joined the Sultan in a tour of Lowlands Estate, which he described as one of the largest coffee and rubber estates in Selangor.⁴⁰

When the price of coffee fell, Bailey's agents, the firm of Barlows in Singapore, under the advice of Allinson, their locally resident partner and manager, advised him to plant up with rubber. Barlows supplied Bailey with rice for his labourers, and cash advances. The example of successful flotations of rubber companies by Harrisons in London put into the minds of Bailey and Carey the idea of amalgamating their two estates, and adding in a large block of jungle granted to Bailey by the Selangor government, for planting with rubber. Allinson was a leading figure in Singapore at the turn of the century, and a friend of Swettenham. It was natural that he should recommend to his colleagues in London the choice of Swettenham as chairman. Swettenham agreed, on condition that Barlows, hitherto a merchanting business operating in Singapore, should open an agency office in Kuala Lumpur. His partners on the board were Dick Denman, brother-in-law of J.E. Barlow, the senior partner of Thomas Barlow and Brother in London, and Bailey who provided the agricultural advice.⁴¹

The papers of the time reported on 'Mr Bailey's Summer Sale,' remarking that the company was over-capitalized.⁴² The paper remarked sourly, 'a bolder attempt to take advantage of the plantation rubber boom it has seldom been our lot to read.'⁴³ Denman's involvement arose because J.E. Barlow, an aspiring Liberal politician, did not wish his name to be associated with such disreputable activities as the flotation of rubber companies. On the other hand, he needed a member of the family to keep a watching brief on the company in respect of family funds invested. Swettenham's reputation in financial matters was evidently known at the time.⁴⁴ Other rubber companies followed; but most of these were smaller companies associated with Harrisons & Crosfield.

By 1907 the number of London-based rubber companies had grown to such an extent that it was decided to form the Rubber Growers' Association to represent their interests. Swettenham, with his old friend Sir William Treacher, became members of the Malayan-Section committee at the end of that year.⁴⁵ Swettenham eventually became chairman of the RGA in 1923.⁴⁶ The activities of the companies themselves throw little light on Swettenham. His position as a director however strengthened his hand in the submission of frequently unsolicited advice to the Colonial Office on Malayan affairs.

Until the enormity of his transactions in Johore became evident, Swettenham was consulted frequently by the Colonial Office in 1904 on routine matters, as well as Johore railway issues.⁴⁷ There was a predictable chill in 1905 when the Johore transaction became known. In 1906 he wrote in on behalf of G.T. Hare, recently deceased and a former Protector of Chinese in FMS, requesting that Hare's pension be continued for the benefit of his Chinese widow. Swettenham was sympathetic, but the Colonial Office was not, responding with a series of disagreeably racial slurs.⁴⁸

During the next three years, he was preoccupied with Sydney's problems, and Mauritius, for it was not till 1910 that he reappeared in the Colonial Office files, objecting to the abolition of the post of Resident-General.⁴⁹ He proposed that his old friend Clifford, a fluent Malay speaker, should succeed Taylor who did not speak Malay as Resident-General. The question was referred to Sir John Anderson, the Governor, who had little time for the idea, for Swettenham, or for Clifford, whom he regarded as self-seeking. The Colonial Office temporized with Swettenham in response to his first letter, but undertook to allow him to comment before a decision was taken. In due course Anderson, from Singapore, proposed the abolition of the post of Resident-General, and its replacement with the post of Chief Secretary.⁵⁰ On this proposal Swettenham commented at some length. Colonial Office minutes indicated that they felt Swettenham was out of touch with Malaya, and on receipt of his comments on the abolition of the post of Resident-General, noted that his comments were 'lacking ... usual clearness and point.'

In 1911 an old friend emerged from the shadows, for a last bow. This was Raja Mahmood, by now retired, in an odour of sanctity in Mecca. This had occurred comparatively recently, for in 1908 he had written to Swettenham while still in Malaya, with a request for a twelve-bore gun and cartridges, the cost to be repaid to Oliver Marks at \$25 per month. He added that he was old, poor and out of favour, dividing his time between Malacca and Klang.⁵¹ He had been given a Selangor pension, with Swettenham's support in

1896, and another from Perak in 1899.⁵² In 1911, he addressed a bitter letter in Malay to the Colonial Office, from Mecca, suggesting that his pension be continued to his children. For this he offered to trade in the sword which had been presented to him in recognition of his services in the Perak War.⁵³ A further letter was enclosed to Swettenham, enlisting his assistance in this appeal. Swettenham recommended his old friend for consideration. The Colonial Office, lacking Swettenham's long and intimate knowledge of the case, were somewhat puzzled, not least by the pages of Jawi script in which Raja Mahmood outlined his case in some detail. No-one in the Colonial Office could read it, so they turned to Swettenham for advice. A month later, Swettenham replied from his London residence, explaining airily that he had been very busy, and away from London. Hence he had had no time to translate 'these interesting observations.' The point was thus made that he understood Jawi, while the Colonial Office did not. He concluded loftily: 'His services were very great and have never been properly recognized..... he encloses a detailed account of [his] services and I can say the account is correct.' With this he returned the whole correspondence to the Colonial Office.⁵⁴

It is possible that apart from scoring points off the Colonial Office over his knowledge of Jawi, Swettenham was still not anxious, over thirty-five years after the event to facilitate further consideration of his role in the aftermath of the Perak War. Raja Mahmood had outlined this subject in some detail in the Jawi memorandum.⁵⁵ Baffled, the Colonial Office sent the papers to Singapore, and Sir Arthur Young, the Governor, returned them, duly translated in February 1912. The Colonial Office was cynical, and probably correct in their assessment: 'After all he is not badly paid for a few days fighting, which he probably enjoyed heartily.' Sir Arthur Young confirmed that Raja Mahmood's pension would be continued to his widow and children after his death, but declined to increase it.⁵⁶

In 1912 and 1913 Swettenham crossed swords briefly with C.L. Brockman, then Chief Secretary of the Federated Malay States. Swettenham, apparently in his chairman's speech at the Annual General Meeting of Seaport (Selangor) Rubber Estate Ltd. commented on recent changes in FMS land policy. This arose from the original Seaport prospectus valuing unplanted land at £7 per acre, since it was free of quit rent. Quit rent was of course a sensitive issue for Swettenham after his passage of arms with W.E. Maxwell in the 1890s.⁵⁷ He contrasted the capitalized value of lands with and without quit rent, concluding that if the rent was capitalized at 4 per cent, at an equivalent of 9s 4d per acre, this amounted to a capital impost of £11-13-0d per acre.

Brockman argued strongly that this basis of capitalizing quit rent was unsound, and that the imposition of quit rent was beneficial as an inducement to the rapid planting of land. He was concerned that Swettenham's remarks had had an adverse effect on opinion in the City of London: '... misrepresentations such as the above and others of a malicious nature may have driven away a certain amount of capital from the country,' he remarked.⁵⁸ It is interesting to note Brockman's use of the words 'of a malicious nature' in his criticism, while being careful to suggest that he was not here referring to Swettenham's remarks. The United Planting Association of FMS had been vociferous in its criticism.⁵⁹

During the First World War, Swettenham was effectively precluded from his job at the Press Bureau from dabbling in Straits Settlements affairs. Yet it did not prevent him finding time to help edit a *Times* supplement on the rubber industry.⁶⁰ This was done at a time when he was working in his late sixties, fourteen or sixteen hours a day, with enormous efficiency. However in 1918 the Foreign Office consulted him on the translation of certain vernacular press reports from what was then the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). Swettenham was most disparaging about the inaccuracy of the Dutch translation from Jawi of Malay-Indonesian words.⁶¹

There had been some earlier correspondence on Muslim objections to a portrait of King George V included in a proclamation published in the Middle East. Swettenham had said that 'no strict Muhammedan would have a portrait in his house.' However General Ridout, the Indian Army officer who was GOC Singapore, had said that his Indian troops would not object. Swettenham reiterated his previous advice though he conceded that 'it would of course be different with those who associated much with non-Muhammedans.'

In early 1919, Walter McKnight Young, who had caused so much trouble in the 1890s, died of apoplexy.⁶² Swettenham must have noted the matter with satisfaction. Back in London there were celebrations over the end of the First World War. At the FMS Victory Dinner attended by the Prince of Wales on 2 June 1919, Swettenham proposed the toast to 'The Fighting Forces.'⁶³ Later in the year, he chaired the annual dinner of the Straits Settlements Association, with Sir Lawrence Guillemard present immediately before his departure to take up the post of Governor in Singapore. In his speech there was more than a hint of the old man, sidelined by recent events: 'It is fifteen years since I left the East, and no-one knows better than I do that when the mantle of office falls from your shoulders, it is supposed to carry with it all knowledge of current events.'⁶⁴

Swettenham was doubtless gratified by the announcement later in the year that one C.L. Hartwell had been commissioned to do a bust of him, to be erected in Kuala Lumpur.⁶⁵ The work was completed by the end of the year, and the statue erected at the junction of Jalan Raya and Holland Road, next to what is now the old City Hall, in the town centre. The official unveiling took place on 20 January 1921, at a ceremony attended by Guillemard, the Governor, who was remarkably silent, Oliver Marks, by now Resident, Selangor, and Sir Ernest Birch, who returned on the battleship *Malaya*, financed by the sultans as a contribution to the British war effort. In the course of the speeches, chiefly by Marks and Birch, it emerged that the statue was the idea of Birch himself, and the planter, E.V. Carey, who had died a short time before. Both were staunch admirers of Swettenham, and Birch considered that he had had a closer association with Swettenham in the course of his career than anyone then living.⁶⁶

Between 1910 and 1922 the area of estate-owned rubber in Malaya had more than trebled, while that of smallholders had increased sevenfold.⁶⁷ The record rubber prices of 1910 (averaging eight shillings and nine pence per pound) slumped to an average of less than 9-1/2 pence per pound in 1922. The Malayan estate producers initially implemented a voluntary restriction scheme to curtail production. This was later made compulsory under the Stevenson scheme. Swettenham was consulted before the scheme was established: Sir C.L. Brockman, former Chief Secretary, raised the question in a meeting with him on 7 March 1921.⁶⁸ There had been misrepresentations by planting interests in the East, who had persuaded the RGA to support government intervention. Swettenham maintained that the RGA was deceived over the scheme by pressure from Malaya and forced to support restriction, since it was essential, if the government in Whitehall was to act, that rubber interests in Malaya and London were seen to be unanimous.⁶⁹

The following month the RGA was officially asked to submit its views to the Colonial Office. In its submission, it urged a 50 per cent compulsory restriction of crops. A delegation, including Swettenham, visited the Colonial Office on 1 April 1921 to press these arguments.⁷⁰ Three days later Swettenham wrote privately to the Colonial Office urging that compulsory restriction be tried first for twelve months only.⁷¹

Swettenham was also involved in the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924-5, as chairman of the Far Eastern Group.⁷² It seems probable that he got this post in part at least through his prominent involvement with the RGA. Meantime as a leading voice in the RGA, he proved a forceful, witty and convincing publicist, and one ahead of his time in recommending

that estate companies expand downstream. The chilly England of his retirement had after all an enormous need for hot water bottles and rubber overshoes.⁷³

After Swettenham's retirement in 1904, his successors as Resident-General, and, from 1912, as Chief Secretary, had furthered the Federal cause, by establishing new federal organs of government. There was increasingly a feeling, particularly amongst the old guard that the enlarged organs of Federal Government were coming between the Malay Rulers and their British Advisers.⁷⁴

By the time Sir Lawrence Guillemard became Governor in 1920, there was a financial recession. Yet he was not slow to recommend grandiose spending plans. The Straits Settlements Association, the pressure group formed in London in 1868 to act for commercial interests in UK concerned with the Straits, now underwent a metamorphosis. It became the Association of British Malaya, in which Swettenham was to play an active part. Its role was 'To form a powerful body of opinion on all subjects of public interest in British Malaya ... To support the best ideals and traditions of British Administration both in the Straits Settlements and in the Malay States.'⁷⁵ Swettenham was the first president of the new association from 4 May 1920 to 20 October 1921, and again sat on the committee in 1925-6. He served for a second term as President, in 1928-9.⁷⁶ It may be assumed that he was an active mover behind the scenes throughout this period.

At the same time the question of trying to bring into the Federation those Malay states which had remained outside was also raised. It was pointed out that the rulers of such states were unlikely to agree voluntarily to Federation: the Ruler of an Unfederated state now had more voice in the administration of his state than the ruler of a Federated state. To counteract the undesirable effects of this policy, a move was made to decentralize, loosening the Federal administration and devolving powers to the states. It was also proposed to modernize the State Councils so that they and the rulers could be encouraged to take a greater interest in the administration of their respective states. It was a subject in which Swettenham was to play a leading role.

George Maxwell, son of Swettenham's rival, W.E. Maxwell was in London on leave in 1920, just after Guillemard had taken over as Governor. Unlike his father, he seems to have got on well with Swettenham. With Swettenham's assistance and that of others, he succeeded in persuading the Colonial Office that he should be appointed to the post of Chief Secretary, FMS, in preference to F.S. James, Guillemard's nominee.⁷⁷ He achieved this on the basis of setting forward a pan-Malayan policy, to bring the other states into the Federation.

At the same time, Guillemard's financial extravagance aroused the wrath of Swettenham and the Association of British Malaya.⁷⁸ Plans to restore the title and position of Resident-General, supported by George Maxwell, were enthusiastically taken up by the association. It was perfectly clear from the arguments produced by the association, that it was acting as a mouthpiece for Swettenham.⁷⁹ In October 1925, in the midst of this agitation, Guillemard felt obliged to consult Swettenham and Birch. While he managed to convince Birch, who was persuaded to beg the association not to fight for the restoration of the title of Resident-General, he had no such success with Swettenham, who was adamant that Guillemard's policy was impracticable.⁸⁰ This was reflected in official correspondence, when Swettenham in November 1925 wrote to the Colonial Office in his private capacity with a similar suggestion. In a typed memorandum, he set out his views of the administration of Malaya since Federation. In it he noted that Anderson in 1910 had replaced the Resident-General with a Chief Secretary, a move which he justified to the Federal Council on the grounds that the Resident-General had too much power in his hands. The Residents and rulers he claimed in this memo that the Resident-General 'was to issue no instructions to any government officer except through the Resident of the State where that officer was employed.' He had conveniently forgotten the true state of affairs when he was Resident-General. Needless to add, he urged a return to the old system.⁸¹

While the Colonial Office recognized Swettenham as the leading authority, they rejected his views as old-fashioned. Eleven years later, Gent at the Colonial Office concluded a memorandum on the same subject with these words: 'The Federal System, as developed by Sir Frank Swettenham and his successors was successful in killing the State Councils. It is our task to rebuild them on modern lines.'⁸²

At some stage around this time, quite possibly towards the end of 1924, or early in 1925, Swettenham undertook a visit to North Africa. This was to be the subject for another book, *Arabella in Africa*. In the first chapter of the book he indicated that his health was in a poor state, and he found London oppressive. There could have been trouble with Lady Swettenham, who had the previous year revisited Malaya.⁸³ Certainly he had been swindled by fur dealers, whom he took to court unsuccessfully. The account of the proceedings made him look ridiculous.⁸⁴ All in all, he had good reason to flee the London winter, accompanied by a younger lady friend.⁸⁵ His account of the trip does however indicate that by this time Swettenham had not yet developed the attachment to the lady who was to become his second wife.⁸⁶

Meantime, shadows were lengthening for other members of the family. Swettenham's sister Charlotte, who had moved to Holborn, died a spinster in 1921, leaving her meagre assets to one of her Jackson first cousins: significantly nothing was left to her younger brother, whom she had cared for after their mother's death in Scotland in their youth. Three years later Swettenham's eldest brother, William Norman also died at the ripe old age of eighty-seven. In 1933 Swettenham lost both his elder brother James Alexander, who died after a long stay in a Swiss sanatorium, and Lucy Maria, his only surviving sister. Frank was now the only surviving child of the eccentric James Swettenham.

There were however occasional diversions in this decade. Visits by Malay Royalty provided a welcome chance for Swettenham to renew old acquaintances. The Yang Di-Pertuan Besar of Negeri Sembilan paid a visit to London in 1925: the two men dined together. The Colonial Office still sometimes asked for his advice. On this occasion, in answer to one such query by Leo Amery, Swettenham advised against allowing the Yang Di-Pertuan Besar to be recognized as Sultan.⁸⁷ In the summer of 1929, Sultan Ibrahim of Johore, by now in semi-retirement in his flat at the top of Grosvenor House, ventured out to tea with Swettenham. Old contretemps were forgotten and the Sultan sent with his thank you letter a gold coin from Johore, to be added to Swettenham's collection.⁸⁸ That year he was invited to test the new telegraphic link between London and Singapore.⁸⁹

Until 1926, he had been obliged, when he sought publicity, to rely on the good offices of the editor of *The Times*. However with the establishment of the monthly magazine *British Malaya* in May that year, he was immediately supplied with a very satisfactory forum in which to air his views to a readership which already had some, and frequently considerable knowledge of the Peninsula. He was not slow to use it for the following twenty years.⁹⁰ He contributed to the first number a long article entitled 'Malay Problems, 1926.'⁹¹ In it, he referred to the need for a fuller account of the rubber industry in Malaya than had been possible in the first edition of his book, *British Malaya*, but veered off this subject to consider what he felt to be a problem of greater interest, the political issues. In a wide-ranging discussion of the origins and effects of Federation, he made a call for the post of Resident-General, independent of Singapore and responsible directly to London, to be restored. It was of course just that position of independence he had wanted when he held the post.

His next major article in *British Malaya* of January 1932 also discussed Federation, and the subsequent problems posed by the wish to bring in the unfederated states. He made reference to 'the

alleged dissatisfaction of the Rulers of the States within the Federation.' This he suggested was attributable to the policy of decentralization. He claimed that those who did not speak out were deemed to have condoned it. It was Swettenham's response to Sir Cecil Clementi's plans to devolve power from Kuala Lumpur to State Councils.⁹²

Two years later, in an after-dinner address as guest of honour at the annual dinner of the Association of British Malaya, he spoke out more forcibly on Federation. He claimed that where there was trouble between the ruler and the Resident of a state, this was almost always due to a breakdown in confidence between the two.⁹³ He elaborated on this theme later in the year, responding to comments which had been made about this speech. Only that which was best in modern systems should be selected and applied to Malaya. But Swettenham was increasingly losing touch in his old age with political realities: 'It is difficult to believe that the Malay will one day say, "I am quite capable of managing my own affairs and the sooner you go and leave me to do it, the better I shall like it:" but that is possible. It would be a deplorable end to a great and strikingly successful experiment.'⁹⁴ Swettenham was no doubt encouraged in his pronouncements by the publication in Kuala Lumpur the year before of Robson's *Records and Recollections*, which paid tribute to his achievements and called in vain for his elevation to the House of Lords.⁹⁵

An example of a breakdown in relations between the Sultan and his Resident occurred in Selangor.⁹⁶ In brief, Sultan Suleiman's eldest son, Tengku Musa-eddin was a spendthrift and wastrel. The British resolved to deprive him of the succession, in favour of the third son, the Tengku Laksamana. The second son was passed over as being almost imbecile and certainly not suitable to govern the country. The exercise was carried out in a high-handed manner by Caldecott, the Acting High Commissioner, and T.S. Adams, the Selangor Resident. While the Sultan had no particular comment to make on the supersession of Musa-eddin, he did object to the high-handed manner in which the name of his third son was chosen for Raja Muda, in preference to his second son.

The case broke new ground, for while in theory the succession in a state was a matter of Malay custom, and thus an area reserved from British influence under the terms of the Pangkor Engagement, the British had long since disregarded the principle, first and most notably in settling who was to succeed Sultan Abdullah in Perak. The Selangor succession case was thus the first in which a Ruler had attempted to assert his rights. In all this the Sultan was under the influence of one F. Douglas, a retired Malayan Civil servant, and his

eldest son Musa-eddin, who was scheming to have himself replaced by a compliant prince who could be manipulated.

It seems likely that Douglas himself was communicating with Swettenham in London on the issue. Swettenham appealed to the Colonial Office, through the Association of British Malaya, questioning the government's right to interfere in the succession on the grounds that it was a matter of Malay custom.⁹⁷ Swettenham also indirectly encouraged the Sultan to oppose the government.⁹⁸ Moreover his position as Garter King of Arms of the Order of St Michael and St George gave him access to court circles, and in particular a royal investiture in February 1936, when there would have been a chance to put the Sultan's side of the case.⁹⁹

The Sultan, inspired by Douglas, sought the legal advice of Roland Braddell, a well-known Straits lawyer, and this was followed by a request for a public inquiry. The Colonial Office rejected this idea, and the suggestion was then repeated on appeal to the King, by then the uncrowned Edward VIII. The King predictably endorsed the Colonial Office decision. The Colonial Office then began to press for the appointment of their nominee, the third son, accompanied by conciliatory increases in allowances to all concerned.

The issue appeared to have been settled, more or less peaceably, when the Sultan departed for London on medical grounds. Here he was taken up by Swettenham and his colleagues in the Association of British Malaya, whose disapproval of the government's handling of the case had been sharpened by their hostility to Adams, whom they regarded as over-zealous in his support of decentralization. Moreover they sympathized with the Sultan in his dilemma, and were genuinely distressed by the prospect of a rift which threatened Malay friendship. *The Times* gave the issue full publicity, and Swettenham, ever ready with his pen, wrote a trenchant letter in support of the Sultan a few days later.¹⁰⁰

The Sultan, to the alarm of the Colonial Office, threatened to present his petition personally when, accompanied by Swettenham, he was introduced to the King. The Colonial Office thus faced the prospect of dissuading simultaneously both him and Swettenham from raising this matter in their audience. They were sternly warned off this by Ormsby-Gore of the Colonial Office, and only narrowly dissuaded from this course of action.¹⁰¹ *British Malaya* published an elegant photo of Swettenham talking to the Sultan at Buckingham Palace on 27 October 1936, in the same issue as it published its exchange of letters two years before with the Colonial Office on the subject.¹⁰² Meantime in November 1936, Swettenham offered his services to the Secretary of State to attempt to bring about an amicable settlement.¹⁰³ The Colonial Office decided to reply

courteously, if briefly, to Swettenham's offer, in order to diminish the risk of further correspondence. Swettenham, they clearly felt, was inclined to be too indulgent to the Malay Rulers. Ormsby-Gore had this to say in his penultimate paragraph:

My own view is that if the future of these dynasties is to be assured in the modern world, and the conditions likely to obtain in Malaya, we have got to be very careful that these dynasties are not disgraced by unworthy personnel.¹⁰⁴

The Colonial Office resolutely refused to alter its stance, which it attempted however to sweeten with a grant of \$400,000, on the occasion of the Sultan's silver jubilee, to enable him to make a financial settlement between his sons. Conscious of the risk of further escalations in the demands of this powerful alliance, the Colonial Office also removed Adams, who was seen as the instigator of the crisis, and awarded the Sultan a KCVO. Despite further agitation in Malaya, the third son of the Sultan was retained as Raja Muda, in compliance with Colonial Office wishes.

The crisis had been resolved, but, as Gent of the Colonial Office cogently remarked, '... the easy association with us of the Malay Rulers and their people in a subordinate position in the FMS is not a condition likely to continue.'¹⁰⁵ The effectiveness of the Sultan's protest was strengthened by the common cause he made with Swettenham and other influential figures in the Association of British Malaya. Underlying all these moves of course, though probably not perceived by Swettenham and his colleagues in London, was a new-found sense of nationalism. The alignment of the old guard in London, headed by Swettenham, in support of the rights of the traditional rulers in the Peninsula, was to be repeated ten years later in their joint agitation against Malayan Union.

Swettenham's other contributions to the debates in the pages of *British Malaya* were less striking. In the issue of September 1936 he wrote a long article on rubber-growing and taxation in Malaya, in response to figures published by the RGA. In it, he appealed, in times of low rubber prices, for a reduction in quit rent.¹⁰⁶

The extent of Swettenham's influence on Malay matters, by his unceasing correspondence and pronouncements is open to discussion. The Colonial Office regarded him in his later years as a tiresome bore. Yet back in Malaya the press gave regular coverage to his letters, and on occasion encouraged him to express his views more forcibly. Thus in a speech in 1935 at the annual dinner of the Association of British Malaya, Swettenham spoke on the importance of mutual trust between Residents, or Advisers, and Malay rulers. A leading article was devoted to this subject by the *Straits Times*.¹⁰⁷

Swettenham's remaining representations concern his fierce opposition to Malayan Union and are dealt with in Chapter 50. As

the 1920s and 1930s progressed, Swettenham increasingly withdrew from public life to his house initially in Seymour Street and later in Hyde Park Gate, in what was described as a veritable museum of mementoes of his career.¹⁰⁸ Keyser, writing around 1922, reported, '... when a few months ago, I lunched with my old friend in Seymour Street, how pleasant it was to see him surrounded by treasures gathered in his life abroad.'¹⁰⁹

Bruce Lockhart, who came to know Swettenham in the 1930s gave a description of the retired proconsul slightly later:

The Swettenham I knew was a dignified old gentleman with a sallow complexion which spoke of a life-time spent in the East ... But the brain and the memory were as active as ever; and the handwriting was as clear and neat as a German schoolboy's. I had had tea with him soon after his eighty sixth birthday in his flat in Great Stanhope Street in London. Surrounded by glass cases of Eastern curios ... he was still far more mentally alert than many colonial servants half his age.¹¹⁰

Despite his early hostility to rubber, the RGA saw fit in 1937, to award him their prestigious Gold Medal. It was presented personally, and Swettenham made a gracious reply.¹¹¹ As might be imagined, he remained assiduous in his attendance of annual dinners of the Association of British Malaya in the late 1920s and early 1930s, as well as occasional functions of The Incorporated Society of Planters.¹¹²

He continued however to take an interest in the rubber companies with which he was involved. Indeed, just two weeks before his death, he chaired a board meeting of Highlands & Lowlands Para Rubber Co. Ltd. over whose activities he had presided for forty years. He was reported on that occasion to be spry, albeit a little hard of hearing.¹¹³ He was also reported as a frequent visitor to the House of Lords debates.¹¹⁴

By now over eighty, his travelling was also restricted, though he frequently revisited Dollar, the village in Scotland where he was brought up and went to school. His activities there aroused comment which was still recollected half a century later: 'Oh yes, I remember Sir Frank Swettenham: he often used to come back to the village in the thirties: always creeping round the graveyards, he was.'¹¹⁵

NOTES

1. Chapter 20.
2. SSF 511/82.
3. Heussler, 1981, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

4. P.R. Wycherley, 1958, 'The Singapore Botanic Gardens and Rubber in Malaya'. *Gardens Bulletin of Singapore* 17:175-86, and P.R. Wycherley, 1968, 'Introduction of Hevea to the Orient', *The Planter* 44 (504):1-11.
5. CO 273/279:95 Swettenham to CO, 211 of 1 May 1902.
6. Swettenham, *British Malaya*, p. 263 and *Footprints*, p. 73.
7. H.N. Ridley writing in 1911 to a friend in Ceylon, text in Kratoska (ed.), 1983, op. cit., pp. 334-5. The story is also referred to by Arnold Wright & Thomas H. Read, 1912, *The Malay Peninsula*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, pp. 287-8, without mention of Swettenham's role. This episode occurred in about 1898.
8. D.H. Wise was in fact appointed. *PGSC*, 7 January 1895.
9. Wycherley, 1958, op. cit., and H.N. Ridley Papers, Notebooks, vol. 4 (1897-1906), p. 169, both quoted in Drabble, 1973, op. cit.
10. Oliver Marks, CMG, 'The Pioneers of Para Rubber Planting in British Malaya.' *BM*, February 1927: 281-5, 292.
11. HC 9108:5, FMS AR, 1897, RG's Report, para. 5, 14 June 1898.
12. *STD*, 6 June 1898.
13. CO 273/240:184 Swettenham to CO, private of 15 June 1898.
14. CO 273/246:574 Mitchell to CO, 106 of 21 March 1899, enclosing Swettenham's memo of 4 March 1899.
15. *PP*, 1 July 1899.
16. HC 1819:4, FMS AR, 1902, HiC's Report, para. 3.
17. HC 8661:7, FMS AR, 1896, RG's Report, para. 14. HC 9108:7 FMS AR, 1897 RG's Report, para. 11. HC 9524:6, FMS AR 1898, RG's Report, para. 7. HC 382:5, FMS AR, 1899, RG's Report, para. 7.
18. HC 382:5, FMS AR, 1899, RG's Report, para. 7.
19. HC 815:4, FMS AR, 1900, Acting HC's Report, para. 11.
20. HC 1297:4, FMS AR, 1901, HC's Report, para. 6.
21. Letter in *MM*, 12 April 1897.
22. CO 273/246:259-304 being correspondence on this subject. CO 273/250:280 telegram of 23 February 1899 agreeing to \$5,000. For proceedings of the Medical Congress, see CO 273/251:153 ff.
23. CO 273/251:141 ff. Mitchell to CO, 140, enclosing Swettenham's memorandum of 18 May 1899. Also SSF 2748/03.
24. *MM*, 10 August and 5 October 1899.
25. Watson, 1921, op. cit.
26. CO 273/263:726 Swettenham from Wrexham to CO, 29 December 1900.
27. CO 273/273:140 Wright reports imminent completion on 30 May 1901. CO 273/274: 406 records his promotion. See also *PGSC*, 7 October 1901 and SSF 2748/03.
28. *MM*, 13 September 1901.
29. *STD*, 4 and 9 January 1904. Ronald Ross was one of the leading experts on tropical medicine at the time.
30. Highlands and Lowlands 50th Anniversary Booklet, 1906-1956.
31. IMR 1900-1950 50th Anniversary volume. See also Chapter 45, fn. 19.
32. J. Drabble, 1967, 'Plantation Rubber Industry in Malaya,' *JMBRAS*, 40: 52-77.

33. The company was incorporated on 9 October 1905, file BT 31 17570/86076. It went into liquidation on 19 March 1920, and transferred its assets to a new company of the same name, file No. BT 36393-402/166459. Swettenham remained a director till 1945.
34. 'One Hundred Years as East India Merchants. Harrisons & Crosfield 1844 - 1943'. Anon, 1943.
35. See Chapter 40.
36. Anon, 1943, op. cit., p. 23. *TOM*, 20 February 1906.
37. Notes prepared from files in London examined by J.M. Gullick.
38. *TOM*, 6 June 1906.
39. *TOM*, 27 August 1906. By 1917, Swettenham was listed, in the Annual Report of The Rubber Estates of Johore Ltd as being director of the following companies: Anglo-Malay Rubber Co. Ltd., Ayer Kuning Rubber Co. Ltd., Highlands & Lowlands Para Rubber Co. Ltd., Seaport (Selangor) Rubber Estate Ltd., Selangor Rubber Co. Ltd., Singapore Electric Tramways Ltd., Sungei Way (Selangor) Rubber Co. Ltd., Tanjong Malim Rubber Co. Ltd. At a later date he was also director of Glasgow Rubber Estates Ltd., Lumut Rubber Estates Ltd., Nanette Rubber Plantations Ltd., Layang Rubber Plantations Ltd.
40. HC 2243:48 SAR, 1904, para 92.
41. Highlands & Lowlands 50th Anniversary Booklet.
42. *TOM*, 12 July 1906 quoting 'Financier' article.
43. *TOM*, 10 August 1906.
44. The late T.B. Barlow, pers. comm.
45. Drabble, 1973, op. cit., p. 53.
46. Obituary in *BM*, July 1946.
47. CO 273/412, 433, 447, 503, 507, 511, 522, 525, 528.
48. CO 273/325:190 Swettenham to CO, 2 April 1906.
49. CO 273/368:250 Swettenham to CO, 3 June 1910.
50. CO 273/362: 187 ff. Anderson to CO, Confidential of 27 July 1910.
51. SP 51 Raja Mahmood to Swettenham, 29 May 1908.
52. SSF 6152/96. CO 273/384:395 Young to CO, 65 of 28 February 1912.
53. See Chapters 12 and 13.
54. CO 273/380:220 Letter dated 15 October 1911 from Raja Mahmood, together with Swettenham's reply of 13 November 1911 to Stubbs at CO.
55. See Chapter 13 for a discussion of his version of events at that time.
56. CO 273/384:395. Young to CO, 65 of 28 February 1912. Raja Mahmood returned from Mecca to Selangor, and became a member of the State Council in 1916; he died in 1919.
57. See Chapter 30.
58. PPC 7709, FMS 1913.
59. Drabble, 1973, op. cit., p. 37.
60. *The Times Trade Supplement, Rubber*, December 1916.
61. HO 139/4.
62. He died on 25 March 1919: *STD*, 26 March 1919. He had recently returned with his wife from a visit to India. *TOM*, 28 January 1919.
63. *MM*, 7 July 1919.
64. *MM*, 16 January 1920.

65. Curiously there was an apparently aborted attempt at a Swettenham Memorial Fund in 1904. It was handled by Mr G. Cumming, and raised some \$1,580 without difficulty. See *MM*, 24 October 1904. It is not evident what became of this fund. Cumming must have known Swettenham in the 1880s when he worked for Hill and Rathborne. He was the first European non-official appointed to the Selangor State Council in 1904, an appointment in which Swettenham may have played a part.
66. The unveiling was reported in *MM*, 20 January 1921. The statue now presides over the back entrance of Muzium Negara, Kuala Lumpur.
67. J. Drabble, 1991, *Malayan Rubber: The Interwar Years*, Macmillan, London.
68. CO 717/18:22 Brockman to Collins, at CO, 12 January 1921, CO 717/18:67 Brockman's notes of meeting with Swettenham, 7 March 1921.
69. *Ibid.* Swettenham was on his way back from a meeting of the RGA.
70. CO 717/16:238 Minutes of meeting.
71. CO 717/16:246 Swettenham to Grindle at CO, 4 April 1921. Further anecdotal evidence for Swettenham's role in the restriction scheme is to be found in *MM*, 26 August 1926, being an account of the Incorporated Society of Planters third annual general dinner, at which Swettenham was guest of honour, and spoke of the scheme.
72. *The Times*, 16 June 1922.
73. *MM*, 26 August 1926, quoting a review by Swettenham in the *Financier*.
74. Yeo Kim Wah, 1982, *The Politics of Decentralization*, OUP, Kuala Lumpur, for a full discussion of the issues.
75. *BM*, May 1926, pp. 31 ff. 'A History of the Association of British Malaya' by the Secretary.
76. Obituary, *BM*, July 1946.
77. Heussler, 1981, op. cit., pp. 236 and 256, quoting CO 717/10 Minutes by Collins, 10 November 1920 on G. Maxwell's 'Notes on Policy in Respect of the Unfederated Malay States,' dated 15 October 1920, and James to Collins, CO of 21 November 1920 in same file.
78. Yeoh, 1982, op. cit., p. 96.
79. CO 717/24:378 ff. Correspondence between Association of British Malaya and CO on post of Resident-General, 9 February 1922. CO 717/24:440 Association of British Malaya to CO, 11 May 1922. Yeoh, 1982, op. cit., pp. 103 and 247.
80. Yeoh, 1982, op. cit., p. 247 quoting Birch to the Association of British Malaya, 7 October 1925 in CO 717/46:352.
81. CO 717/47/550 Swettenham, 1 November 1925 to CO. Swettenham's views on the subject were also reported in *MM*, 19 August, 5 November 1925, *STD*, 16 July 1925, 4 November 1925.
82. CO 717/118 Memo by Gent of 4 November 1936.
83. See Chapter 49.
84. *MM*, 25 January 1925.
85. See Chapter 48.
86. See Chapter 49.
87. CO 717/47:534 Swettenham to Amery, 18 September 1925.
88. SP 124.

89. *MM*, 25 February 1929 reporting on the event which took place on 28 January 1929.
90. *Ibid*.
91. *BM*, May 1926, pp. 7-14.
92. 'The Legal Status of the Malay States' *BM*, January 1932. See also Heussler, 1981, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-50.
93. *BM*, June 1935, pp. 41-2.
94. Swettenham in a letter to *BM*, October 1933, published in full in *MM*, 8 November 1935.
95. Robson, 1934, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
96. Yeo Kim Wah, 1971, 'The Selangor Succession Dispute, 1933-1938', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 2(2):169-84 has been consulted for the following pages unless otherwise indicated.
97. CO 717/112 Association of British Malaya to CO, 12 April 1935. Certain of CO 717 files including this one are not sequentially numbered, so no easy number reference is possible.
98. CO 717/112 Minutes by Gent, 29 April 1936 on the same file.
99. *MM*, 3 March 1936.
100. *The Times*, 22 and 27 August 1936.
101. CO 717/118 Ormsby-Gore to Thomas, 26 November 1936.
102. *BM*, November 1936, p. 159.
103. CO 717/118 Swettenham to Ormsby-Gore, 2 November 1936.
104. *Ibid*, Ormsby-Gore to Swettenham, 6 November 1936.
105. *Ibid*, Note by Gent, 7 November 1936.
106. 'Rubber Growing and Taxation in Malaya,' *BM*, September 1936, pp. 119-22.
107. *STD*, quoted in *BM*, p. 104, August 1935.
108. The late Archie Gibson, *pers. comm.*
109. A.L. Keyser, 1923, *Trifles and Travels*, p. 124.
110. R.H. Bruce Lockhart, 1936, *Return to Malaya*, pp. 140-1.
111. *STD*. 26 November 1937.
112. *MM*, 12 July 1924, 10 and 19 July 1926, 2 July 1928, 16 November 1928, 29 June 1929, 23 October 1934.
113. The late T.B. Barlow, *pers. comm.*
114. *MM*, 5 July 1939.
115. The late Mr Muckersie, formerly oldest resident of Dollar, *pers. comm.*

Writings: Swettenham as Historian

Quotations throughout the preceding chapters show that much of Swettenham's writing was autobiographical: as a young man he had lived through stirring times in the history of the Malay Peninsula. As he began to contemplate retirement, it was only natural that he should seek to record his impressions, as did so many colonial administrators of his time.¹ His earliest contributions were factual records, or reports, on occasions published after the event in learned journals, chiefly the *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, which have already been considered.

Of Swettenham's more technical publications, his two-volume *Malay Vocabulary* (Vol. I 1881, reprinted 1885, Vol. II 1885, reprinted 1887) was hailed on publication as a worthy successor to the dictionaries of Marsden and Crawfurd which were even then out-of-date and not in print. Swettenham had included the jawi script, for which he was praised by the reviewers, and a series of short conversations, the contents of which are now extremely dated. The production of the vocabulary after ten years of rigorous work in government attests to his drive and industry. However the work was superseded by Wilkinson's and Winstedt's dictionaries in this century. In 1894 he published the first part of a fuller dictionary in collaboration with Sir Hugh Clifford, but the work was never completed; only the volumes up to M were produced.² In addition of course he was writing a series of articles on Perak, subsequently collected and published in book form, *About Perak*.³

Yet Swettenham went further than most of his contemporaries in two respects. First, with a candour which, in the knowledge of his private life, now seems on occasion breathtaking, he bared his personal emotions to the world. Secondly, having played a major role in the history of British intervention in the Malay Peninsula in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, he set out, like Winston Churchill many years later, to impose his own view of the history of

the period in which he had been involved. In this he was remarkably successful.

Some light on Swettenham's literary work is cast by his correspondence with his publisher, John Lane, an autocratic character, who, as we have seen, clashed with Swettenham.⁴ The earliest letters in the collection date from Perak in the early 1890s, and suggest that in the early stages of their collaboration, Swettenham requested John Lane, without success, to place stories for him. The John Lane Archive throws no light on the publishing background of his first book, published in UK, *Malay Sketches*.

It is not unreasonable to suppose that after Swettenham's success with *About Perak*, he found time to write part at least of *Malay Sketches* and looked for a publisher in 1892, when he was home on leave. Having interested Lane, it seems likely that he worked on the text till about mid-1894, and sent it home, in time for publication two months before his arrival in London on leave at the end of October 1895. Swettenham's closer involvement with Lane appears to have commenced around 1896. Lane was at this period publishing the *Yellow Book*, a quarterly journal of which thirteen issues appeared between 1894 and 1897. Publication came to an abrupt halt in 1897 as a result of adverse publicity from Oscar Wilde's arrest, in the course of which a photograph showing him carrying a copy of the *Yellow Book* achieved wide publicity.⁵

Swettenham contributed two stories in his own name to the *Yellow Book*. The first, 'Death's Devotion', which appeared in No. 9 of the *Yellow Book*, was later republished in *Also and Perhaps* in 1900.⁶ His second contribution, in what was to be the penultimate issue of the *Yellow Book*⁷ was entitled 'The Unka'. It was later published under the title 'A Genre Picture', in *The Real Malay*.⁸ Fellow writers appearing in the same issue as Swettenham's first contribution included a number of well-known names: Lawrence Alma Tadema, Baron Corvo, Richard Garnett, Max Beerbohm and John Buchan. On occasion Lane employed Aubrey Beardsley as an illustrator. The associations were doubtless welcome to Swettenham, and in the *Yellow Book*, Lane found a satisfactory way of bringing to public notice, and in a prestigious context, promising authors with whom he had established links.

The most readily accessible of Swettenham's writings, and those which nowadays are the most readable, are the many short stories he wrote about his experiences in Malaya. They are to be found chiefly in *Malay Sketches* (1895) and *The Real Malay* (1900), two of his earlier books. However his two books of essays *Unaddressed Letters* (1898) and *Also and Perhaps* (1912) also contain occasional vignettes of a similar character.

His short stories describe a world long since vanished: they portray the rural, unsophisticated and often lawless conditions of the early 1870s. They are remarkable for their close familiarity with, and deep understanding of rural Malay life. Perhaps the feature which is most striking about these stories is the repeated stress on colour, whether in the garments of the participants, as in the Malay picnic described in 'Meng-gelunchor' or in a description of landscape, such as 'Evening.'⁹ Swettenham's colour sense is equally evident in 'A Line Engraving,'¹⁰ in the descriptive parts of *British Malaya*, 'The Hill of Solitude,'¹¹ and in his descriptions of Mauritius and Reunion.¹²

The sketches and stories are frequently no more than descriptions of a small incident which attracted his notice at the time. Thus 'A Genre Picture'¹³ describes two minor incidents during his stay, while sharing a house with Captain Innes in Penang. 'A Nocturne,' in the same book and of the same period, recounts an attempted seduction, the loss of a hand, and subsequent death in a Malay fishing community in Province Wellesley. As well as keen observation, Swettenham's writings reveal a vivid imagination. J.H.M. Robson, commenting on Swettenham in the 1930's, remarked, 'that his undoubted materialism was balanced by a vivid imagination not ordinarily permitted in Englishmen.'¹⁴

Swettenham, as we have seen, prided himself on his knowledge of the Malay language, and the Malays themselves. This comes out strongly in his short stories: he made many real friends amongst the Malays with whom he lived and worked, quite apart from his at times cordial relations with the Sultans and the ruling families. It is difficult to conceive otherwise how he could have written accounts such as 'A Fishing Picnic' or 'Meng-gelunchor'. Against this must be set the condescension, which reads so disagreeably today, and permeates much of his writing about the Malays and their lifestyle. This is seen particularly in 'The Real Malay,' the first item in *Malay Sketches*, and in his descriptive account in Chapter VII of *British Malaya* entitled 'The Malay: His Customs, Prejudices, Arts, Language and Literature.' It is also evident in the text of his talk to The Royal Colonial Institute on 31 March 1896 in London.¹⁵

While it may be argued that condescension towards the inhabitants of British colonies was the hallmark of those who wrote about them in the high noon of empire, it is difficult, reading the passages cited above, not to conclude that Swettenham surpassed all but the most jingoistic of his contemporaries in his respect. This tone more than any other aspect has precluded their republication in recent years. Swettenham's nearest contemporary in writing short stories of the Malay Peninsula was Sir Hugh Clifford. The two

have been ably compared by Allen.¹⁶ It appears that Swettenham was rather jealous of the literary successes of Clifford: 'Meanwhile my friends here get quite indifferent tales (by comparison of course) accepted by the best magazines.'¹⁷ A year later he recorded: 'I think Mr Clifford contemplates the immediate publication of another book of Malay stories so you had better forestal him.'¹⁸

A brief reading of the best of Clifford's stories makes it clear that Clifford was not only a man of far greater intellect than Swettenham, but that he excelled Swettenham in his literary ability. Certainly nowhere in Swettenham's work can there be found as gripping a story as 'Our Trusty and Well-Beloved,' describing the return visit in an east-coast Peninsular town of the newly appointed Governor, to relive, for the last time, the excitement of bazaar life he had known in that same place as a cadet over twenty years before.¹⁹

While it is true that in their short stories both men drew some of their inspiration from the European romantic movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the similarity ends there. Clifford was far more in sympathy with the Malays of whom he wrote, and told a good story well, in a way which Swettenham seldom achieved. At best, Swettenham's stories were lightweight, vignettes. Yet Swettenham was good at describing and penetrating the character of prominent Malays of his time. His sketches are often invaluable biographical sources.²⁰ In contrast to Clifford he did not indulge in romantic idealization of the peasantry.²¹

The least readable of Swettenham's works nowadays are his two volumes of essays, *Unaddressed Letters* (1898) and *Also and Perhaps* (1912). *Unaddressed Letters* purports in the introduction to be a collection of letters from a friend. On his death these were passed to the author with the words: 'You will seek to grasp, in these apparent confidences, an inner meaning that to the end will elude you.'²² The aim was amply fulfilled. However correspondence in the John Lane Archive throws some light on the origins of the work.

On 28 October 1897 Swettenham wrote from The Sports Club, St James's to tell Lane: 'I have the making of a book if we could arrange it.' A few days later he added: 'I have got a book and in my opinion a good one, a deal better than the other.' Swettenham described his material as a series of forty letters. It was to be up-market, 'not meant to appeal to the mob.' He proposed that he and Lane should bear the expenses and share the profits equally. This was the only joint venture of that type between them. It gave Swettenham a knowledge of publisher's expenses which made him very critical of the royalty percentages offered to him for later books. Throughout his career as an author Swettenham was businesslike, to put it mildly, over the financial rewards of writing.

There are some interesting if baffling clues to the origins of *Unaddressed Letters*. When he first proposed it to Lane²³ he described it as about 70,000 words, mostly in print but about one-sixth still in manuscript. Later when he found Lane slow in responding Swettenham asked for the return of 'a rather rough print of a book.'²⁴

By 'print' Swettenham may have meant only typescript: typewriters were still rather a novelty in the 1890s, in Malaya at least. But if 'print' means printer's proof material one must assume that at some earlier stage Swettenham had planned to publish the greater part of the book in Malaya and had had it set up by a local printer. By this time there were various printing presses in Malaya. The *Malay Mail* began book publication in 1897 but a more likely choice is Kelly & Walsh of Singapore, who seem to have acted as local distributors of Swettenham's books in Malaya.

In November 1897 Swettenham also suggested to Lane that if he accepted the book, 'it might be better to do it anonymously, in any case I should like to show it to one, perhaps two of my friends here.' As Swettenham was then in England the friend or two friends must have been there too. Clearly there were passages in the book which they would recognize as referring to them. It supports the interpretation of *Unaddressed Letters* as partly based on Swettenham's own experiences and relationships.

There are of course passages in *Unaddressed Letters* which derive from Swettenham's visit to India in 1884. That fact does not of itself establish that he began to write the book immediately after his trip to India. But it is possible that he first wrote the greater part of the book long before he offered it to Lane, following the publication of *Malay Sketches*. At the earlier stage he had arranged with a printer to set up the material, then abandoned it at the proof stage, and finally was encouraged by the comparative success of *Malay Sketches* to revive the possibility of publishing it, perhaps under the cloak of anonymity.

It is also worth noting that the published text includes thirty-seven letters, whereas the letter to Lane mentions forty. The length of the book is about 60,000 words in comparison with Swettenham's original estimate of 70,000. He may have decided, perhaps in consultation with one or two friends, to withdraw from the publication those items which might cause embarrassment. He was then able to proceed without attempting to conceal his identity. There is not a word of any of this in the extant letters to Lane. But they are not, to all appearances, a complete record of the arrangements for publication. Swettenham often called at Lane's office when in London and he may have arranged these changes, if they occurred, in the course of discussion.

It is tempting to read into these letters an autobiographical account of Swettenham's personal and private life: indeed there can be little other justification for many of these pieces. Taken as a whole, they appear to chronicle the progress of a love affair which lasted for several years between the author and a woman of charm, education and distinction, who was definitely not his wife. References to scenes from India, as in 'A Clever Mongoose' and 'A Jingling Coin' suggest that the affair, if such it ever was, may have occurred there, while 'A Blue Day', with its mention of south east Asian pitcher plants, clearly describes a view from the main range of the Peninsula.

Most of the letters appear to be written in sequence, and from the author's remarks one may deduce that the lady to whom he was writing was initially well-disposed to his outpourings, but became gradually less well disposed, and eventually insisted that the correspondence be terminated. The author gives a clue to the reason for this attitude towards the end of the book in 'Of Obsession'. 'How utterly powerless we are, how impotent to save those we love, when no offer of the best we have, no devotion, no self-effacement will secure the happiness of one other being, whose every pulse throbs in unison with ours, yet between whom and us there is fixed the great gulf of our own conventions.' The convention could refer to Swettenham's own unhappy marriage, which prevented his marriage to this lady. She, seeing no future in the relationship, decided to bring it to an end. Or it could refer, on the other hand, to the problems of an affair which Swettenham may have had with an intelligent and well-educated local girl. The book provides a fair example of Swettenham's florid prose.

That the guests invited to Swettenham's house-warming of Carcosa in 1898 saw fit to use the occasion to congratulate him on this work is perhaps significant, as most certainly is the fact that he should choose to bare his soul publicly at the time when he held a position of very considerable prominence in the Government. It is difficult to believe that some of the guests present at that party were not in a position to read far more into these stories than is now possible. While in those days many would scarcely have sympathized with an interracial affair, they might well have given their Resident-General the benefit of the doubt over his undoubtedly unhappy marriage and a possible flirtation with a lady of charm and distinction.

The chances are that we shall never discover exactly who or what was in Swettenham's mind as he wrote the book. It is difficult to imagine that even Swettenham would have had the temerity to lay bare a single romantic affair in this way, and it may be wisest to regard the work as a pot-pourri of thoughts which occurred to him,

in the light of his own emotional life. Some doubtless could at the time have been traced and identified by individuals who knew him well. Others, in all probability stemmed purely from his own imagination. Some of the sketches are still readable, as for instance 'The Jingling Coin' and 'Devi', both set in India, but many, despite their vivid appreciation of colours noted earlier, have little if any interest now, almost a century after publication.

At this stage in their association Swettenham's relationship with Lane was fairly amicable. A letter of 29 November (probably 1897) suggests that Lane occasionally referred other writer's work, presumably on Eastern subjects, to Swettenham for an opinion. He says that he was willing 'to read the MS but it does not *sound* very promising.' However by now Swettenham was showing impatience with Lane over delay in dealing with his material. At one point, on 27 June 1898 he indulges in the sarcasm of sending a postal order for 3d to cover the cost of postage on an overdue reply.

By the standards of modern publishers, for whom an interval of three to five years between acceptance and publication is not unusual, Lane did pretty well for Swettenham in publishing *Unaddressed Letters*. Swettenham felt that it had been more favourably received than *Malay Sketches*. He wrote to Lane: 'Here [in Malaya] people like the *Unaddressed Letters* far better than *Malay Sketches*, but then of course there is nothing novel about the Malay.'²⁵

The urge to succeed and to make money, which were prominent in other facets of Swettenham's career, appeared also in his attitude to his books. He wanted more than a *succés d'estime* ('not meant to appeal to the mob' quoted above). He regretted that *Unaddressed Letters* had not been reviewed in the up-market womens' magazines,²⁶ and was also upset that his publisher had failed to promote sales by adequate advertising and supply of stocks to distributors. He complained that although Kelly & Walsh had advertised the book locally they were unable to supply copies for lack of stock.²⁷

No sooner was *Unaddressed Letters* successfully launched than Swettenham and Lane began to plan new projects. According to Clifford, writing many years later, Arnot Reid at the *Straits Times*, anxious to give local colour to his columns, persuaded Swettenham to write a series of stories and sketches, which were subsequently collected and published under the title, *The Real Malay*.²⁸ But first Lane proposed to Swettenham that one of his stories should be offered to Lady Randolph Churchill for the *Anglo-Saxon Review*. Swettenham suggested that his encomium on British rule in Malaya, later to appear as 'A New Method' at the beginning of *The Real Malay* would suit the high Tory Anglo-

American style of the new journal: 'I can speak with more authority than anyone else on that subject and it would appeal to the imperial spirit which is now awake both in England and America. I should call it "The White Man's Burden" (or the Englishman's Burden) in Malaya.'²⁹ This is interesting confirmation of the hypothesis that Swettenham was casting himself in the role of imperial spokesman generally.³⁰ If however beating the imperial drum was not acceptable then Swettenham felt that one of his Malay stories, 'A Mezzotint,' later to appear in *The Real Malay* might do.³¹

Meanwhile Swettenham and Lane were proceeding with the project for a second volume of Malay stories to follow *Malay Sketches*. Originally Swettenham proposed that it should be entitled merely *More Malay Sketches*.³² They soon concluded that some more original and arresting title was required. Swettenham persisted, in the second half of 1899, in pressing for *Pen-Painted Malaya*. Lane, with better judgement, would have none of that.

At one point³³ Swettenham put forward no less than fourteen alternative titles for Lane's consideration. They included *The Kris Country* and *Mysterious Malaya* as well as *Studies of the Real Malay*, an obvious hit at Clifford's *Studies in Brown Humanity*. Lane was disposed to use *Malay Pictures* but Swettenham objected to this as 'an indifferent and unattractive title.'³⁴ Eventually *The Real Malay*, which had been Swettenham's second preference in his list of fourteen, was chosen. Swettenham's letters of this period show much interest in the artistic design of covers and frontispiece pages. But he was also increasingly resentful of Lane's failure to supply royalty statements. By 1900 his letters on this subject became stiff and even peremptory.³⁵

Of all Swettenham's writings, that for which he is best known is *British Malaya*. No doubt before and immediately after his retirement Swettenham had had in mind such a work. It would serve to confirm the position he sought in British society as the expert on Colonial administration, and would also provide a useful opportunity for settling one or two old scores, particularly, as we have seen, with the Sultan of Johore. However Swettenham's first public reference to the need for a book of this kind seems to have been in 1904, when he gave a talk to the London School of Economics on the administration of the Straits Settlements and the FMS. In it he deplored the lack of textbooks published on the colonies, and compared the British situation with that which prevailed in USA. There, he noted, the University of Chicago had sent out Alleyne Ireland specifically to write such books. If he had not already begun to set pen to paper, he now set to work.³⁶ The first edition of *British Malaya* was published in 1906. Gertrude Bell was consulted about the text, particularly the handling of the

chapter on the Unfederated Malay States. She wisely advised him to avoid special pleading: he was tempted to include a savage attack on the Siamese. She gushed in appreciation of the final result: 'If you are content to rest now on your laurels, you will rest knowing that you have used every gift you are blessed with (not a few, dear Excellency!) to further the cause of the Malay.'³⁷ The book was a solid job and must have absorbed much of Swettenham's time for some twelve to eighteen months.³⁸

After reprints that year, in 1907 and in 1920, a new and revised edition was produced in 1929. Finally further revisions were incorporated in 1946, just before his death, and published in 1948. For some fifty years, it was required, though not exactly stirring reading for anyone wishing to know about the Peninsula. As the author stated in the preface to the first edition, 'The main idea is to portray accurately the important facts which led to the intervention of Great Britain in the domestic affairs of the countries now known as the Federated Malay States, and to record exactly the steps by which they have been led to their present position as Dependencies of the British Crown.' A history and description of the country up to 1867 forms the first five chapters, leading to the heart of the book, which is Swettenham's at times personal account of the development of the country from 1867 to the date of publication. The final edition includes an additional retrospective chapter 'Twenty Five Years After' and two partisan appendices: one dealing with the origin of the idea of Federation, discussed below and the second with the rehabilitation of rubber estates after 1945.

The book therefore fully covers Swettenham's official career, and although he does not overemphasize his own role in the events described, the reader is not allowed to forget that he was indeed a leading figure in the period. Until the relevant Colonial Office files were opened for study, *British Malaya* was the only authoritative account available of the period, and for that reason alone exercised, till some thirty years ago, a powerful influence on those concerned with the area. Today, even though the style, and more particularly the condescending tone of some of the descriptions, is no longer agreeable, it cannot be denied that in general the account given was a fair one. It has been described more recently as, 'a large but on many points curiously uninformative history of British Malaya.'³⁹

We noted earlier a growing antagonism between Swettenham and his former boss, Sir Cecil Smith. In the mid-1890s, the relationship between the two men had been warm, to the extent that Swettenham had even corresponded with John Lane on the possibility of Lane's publishing a novel by Smith's daughter, Beatrice, later Lady Brownrigg. However Lane had not accepted the novel.⁴⁰ Relations chilled perceptibly, as we have seen, in the

course of the negotiations on the Johore Railway concession. The publication of *British Malaya* brought into the open the hostility of the two men in a controversy over the question of who first produced the idea of Federation. It forms a curious footnote to the history of the Federation.

The controversy erupted publicly over Swettenham's statement, in 1906, when *British Malaya* was first published, that it was he who first drew up detailed proposals for Federation. We have seen in an earlier chapter⁴¹ that this contention was ultimately to depend on a memorandum drawn up, allegedly in early 1893 by Swettenham, but not brought to light till after Smith's death in 1916. Additionally, when in 1896 Sir Hugh Low described the scheme of Federation as 'almost entirely due to Mr Swettenham,' at a meeting of the Royal Colonial Institute at which Smith took the chair, Smith at that stage raised no objection.⁴² It seems likely that Smith genuinely forgot he had received Swettenham's memorandum, probably mislaid it and never found it again. Smith was concerned to form the FMS as a means of alleviating the financial problems of Pahang. Swettenham's memorandum concerned the problems of administration, and was therefore not pertinent to the problems which Smith sought to resolve.

On the publication of the first edition of *British Malaya*, Swettenham forwarded a complimentary copy to Smith. This provoked a series of pained letters from Smith to Swettenham, whose replies do not survive. Swettenham made extensive enquiries at the time, both through the Colonial Office, and by writing out to Malaya, for the proof which he eventually alleged was provided by his long-lost 1893 memo.⁴³ *British Malaya* had meantime run to a second printing, and Smith was even more aggrieved to discover that despite his prompt objections to the first edition, no attempt was made to take these into account in the second.⁴⁴

Swettenham seems to have been genuinely saddened by this contretemps with his old friend, which, he admitted years later, 'caused me very great regret.'⁴⁵ This was exacerbated by the discovery that Smith, having failed to persuade Swettenham in 1906 to change his views, or the text of *British Malaya*, had prepared and privately published, without informing Swettenham, a small pamphlet giving his account of the story. This curious document was entitled 'Notes on Some of the Statements in Sir Frank Swettenham's book *British Malaya*,' marked 'For Private Circulation' and dated 1909.

In it, Smith explained that since the new edition of *British Malaya* contained no amendment to the passage in the first edition to which he took exception, and since the second 'is a cheap edition,

and hence will have a larger circulation,' he deemed it, 'right in the interests of historical accuracy to draw up these notes.' Smith was doubtless aware that even if he did not send a copy to Swettenham personally, one would sooner or later fall into his hands. It can only therefore have been with a touch of malice that he chose to describe Maxwell as 'the late Sir W.E. Maxwell, whose great ability and knowledge of the Malay States was not surpassed by any one in the service.'

The arguments themselves need not concern us: they were technical and not wholly convincing, except insofar as they showed that Swettenham's arrogance in claiming credit for his achievements was capable of rousing even his closest friends to fury. Smith took the opportunity in his pamphlet also to attack Swettenham's assumption of responsibility for the railways⁴⁶ and went so far as to assert that Swettenham had no responsibility for any of those constructed while Smith himself was serving in the Straits. Earlier chapters have shown clearly that such a sweeping assertion was not justified.⁴⁷ He concluded his pamphlet with an attack on Swettenham's generalizations on the administration, in particular his statement, 'During these twenty years - to be exact, from 1874 till 1895, the British Residents gradually built up the system of administration which seemed best suited to the peculiar circumstances, without more than routine references to the Governor ... there was no-one in Singapore who had knowledge enough to criticize successfully the action of the Residents ... The secretariat in Singapore only knew what the Residents chose to tell.'⁴⁸

These allegations Smith maintained, with some justification, were nonsense, and quoted from Swettenham's own words, later in the same chapter, to prove it. He concluded by casting considerable doubts on Swettenham's claim that his work should be accepted as historical. The pamphlet was the first, and for many years the last occasion when Swettenham's own interpretation of the history of his own period was challenged.

There the matter rested for some ten years. Smith died on 6 February 1916. Only after his death did Swettenham choose to revive the question. There could be no further chance of an embarrassing riposte. On 13 December,⁴⁹ Swettenham wrote to Lane that for the new edition of *British Malaya* he wished to include 'new matter ... as an appendix.' This appendix eventually appeared in later editions of the book.⁵⁰ It describes how on 24 December 1916 Swettenham found the draft of his 1893 memorandum in a packet of old papers.

Wasting no time, on 25 December 1916, Swettenham wrote to the Colonial Office requesting permission to publish certain official papers of 1893, including a memorandum: 'I only ask it for the sake

of historical accuracy.⁵¹ On 29 December 1916, the request was turned down: the Colonial Office took the view that these were confidential papers which could not be published. Eventually, after further correspondence a text, which appears as an appendix to the later editions of *British Malaya* was approved, on 18 January 1917. All correspondence on this issue was on Official Press Bureau paper.

The following day Swettenham wrote to Lane reporting the fact. Lane's reaction to Swettenham's proposal for inclusion of 'new matter' on a specific point had been a suggestion, or assumption that Swettenham would also update *British Malaya* throughout. Swettenham, hard-pressed at the Official Press Bureau, found this irritating, and replied that 'such a thing could not be done.' It would need another book 'for which I have neither the time nor the knowledge.'⁵² Whether by intent or human error, the appendix was absent from the 1920 edition of the book. Swettenham remonstrated, and Lane replied that it was a printer's oversight.⁵³ It did however get into the 1929 and subsequent editions.

Several points emerge from this: first, Swettenham was, by mid-December 1916 looking for new material to vindicate his case against the by then deceased Smith. For him to suggest therefore that he discovered the missing memorandum by chance on 24 December 1916 is misleading. He must have been looking for the paper, and delighted to discover it. The episode lends strength to the belief that the document was genuine. Secondly, in 1916, when he was heavily involved in the Official Press Bureau, Swettenham must have been so burdened with responsibility, or lonely, or perhaps both, that he was ready to handle official work on Christmas Day. Finally, the episode proves, not for the last time in his career, that Swettenham was prepared to go to considerable lengths to ensure that his view of the history of the period prevailed.⁵⁴ The embers of this controversy were stirred briefly a decade later when the *Singapore Free Press* wrote of the controversy between the two men. Swettenham rushed into print with a letter to Singapore.⁵⁵

The personal relationship between Lane and Swettenham never recovered from their quarrel over The Times Book Club. There are no extant letters showing how Swettenham came to offer *Also and Perhaps* to Lane nor why Lane accepted it. They were both combative characters. Perhaps the urge to have one more joust was irresistible. Lane would have wished to avoid the loss of an established and fairly prestigious author. It seems that the material included in *Also and Perhaps* had been written at different times. As mentioned above it included a story which had first appeared in

The Yellow Book in the 1890s. The Mauritian chapters had obviously been written after 1909. As far back as 1901 Swettenham had responded to an invitation from Lane to produce another book: 'I have two books half done; one is a novel in letters, to which I could not put my name (I should only be joint author for one thing) but that seems rather an advantage nowadays and the other would be a volume of essays. Either would take some time to finish.'⁵⁶

When Swettenham did eventually put forward his manuscript of *Also and Perhaps*, Lane apparently had some doubts both about the heterogeneity of the material and the quality of some of it. One of the chapters, entitled 'Also,' is a very artificial conversation piece between a man, obviously Swettenham, and a woman at a London social occasion. Lane told Swettenham that The Bodley Head's reader found the conversation so boring that he thought that in real life the lady would be looking round the room at the other womens' hats. Swettenham (undated) was equal to that. Lane's reader was evidently so unversed in fashionable etiquette that he did not know that at evening parties the ladies did not wear hats. For good measure he enclosed the opinions of his friends, the Duchess of Sutherland and the Countess of Mar and Kellie. These are not preserved but must have been favourable.

The book was originally to be entitled *The Kaleidoscope of Life*, the title of one of the chapters. But there was no prolonged consideration of alternative titles. In keeping with the antagonism which now existed there was a dispute over royalties on the new book. When Lane proposed his terms Swettenham replied: 'Your letter made me laugh ... Do you wish me to take it somewhere else?'⁵⁷ Eventually Swettenham's demand for a 25 per cent royalty was scaled down to 20 per cent, to be increased to 25 per cent if sales reached a total of more than 4,000 copies within four years. Swettenham gave way ungraciously: 'I can't go on haggling.'⁵⁸ It did not receive particularly favourable reviews: '... the sweepings of his portfolio,' was one description.⁵⁹ After *Also and Perhaps* Swettenham had nothing more to offer Lane and from August 1914 he was working very hard at the Official Press Bureau. There is a break in the correspondence until the discussions over the appendix to a reprint of *British Malaya*.⁶⁰ There, to all intents and purposes, the Lane correspondence ends. Yet Swettenham was to write three more books in his long life.

The first of these was *Arabella in Africa*, published in 1925. It was of interest chiefly because the dust-jacket and illustrations were undertaken by Rex Whistler, assisted by Mary Forster-Knight. This was one of the earliest commissions undertaken by Whistler.⁶¹ The book was completed with a helpful map of the northern parts of Algeria and Tunisia in a pocket at the back and a suggested itinerary

for future travellers wishing to benefit from the experience of Swettenham and his young protégée. The dedication, to 'Patricia', 'my near relative' seems designed to puzzle. Swettenham had no near relative of that name, and it is likely that the near relative was a means of making socially acceptable, in print, a straightforward account of a journey which Swettenham made through North Africa with a lady friend of his in her mid-twenties, her ladies-maid and a chauffeur. It contains little to interest the modern reader, with its accounts of rudimentary inns, and the wilful behaviour of Arabella, but reveals on occasion many of Swettenham's traditional prejudices: 'insalubrious natives' feature prominently.

It was followed, three years later in 1928 by *Three Gifts: An Arab Love Story*, a translation from the French version entitled *Tangu et Feline* by Monsieur de la Harpe of the late eighteenth century. Swettenham in the introduction claimed to be a collector of old illustrated French books, amongst which was a 1780 edition of de la Harpe. The fairy story is an account of a young man, who is endowed with magic powers which, invariably, he uses in matters of the heart, to his own ultimate disadvantage. For Swettenham it must have been a poignant reminder of that dreadful marriage which had marred his life for well over half a century. Swettenham's final, and in many respects most readable work was *Footprints in Malaya*, published in 1942 when Swettenham was 92. Swettenham justified it in his dignified preface: 'I do not pretend to be an artist in any sense, so the desire to present artfully has not worried me. I had some sort of story which it interested me to tell, and I have told it in my own fashion as a sufficient object in itself.'⁶²

Despite various errors in dating, many of which have been mentioned in the course of this work, it is an impressive exercise in recollection for a man of that age. It is also highly selective. Sir Richard Winstedt, reviewing the work in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, noted sarcastically: 'It is a pity that fate seems hardly to have brought him into contact with Sir William Maxwell, the best Malayan scholar of the period and creator of the admirable land system of the Malay States. It is strange too to find no mention of Mr H.N. Ridley ...' He believed Swettenham's account of Pangkor had been biased, and, criticizing Swettenham's condescending attitude towards the Malays, remarked: '... but is one wrong in feeling that his attitude is rather that of the squire towards his old retainers?' No doubt the review caused the old man to stir uneasily in his armchair.

Reference was made earlier in this chapter to Swettenham's remarkable skill in perpetuating, both during his life, and after his death, his own interpretation of the history of the Peninsula in which he had played so prominent a part. No assessment of his written

work would be complete without considering this aspect in rather more detail.⁶³

His first significant writing on the subject was the memorandum which he prepared for Jervois in the middle of 1875.⁶⁴ It must however also be noted that in his conduct of the trials of those accused of complicity in Birch's murder, Swettenham was able, by skilful manipulation and on occasions suppression of the evidence, to ensure that a version of events favourable to the British cause and to himself in particular was accepted. Thereafter, his first substantial contribution, apart from his diaries, was to assist his friend C.P. Lucas, during his leave in the mid-1880s with his first volume of *A Historical Geography of the British Colonies*.⁶⁵ As has been noted Swettenham wrote a substantial chapter on the Straits Settlements and the Protected Malay States.⁶⁶ The account it contains of the introduction of the Residential system is uncontroversial: '[Perak] was left to itself till 1874, when a British Resident was appointed under the provisions of the treaty of Pangkor.' Perhaps this reflected Lucas' editorial hand.

The first occasion on which he wrote in any detail under his own name of the events of the 1870s in the Peninsula was in *About Perak*, the series of articles first published in the *Straits Times*, and subsequently issued by them as a book in 1893.⁶⁷ Noting that 'the story of British interference in Perak and subsequently in the other Malay States is one of more than passing interest, and has yet to be written,' Swettenham added 'while the circumstances alone made that interference the duty of the paramount power, Rajah Abdullah, who was believed to be the rightful claimant to the throne of Perak, besought the assistance of the Governor of the Straits to introduce order into Perak, to control the Chinese and to send him an experienced officer to aid him in properly administering the Government of the Country.'⁶⁸

The wording was cautious: Raja Abdullah 'was believed to be the rightful claimant.' By whom? The British, of course. Later in the book, there is mention of the factional squabbles among the Perak chiefs.⁶⁹ He continued: 'Perhaps, it is hardly surprising that, under these circumstances Raja Abdullah asked for the assistance of the Governor of the Straits Settlements to send him an Officer to teach him how to rule this unruly country.'

About Perak was of course written before W.H. Read's 'anonymous' memoirs were published, although it seems fairly certain that Swettenham would have known Read's story.⁷⁰ Here Read claimed credit for having been asked by Clarke to obtain from Abdullah a letter to Clarke specifically requesting help. With the help of Tan Kim Cheng, he drafted a letter, and duly obtained Abdullah's signature to it, though under what circumstances is

unclear. It would have been more correct to say that Abdullah 'was prevailed upon' to ask for assistance. Birch's tactlessness was scarcely alluded to, although his fearless energy and ability were spoken of in terms of high praise. Birch's murder was described as 'a political murder in which there was no semblance of personal feeling,' a doubtful proposition to say the least, and Swettenham referred with relish to 'the subsequent short occupation of the State by British troops [which] did more to secure permanent tranquility than 10 or 15 years of "advice" by a British Resident could have done without it.' Swettenham's first account of the episode in *About Perak* was very strongly British-centred.

The next occasion when Swettenham was recorded on the subject was his address to the Royal Colonial Institute in London on 31 March 1896.⁷¹ Here, after describing briefly the chaos which previously existed in Perak, and threatened to spill over into Penang, Swettenham laid stress on the fact that Abdullah asked for assistance in the form of a British officer to teach him 'the art of administration.' He continued: 'I believe this was the first suggestion of the residential idea, and if I am right, it is both curious and interesting that it should have originated, even in its crudest form in the Malay states.'

This of course was not true. Hastings and Raffles had emphasized the importance of using indigenous institutions in administration, as had the Dutch in their relations with some of the Javanese rulers. Moreover Sir Hugh Low had applied with considerable success to the problems of Perak in the late 1870s, lessons learnt earlier from the Brooke regime in Sarawak.⁷² Closer to home, G. Campbell and J.F.A. McNair had first proposed the appointment of Residents in the Peninsula in the early 1870s.⁷³ Once again Birch's tactlessness was not mentioned. He was 'murdered to satisfy the hatred of foreign interference, the intolerance of the white man's control.' It was the truth, but not the whole truth.

Two other points of interest emerge from a study of this lecture. Swettenham dwelt on the horrors of debt-bondage which was abolished on the arrival of British Residents. He added: '... in every state where there is a British Resident, slavery of all kinds has been absolutely abolished; forced labour is only a memory. Courts of Law presided over by trustworthy magistrates, mete out what we understand as justice to all classes and nationalities, without respect of persons, and the lives and property of people in the protected Malay States are now as safe as in any part of Her Majesty's dominions.' This again was true, but with two important riders. Debt-slavery was indeed abolished, but to a certain extent the indentured labour system, whether of Indians or Chinese took its

place. Swettenham was well aware of this, having sat on the Labour Commission in 1890-1. However he did admit in the introductory remarks to the talk that British involvement was unwelcome to the Malays. He went on in this talk to explain how British rule was imposed, and how the Malays had come to appreciate this.

Swettenham's next account occurred in his book *The Real Malay*, in the chapter entitled 'A New Method' published in 1900. The request from Abdullah for assistance was mentioned casually, before Swettenham eulogized Sir Andrew Clarke: '...Clarke did not wait to write a report that might have led to nothing; he seized this opportunity to deal with the Chinese quarrel to summon the Perak Chiefs to a meeting — whereat the claimant with the best title was recognized as Sultan — the Treaty of Pangkor was concluded.' This breathless account begs two important questions: first, not all the chiefs were summoned to Pangkor, and fewer still came. Second, the claim that the chief with the best title was recognized was to put it mildly, a gross over-simplification. However it must be remembered that this book was one for public consumption, aimed at the substantial market for *belles-lettres* which existed at that time in late Victorian England.

In this same account he touched on the circumstances of British involvement in Selangor. 'In Selangor, beyond a naval demonstration, the shelling of some forts, and the execution of certain reputed pirates, there had been no conflict with British forces.' There was scarcely likely to be in the face of such overwhelming fire-power. Sultan Abdul Samad was far too wily to provoke a head-on confrontation.

By the time of the Rulers' Conference in 1903, Swettenham felt himself in a position to set out with little fear of contradiction, his own interpretation of the history of the Peninsula in the previous thirty years.⁷⁴ He made the best of his opportunity to do so in his speech at the official opening.

Swettenham's next and penultimate public statement of his position on the history of the times came in *British Malaya*. Kimberley's instructions were described in these terms:

Lord Kimberley had however furnished Sir Andrew Clarke with instructions of the first importance, showing a disposition to make an entirely new departure, and to recognize the duty forced upon England, as the dominant power to interfere in the Malay states and put a stop to a disgraceful state of affairs. The duty was imperative from motives of humanity alone; but it was equally certain that to undertake it would be highly beneficial to British interests and British trade, though these pleas had hitherto been dismissed as of no importance.⁷⁵

By this time, Read's memoirs, with his account of the dinner party with Clarke, had been published, and it is scarcely conceivable that Swettenham, who had been in UK since 1903, could have missed reading it, even if he had previously been unaware of this incident. Once again, with a brief mention of Abdullah's request for assistance, Swettenham launched into praise of Clarke:

[The instructions] invited the Governor to report his proposals, and Sir Andrew Clarke, a man of energy and decision, ready to take any responsibility, decided that this was no time for talking; the situation demanded immediate action, and he would take it, reporting what he had done, not what he proposed to do. Naturally the Governor did not come to this conclusion until he had gone thoroughly into the case, taken the advice of all those who had any knowledge of Malay and Chinese affairs, and felt confident that he could carry his plan to a successful issue.⁷⁶

Clarke certainly consulted Swettenham. Yet he went out of his way to sidestep both C.J. Irving, the Auditor-General, who had made several trips in the previous two to three years at Ord's request, to assess the lie of the land. He certainly consulted Irving, but having discovered that Irving favoured a policy of benign neglect towards the states, he left him severely alone. Since Ord had committed few of his thoughts on the Malay states problem to paper, Clarke, by leaving Irving at Singapore when he went to Pangkor, deprived himself of a valuable source of information. The same could be said of Anson, the Lieutenant-Governor of Penang. But he had in any case been the man who had persuaded Ord to support the Mantri, and his presence, while Clarke was metaphorically changing horses to favour Abdullah would have been an embarrassment. Swettenham's account is therefore by any measure a partial one.

Later in the book he talked about his Selangor experiences, and the piracy problem. Two such cases, one in November 1873, and a further one in early 1874 rapidly absorbed Clarke's attention once the Pangkor Engagement had been concluded.⁷⁷ The drastic action, possibly a miscarriage of justice which followed these incidents did not however prevent a further case of piracy at Kuala Labu, some twenty-five miles up the Langat River in July 1874. This provoked Clarke to revisit Langat, the Sultan and Kudin, with Swettenham being left there as the Sultan's unofficial adviser. Although Swettenham recorded these details in *British Malaya*, he failed to mention that Clarke's second visit to Klang and Langat, which left him, Swettenham, residing at Langat, was in response to a further case of piracy.⁷⁸ This was an important point. Swettenham's contention was that the placing of Residents in Perak and Selangor was in response to appeals from the rulers.

Technically, he was correct, but those appeals would scarcely have been made if the administration in Singapore, headed by the Governor, had not been anxious to take a hand in the affairs of the states. *British Malaya*, through a series of editions remained the standard work on the Peninsula, till the revisions of Parkinson and Malaysian historians of the 1960s. It was a remarkable achievement.

In his final account, *Footprints in Malaya*, Swettenham spelled out the chaos which existed in the coastal districts of Perak, and traced the change of policy to Kimberley's dispatch quoted above, which Clarke took out with him to Singapore. But beyond noting Kimberley's responsibility, Swettenham made no attempt to account for the change in policy, subsequently analysed in detail by Cowan and Parkinson. Swettenham left the impression that Her Majesty's Government, surrounded in the Straits Settlements by the anarchy and disorder of the Native States for the best part of thirty years suddenly woke up and changed its mind, in the interests of humanity, and on the appeal of a claimant to the sultanate of Perak. Yet by this stage he did at least admit that Ismail and Yusof were not present at Pangkor. Once again there was no mention of the atmosphere of intimidation which must have existed. It was a superficial, Anglo-centric, interpretation of events, ably sustained by Swettenham during his long life and after. How did he achieve this?

First, there is evidence that he tampered with documents in later years. It was suggested in Chapter 13 that he had in some way edited his diaries, which were written for perusal by the Governor. We have noted the entry in his diary of 9 April 1874 which was highly critical of Commander Patterson.⁷⁹ Swettenham would scarcely at that time have used such strong language in a diary to be submitted to the Governor. It is possible of course that this section of the diary was not submitted to the Governor, or he may have made fair copies, an expurgated version, for the gubernatorial eye which has not survived. Or it is just possible that he made the report intentionally, to draw Clarke's attention to excesses which were being committed, although there is no sign that any further action was taken. We do know at least that he was capable of telling tales from the extraordinary private letter he wrote from Perak, not long after the end of the Perak War.⁸⁰ As in so much of Swettenham's life, particularly his private life, we cannot say for certain. But it looks suspiciously as though there may have been more than one version of certain parts of his diaries.

More clear-cut is the case when an investigation was conducted by W.E. Maxwell into land dealings by Spence-Moss, the railway engineer, and in all probability by Swettenham himself in Selangor. Here the relevant Selangor Secretariat files have

annotations in Swettenham's handwriting, and, significantly, crucial pages are missing. They may simply have been lost. Yet Swettenham had access to them when he was back in Selangor as Resident-General, and from his annotations we know he must have reviewed them.

If it is accepted that Swettenham was capable of tampering with evidence, we should perhaps be a little cautious about accepting at face value his own, uncorroborated statements. The area of his life where they occur in greatest abundance is of course his account of events immediately after Birch's death and during the Perak War. It is curious that Swettenham, such an inveterate hoarder of records, especially, almost exclusively, of those throwing a favourable light on his own activities, should not have retained some record of the trials of those held guilty of the murder of Birch, in which he played such a prominent role. Much corroboration of the story of course appeared in the voluminous Perak Enquiry Papers. Yet it was significant that these papers made little if any reference to the military activities after Birch's murder.⁸¹ Although Swettenham was not directly concerned in compiling them, the Singapore colonial establishment had a vested interest in ensuring that they reflected nothing untoward. But Swettenham's verbal account, later in his life, of how he escaped downriver, past the hostile barricades, varied dramatically from the authorized version, repeated in *Footprints*.⁸² Swettenham is on record, late in his life, as saying that he escaped because one of his old Malay girl-friends hid him in the bottom of the boat and covered him with sacks of copra. Were these the tall tales of an old man, or the beginnings of an untold story, far more dramatic than the authorized version we generally accept? We shall never know, but the point is made that evidence provided by Swettenham is not always to be taken at face value.

Before leaving the subject of Swettenham as both maker and writer of history, we may perhaps cast an eye on his rivals in historical interpretation: who were they, and how did they fare? The first, almost pre-Swettenham, was Sir Peter Benson Maxwell, who had retired from the post of Chief Justice in the Straits Settlements shortly after Swettenham's arrival. In 1878 P.B. Maxwell produced a remarkable pamphlet, entitled, sarcastically *Our Malay Conquests*, highly critical of British activities in the Peninsula. Given the high tide of empire which marked British political life at the time, it was scarcely surprising that the book sank, almost without trace.

The next authoritative work to appear on the Peninsula was Arnold Wright and Thomas H. Reid's *The Malay Peninsula*. This was published in 1912: 'On the one hand they [the authors] have sought to trace through their interesting windings the various movements, commercial and political, which led to the permanent

planting of the Union Jack at both ends of the Straits of Malacca; on the other they have attempted to sketch the modern influences which have firmly established British power on the mainland.' From at least one uncomplimentary reference to Swettenham's hostile attitude to rubber in the early days of the industry, it seems clear they were not friends of his. But they in general followed Swettenham's view, at least in their interpretation of the reasons for British involvement: Her Majesty's government was moved by appeals from Kudin's faction in Selangor, the Chinese merchants in Singapore and the deplorable state of affairs in Perak. Abdullah's appeal for recognition was not even mentioned, nor was any attempt made to explain why HMG had pursued a policy of masterly inactivity in the face of disorders for some years earlier. The Swettenham doctrine appeared to have taken root.

The first cracks began to appear in the late 1930s, when Rupert Emerson of Harvard University published his *Malaysia: A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule*. This was regarded at the time as an anti-imperial exercise, and does indeed put forward views opposed to those so assiduously propounded by Swettenham. Swettenham himself, rising ninety, showed that the old tiger still had claws: in a review for *British Malaya* he wrote:

The author of this book with the barbarous title ... deserves every possible credit for his astonishing industry in collecting and recording the immense amount of information set out in over 500 large pages of print ... To give this local and embittered controversy [decentralisation] ... the dignity of a record in the shape of a large volume, itself full of highly contentious writing, seemed needless and naturally raises the question of what was the author's object in writing it.

Possibly an impartial reader, struck by the constant reference to Imperialism, and especially to British Imperialism coupled with capitalism, might conclude that the author ... seeking to ride a tilt against all Imperialism, ... had seized upon the case of the Malay States as an admirable text on which to preach a sermon. If so, he chose a singularly unfortunate instance of Imperial rapacity from which to draw his moral and adorn his tale.

It seems fair to ask Mr Emerson why, in criticising British Imperialism, he omitted to describe the real circumstances under which the British Government, after years of refusal — consented at last to accept the invitation of Malay Rulers to interfere in their affairs. Also to say that had there been no such invitation, the British Government was compelled in the interests of its own Colony and people, to

interfere for their protection and to maintain the freedom of the Season [on] the Malayan coast.

Is it possible to make a fair and useful study of a then unique experiment when the material facts are omitted and ignored?

But the suggestion that the departure of 1874 was made in the interest of Imperialism supported by British capitalism is untrue. ...

Unless some mild protest is put on record it might be assumed, at any rate in the USA, that the greedy Imperial British Government went uninvited into the Malay States to secure for itself and its capitalist subjects the control of the rich Malay tin deposits. When once an idea like that has got a good start, it takes a deal of catching; and it is only those who know the facts who are likely to feel that the impression given by this study needs correction in the interests of historical accuracy. F.S.⁸³

The 'mild protest' was in fact a statement of some vehemence, so much so that it looked suspiciously like a shoring up operation. Yet thanks in part to the Second World War it was not till the late 1950s and early 1960s that Parkinson, and Malaysian historians began to review the whole question, and produced an interpretation which nowadays is more readily accepted.

If these were the highlights of Swettenham's largely successful attempt to impose his own view of recent Peninsula history on the public, we must not forget that there were also many lesser occasions: the publications of Perak Annual Reports provided regular opportunities for a paragraph or two of potted history. Nor was Swettenham idle in retirement. In his attempts to establish his position as an expert on Colonial administration, and as an assiduous writer of letters to the newspapers, he regularly reiterated his views of the history of the Peninsula.⁸⁴

At the end of the First World War, he became heavily involved in the affairs of the Association of British Malaya, the most influential if not the only non-government pressure group concerned with the affairs of the Peninsula. Their magazine, *British Malaya*, provided an ideal forum in which Swettenham, to the increasing exasperation of the Colonial Office, regularly aired his views, by letters or articles. Whether the issue was the role of the Resident-General, Decentralization or the Selangor Succession, Swettenham was always to the fore.

The final episode, in which Swettenham was most publicly and vociferously involved was Malayan Union, within months of his death, at the age of ninety-six.⁸⁵ Once again Swettenham in his letters to the press lost no opportunity of reiterating his interpretation

of Peninsular history. His final letter (the proconsul's letter) was written two months before his death.

There can have been few colonial administrators who impressed their mould so forcibly on a single territory. Fewer still lived long enough subsequently to vindicate their role by imposing, as successfully as Swettenham did, for half a century, their own interpretation of the events in which they played such a major role.

NOTES

1. A full list of his publications is given in the Bibliography, p. 733.
2. See Chapters 28 and 33 for details.
3. For a discussion on *About Perak* see Chapters 29 and 30.
4. Chapter 43. The Letters of the John Lane Archive (JLA) belonged to the Allen Lane Foundation, until their disposal by Sotheby's in December 1985. J.M. Gullick examined them before the sale. All except two are from Swettenham to Lane or to Bodley Head ('Dear Sir'). They are in manuscript and vary in length from one to six pages. There are two carbon copies of letters from Lane to Swettenham, late in the series, but they are of little interest. Swettenham inserted the day and month at the head of his letters but he did not usually put in the year. The collection is now arranged in chronological bundles. But whoever undertook this task did not in a few cases sufficiently understand the significance of internal evidence, for example of the address from which a letter is written. A few letters are clearly in the wrong bundles. Many of them cannot be dated with absolute certainty. But generally speaking the address of origin or the content is a reasonable guide to the year in which each letter was written.
5. Wilde had published 'Salome' in the *Yellow Book*.
6. *Also and Perhaps*, pp. 119 ff.
7. Number 12 in early 1897.
8. *The Real Malay*, pp. 86-104.
9. Both in *Malay Sketches*, pp. 31-7, 281-9.
10. *The Real Malay*, pp. 210-33.
11. *Unaddressed Letters*, pp. 1-5.
12. *Also and Perhaps*, pp. 143-226.
13. *The Real Malay*, pp. 86-104.
14. Heussler, 1981, op. cit., p. 85, quoting Robson, 1934, op. cit. Also *BM*, November 1926.
15. Printed Kratoska (ed.), 1983, op. cit.
16. J. de V. Allen, 1964, 'Two Imperialists: A study of Sir Frank Swettenham and Sir Hugh Clifford,' *JMBRAS*, 37 (1):42-73.
17. JLA, 7 June 1898.
18. JLA, 3 August 1899 and a letter of 6 September 1899 to the same effect.
19. *Stories by Sir Hugh Clifford* selected and introduced by William R. Roff, OUP, 1966.
20. See 'A Silhouette' of Syed Masshor in *The Real Malay*, pp. 224-31 and 'The King's Way', describing Sultan Yusof in *Malay Sketches*, pp. 161-178.

21. Stevenson, 1975, op. cit., p. 9, referred to Clifford's 'Rousseauesque' picture of kampong life.
22. *Unaddressed Letters*, Preface. See also Chapter 33.
23. JLA, letter of 1 November 1897.
24. JLA, letter of 22 November 1897.
25. JLA, 22 August 1898? There is some confirmation of this reception in Winstedt's Dictionary of Natural Biography article in which he says that this was the best of Swettenham's books. Winstedt first came to Malaya in 1902.
26. JLA, 12 November 1898.
27. JLA, 22 August 1898.
28. For the origins of *The Real Malay* see Clifford's preface to his 1927 ed. of short stories *In Court and Kampong*.
29. JLA, 13 April 1899. See also *STD*, 17 April, 24 and 28 July 1899.
30. See Chapter 43.
31. *Anglo-Saxon Review*, No. 1, June 1899 did in fact carry this sketch.
32. JLA, letter of 14 May 1899.
33. JLA, 3 August 1899.
34. JLA, 5 December 1899.
35. JLA, 6 April and 22 August 1900.
36. *STD*, 14 and 16 May 1904.
37. Two letters from Gertrude Bell to Swettenham in the possession of Mrs J. Wijsman.
38. See Chapter 43 for the controversy over distribution by The Times Book Club and John Lane. Unfortunately there is nothing in the JLA about the origins and writing of *British Malaya*. Correspondence that survives shows Swettenham and Lane at odds over such matters as royalty payments and the cost of illustrations, for example JLA, 3 February and 30 May 1906.
39. P. Kratoska, 1984, *A Select List of Files in the Selangor Secretariat, 1875-1955*, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang, p. 8.
40. JLA. The letter was dated '20 July,' probably 1897.
41. Chapter 31.
42. See Kratoska, 1984, op. cit., p. 199.
43. SP 16, 17, 19, 21-5.
44. Swettenham's memo, undated, but presumably around 1926, SP18. Smith's letters are found in SP 28-34.
45. *Footprints*, p. 106.
46. See end of Chapter 35.
47. The dispatches of Weld (1880-7) and Smith himself (1887-92) reporting in detail on their frequent tours of the States effectually rebut Smith's later assertions.
48. *British Malaya*, pp. 245, 247.
49. The letter in JLA gives no year, but must be 1916.
50. *British Malaya*, p. 363.
51. CO 273/455:356 Swettenham to CO, 25 December 1916.
52. JLA, 19 January 1917.
53. Letters in JLA.
54. SP 14.
55. *MM*, summarized the issue on 29 April 1926.

56. JLA, 15 August 1901.
57. Letter undated in JLA.
58. JLA, 25 April 1912.
59. *TOM*, 6 September 1912, quoting a review in *SFP*.
60. See pp 707 above.
61. No correspondence survives about the work, apart from a few perfunctory letters on proofs in JLA so it is not possible to ascertain how Swettenham came to choose Whistler for his drawings.
62. *Footprints*, p. 4.
63. Much of this section is drawn from a talk given by the author to Institut Pelajaran Tinggi, University of Malaya in 1988. Their permission to reproduce parts of it is greatly acknowledged.
64. Swettenham, 1880, op. cit.
65. *A Historical Geography of the British Colonies*, vol. 1. Clarendon Press, 1888.
66. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-28. See also Chapter 24 above.
67. See Chapters 30 and 31.
68. *About Perak*, p. 5.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
70. See Chapter 4.
71. Kratoska (ed.), 1983, op. cit., pp. 170-211.
72. For an account of the Brooke policy, see C. Hose in *ibid.*, pp. 366 ff.
73. Gullick, 1992, op. cit., pp. 12-3.
74. See account of Swettenham's opening speech at the Rulers' Conference of 1903, Chapter 41.
75. *British Malaya*, p. 174.
76. *British Malaya*, p. 175.
77. Chapter 7.
78. *British Malaya*, pp. 183-4.
79. Chapter 4, fn. 15.
80. See Chapter 13.
81. There is also Raja Mahmood's account of the escape down the river in his letter of 1911. See Chapters 13 and 47.
82. See Chapter 12.
83. Review in *BM*, December 1937, pp. 196-7.
84. See Chapter 43.
85. See Chapter 50.

Divorce at Last

The pattering of letters from Swettenham sustained throughout the 1930s upon various editorial desks was sharply interrupted in April 1938 by the announcement of a defended petition for the Easter Term Divorce Court in which he sought the dissolution of his marriage to Lady Swettenham.¹ Swettenham was then eighty-eight, and his wife was eighty years old. This was one of six cases brought in that term under the new Divorce Act of 1937. The act had been sponsored by A.P. Herbert and provided that a petition for divorce might be brought by either wife or husband on the ground that the respondent was incurably of unsound mind and had been continuously under care and treatment for a period of at least five years preceding the presentation of the petition.

Before following the case in further detail, it is necessary to review Sydney's life since the failure of the 1904 divorce proceedings. She had been discharged, after some eight years of certification on 1 May 1912. While she may theoretically have been deemed to have recovered, there is evidence to suggest that she was still a source of considerable potential, and perhaps at times actual physical embarrassment to her husband. On 25 July 1915 she wrote him a rambling and incoherent letter, the gist of which was that she would be satisfied by an allowance of £600 per year. On the 29 July she signed a typed letter accepting £600 p.a. paid quarterly in full and final settlement of all claims, concluding, 'I undertake to make no further demands of any kind and I promise not to molest or disturb you in person or by letter.'² It is evident by implication that Sydney Swettenham had been known to appear in person and create a scene.

If the war circumscribed her activities, it did not at least prevent her making a return visit to Malaya in 1916, where she stayed for several months, and was apparently received in colonial circles. In the course of the visit she attended the investiture in Kuala Kangsar of Rajah Alang Iskandar, son of Sultan Idris, as Rajah Bendahara, in the presence of Brockman, then Chief Secretary, R.G. Watson, Resident of Perak, and Oliver Marks.³

86. Loke Yew.



87. Sir Frank
Swettenham ?ca
1910.



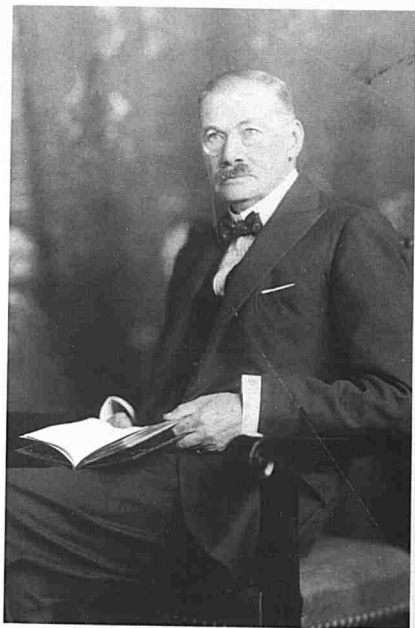
88. Sir James Alexander Swettenham, and Lady Swettenham, née Copeland, on their wedding day in Jamaica in August 1905.



89. Lord Lonsdale's shoot at Lowther, October 1911. Left to right, on shooting stick, Captain Duff, Standing : Sir Frank Swettenham, King Manuel of Portugal, the Hon. Launcelot Lowther, the Hon. Alec Macdonell, Mr Rowland Robinson. Seated: Lord Lonsdale with stick and Sir William Bars.



90. Sir Frank Swettenham in the butts at Lord Lonsdale's shooting party at Lowther.



91. Sir Frank Swettenham, 1920s.



92. Sir Frank Swettenham with Sultan Suleiman of Selangor in London, 1936.



93. Sir Frank Swettenham, probably 1930s.



94. Sir Frank Swettenham and his second wife, Vera on their wedding day, 22 June 1939.

This was her first visit since her stormy departure in 1894. It must have caused Swettenham, busy though he was at the Press Bureau, no little apprehension. The fact that she was received in such elevated circles suggests that amongst her husband's juniors at least there was some sympathy for her plight. On her return to Europe, despite the war, she had spent several months at Cannes and Vichy, returning to London in the autumn of 1917.⁴ In 1920 she revisited Cannes,⁵ apparently intending to stay for several months. In 1924 she paid her second return visit to Malaya. This involved visits to Kelantan, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, where she dined at Carcosa, Singapore and a visit to Bangkok.⁶

She paid a third and final visit in early 1928, and on this occasion, possibly as a result of a letter from Swettenham himself to his old friend, Clifford, now Governor, she appears to have been received either not all, or without the deference which she considered her due. Perhaps because of this slight, she proceeded to Saigon, where she had a very serious breakdown, and had to be admitted to a padded cell there. It was only with some difficulty that she was found similar accommodation on a French troop-ship sailing back to Europe. The British Consul in Saigon, F.G. Crichton, was involved, as was the Colonial Secretary in Singapore.⁷

Walter Ellis, from Downing Street wrote to Swettenham on the matter in August of that year, indicating that the incident had caused a major stir in official circles. In the same month she was admitted to Crichton Royal Hospital in Dumfries for a short period. It is not evident what happened to her between her breakdown in 1928 and the date when she was readmitted, certified, to the care of Dr Christian at Stanley House, Bath Road, Hounslow on 2 May 1930.⁸ There she remained until her death on 2 November 1947 at Wyke House, Isleworth, Middlesex.

The case was heard in May 1938 by Sir Boyd Merriman, President of the Divorce Court, with Mr Melford Stevenson appearing for Swettenham, and Mr William Latey for Lady Swettenham.⁹ Newspaper reports of the time gave few details, but Swettenham himself was in the witness box for three days, maintaining 'an attitude of grave, severe dignity,' refusing a chair, despite his years. It is clear from the list of affidavits which survives that the history of his marriage was subjected to close examination.

The first breakdown had occurred in 1887, though there can be little doubt that there were signs of manic depressive behaviour well before that date. Her first period of insanity involved a brief certification and admission to Cheadle in Cheshire for slightly over a month in November 1887. She was again certified for less than a

week at the end of November 1891, and admitted to Otto House, Hammersmith. To judge from the schedule of papers produced, no more than a passing reference was made to the events of 1894, which led to Sydney being dispatched back to UK in disgrace by her husband, apparently having become pregnant by another man. There were perhaps aspects of Swettenham's own behaviour at that date to which he did not wish to draw attention. It was simply noted that the marriage broke down irretrievably at the time. Sydney was not recertified until 31 January 1899, when she was readmitted to Otto House till 17 October that year. The events of 1904, when Swettenham's divorce petition failed, have already been described.¹⁰

Among the papers presented at the court hearing were a series of six letters written between February and July 1936 and one dated 24 December 1937 by Sydney Swettenham to her husband, which are still preserved on the divorce file. They are rambling, incoherent and frequently illegible. They would have served well to reinforce Swettenham's contention that his wife was insane.

The divorce proceedings recalled that the last onset of illness had lasted eleven years. But she had not been continuously insane since 1930. That she had moments of lucidity was stated in the divorce proceedings: 'the disorder is sometimes submerged, sometimes active.' This was borne out by the fact that in 1933 she had made a will, which was held to be legally valid on her death. Occasionally she was allowed away for a weekend to visit charitable Swettenham relations.¹¹ She had by now few close relations in her own family; so far as can be ascertained, all her brothers and sisters were dead. Gerald, the stockbroker, had died comparatively young in 1895, Cecil, an army officer, had died in India; Henry, after his brief stint in Malaya, died in America; Marcus had fought, and lost his life in the Spanish American War before Manila in 1898.¹² Her younger sister Violet had married and produced a son, Henry Chatterton Price, a banker, by this time retired, and living in Kent. He was named one of the executors, and was her official guardian in the court case. He was probably in poor health at the time, for he seems to have taken no active part in the proceedings, if he even attended, and died a few months later before the problems of Sydney's future maintenance had been resolved.

It was no doubt a matter of considerable relief to Swettenham that His Lordship was brief in his judgement. It was open to those caring for Lady Swettenham to decide whether she should be told of the divorce proceedings against her. They chose not to do so, and the first intimation she had received of the pending divorce case was when she read of it in the newspaper. The facts indicate a lack of sensitivity, or perhaps concern, on the part of those whose duty it was to care for her. Sir Boyd Merriman wished to say as little as

possible to add to her trouble. Sydney Swettenham, who was described in the papers at the time as capable of social intercourse and doing shopping was thus legally deprived by the certification of lunacy from the chance of putting her story. But as we shall see below, she was by no means lacking in resource to ensure that certain unpalatable facts were drawn to his Lordship's attention. Merriman, summing up, stated that he was satisfied, after listening to four physicians and Swettenham himself, that there was no prospect of a cure. His Lordship maintained that everything possible had been done for her over the last five years, and he was not prepared to draw any distinction between degrees of care and treatment which brought about cure or recovery as the case might be. But he added, significantly: 'I cannot say it would be possible without more convincing evidence to say that Sir Frank Swettenham's conduct conduced his wife's unsoundness of mind. It could not be a matter for surprise and resentment if the public official charged with these duties thinks it necessary to make such enquiries as he sees fit to make in this matter.' Despite the convoluted and ungrammatical wording, this was a severe indictment of a man who at the age of eighty-eight was still well known in colonial government circles and even in 1938 enjoyed considerable public respect and prestige. In fact, the public official concerned did not see fit to institute any further inquiries, perhaps believing that by this time the Swettenhams had tortured each other enough over some sixty years.

Left as we are with few facts, apart from a bare recital of the timing of the court decisions and Lady Swettenham's certification, it is difficult not to conclude that it was in part Swettenham's coldness towards his wife, and his refusal to return to her in 1904 which led to her prolonged mental breakdown. Indeed, the general context of Merriman's judgement suggests that it was Swettenham's behaviour leading up to her breakdown in 1904 which caused the harsh remarks mentioned above. That breakdown in itself must have been an enormous relief to Swettenham. It meant that he was not obliged by the court order to resume married life with her, and thus avoided much further inconvenience and embarrassment to himself.

Yet the most remarkable aspect of the case concerns Lady Swettenham's reaction. She was seriously and understandably provoked by this final insult, imposed upon her by her husband, after sixty years of misery. We have noted above that the illness was at times not evident, and it is clear that during one of these moments of lucidity, Lady Swettenham struck, and to considerable effect.

Possibly in the course of her visits to the local newsagent, at the end of the street, she had made the acquaintance of a retired

woman. The circumstances suggest a lady's maid. On discovering from the newspapers of the divorce proceedings, Sydney confided in her old friend, and they devised a spirited response. The friend was to attend the divorce court, incognito. This was duly done, and the two old ladies foregathered to consider the next move. The result was an anonymous, damning and colourful letter in pencil to Merriman, posted on 23 May 1938 from Hounslow. It reads as follows:

Sir,

I feel I must write to your Lordship as they say you are a good man, that terrible man today, Sir Frank, I mean why he drove her poor Ladyship mad, with his badness, when he took her to Manchester, ask him what her poor ladyship saw that night, that drove her wild, he had another woman with him. You ask him, sir, and when she went out to Singapore, didn't he bring Mrs Romer into the house as his mistress and her ladyship in the house. Mrs Romer is alive still, ask him if this is true, why sir he had one mistress after another, he is a bad man may God forgive him. Her ladyship is a good soul and good to the poor, every one loves her. I was in court today, sir, and how good you are, the wicked old man, he ought to be saying his prayers instead of telling lies, why he had one mistress after another. I wonder God don't strike him down, looking at him every day in the box he looked like old Harry himself, he only wanted the horns, and her poor ladyship she is good to me. I am 84 years, she is kind to everyone, she wouldn't hurt a fly, she comes to see me every week and brings me tea and sugar and lots of little things an old woman would like. I have prayed night and morning to the good God to send her a kind judge, and God heard my prayers and sent you. I can't hear but everyone told me you were wonderful. May God bless you Sir and don't say her poor ladyship is mad, she is not, Sir, she is 80 years and only eccentric like myself.

Ask him if he didn't bring Mrs Romer into the house with her ladyship in the house and Mrs Romer lived there. Pass this paper to him and watch his face. Mrs Romer is still alive.

I shall pray all night and God will guide your lordship, the doctor from Bedlam says she is alright and he must know.¹³

It was indeed a lively exposé. The Mrs Romer was evidently Mrs Rome. There is of course no means of knowing for certain whether Lady Swettenham's suspicions of Mrs Rome's role as mistress are correct. The balance of probabilities suggests she was.

Nor is there any means of knowing about Swettenham's scandalous behaviour in Manchester. Although in strict legal terms, it would have been improper for the judge to consider an anonymous letter such as this, which could not be produced in court, Mr Justice Merriman must have found it a remarkable document. The very fact that it was so carefully preserved amongst the divorce papers at Somerset House indicates that there was, amongst the lawyers at least, considerable sympathy for Lady Swettenham, and indeed admiration for the manner in which she deployed the only means at her disposal to ensure that her side of the case should not go unheard. Half a century of misery, acrimony, bitterness and outrage spilled out from the letter. There was no more that Sydney could lose. It was her last chance to settle old scores, and she did so with an efficiency which must command our respect.

On 26 May 1938 Swettenham sat alone with his head in his hands on a front bench in the divorce court while a decree nisi was granted to him. Within a week he had resigned his office of King of Arms in the Order of St Michael and St George. The press reports give no reason for such a resignation, but the timing suggests strongly that he did so in the light of public comment on his private life as revealed in the divorce proceedings.¹⁴ In his autobiography, however, which contains no mention whatsoever of his matrimonial life, Swettenham indicates that he retired after a service of the Order in St Paul's Cathedral. This was attended by King George VI and the Duke and Duchess of Kent. Swettenham's account not unnaturally gives not the slightest hint of pressure or impropriety.¹⁵

The divorce was made absolute in December of that year,¹⁶ and in the same month an annuity of £750 p.a. was purchased for Lady Swettenham. Even this had to go to the Court of Appeal before Swettenham would consent to contribute to the cost of the annuity out of his funds, rather than hers, and make provision to ensure the continuation of an annuity of this amount out of his estate, should he predecease her.¹⁷

The following year on 22 June 1939, he remarried, at Caxton Hall. His new wife was Vera Seton Guthrie, a daughter of John Gordon, a prosperous merchant in the South American trade, who, at the time of the birth of his elder daughter Vera on 15 June 1890 lived at 21 Albert Gate, Knightsbridge. In February 1911 she had married John Neil Guthrie of Eastbourne, the eldest son of John Douglas Meade Guthrie, a Scottish landowner of substance and formerly a captain in the 19th Hussars. He was five years older than she and in May 1906 had joined the 9th Queen's Royal Lancers as second lieutenant. In 1908 he transferred to the Irish Guards. Her first marriage, which took place on 28 February 1911 at the Guards Chapel, Wellington Barracks, was a very lavish affair,

reported fully in the Court Circular, with over 100 guests, many of them titled, and extravagant wedding presents. The reception was held at 22 South Audley Street, the bride's home. In August 1914 Guthrie's battalion, where he was by then a captain, was posted to France. He was twice wounded in the ensuing eight months, and was killed in action in mid-May 1915, at the battle of Festubert. There had been no children in their marriage.

At the time of her second marriage it was evident that Vera Guthrie had been living with Swettenham for several years. He wore morning dress for the occasion, but no buttonhole, while she wore a fox-fur, fashionable in those times. There were two witnesses, the bride's sister, the Duchess of Crussol, and Mr Eric Barker, described as a friend of Swettenham. The marriage came as a surprise even to his close family. After the ceremony they posed before the photographers, but Swettenham, who had suddenly become very coy about his age, and described himself only as, 'of full years,' refused to talk to the press.¹⁸

The Swettenham family maintained that Vera put no pressure on him to obtain a divorce and marry her, claiming that he himself insisted on it.¹⁹ Prima facie however the facts suggest otherwise. Why else should a man of eighty-nine, set in his ways and apparently living happily, wish to subject sixty years of tragic and at times discreditable personal life to public scrutiny, unless to regularize an ambiguous matrimonial position?

An examination of the photo of Swettenham at Court with the Sultan of Selangor in 1936²⁰ shows signs of disfiguring moles on his face. This contrasts sharply with the clear complexion revealed in the photograph of his second marriage in 1939. It provides support for the contention that at around this period Swettenham underwent major cosmetic surgery to improve his appearance, presumably in anticipation of his marriage. He must have been one of the earliest candidates for a face-lift. At the same time, he evidently passed over to his second wife such substantial assets as he had managed to retain, and managed to conceal this from the authorities by changing simultaneously his lawyers, bankers and accountants.²¹ Enquiries were made after Swettenham's death by the Inland Revenue authorities, who said they thought Swettenham was a very rich man, but were surprised to find that this apparently was not the case.²²

There can be no doubt that Swettenham found in his second marriage much of the solace and comfort so noticeably absent from his first. He was by now a very old man, and grateful for Vera's care. *Footprints in Malaya* was effusively dedicated: 'To Vera, my beloved. In wisdom subtle, in variety, infinite.'²³ There also exist pages of excruciating verse written by a besotted Swettenham to

Vera.²⁴ Yet the establishment which they maintained was a curious one. Perhaps due to the exigencies of war, they moved for part of the time to a cottage near Datchet, outside Windsor, while much of the time that he was in London Swettenham spent in residential hotels in Knightsbridge. That at least was where he frequently met people.²⁵ Those with memories of Hyde Park Gate under the second Lady Swettenham have strange recollections: she hated bright light, so the house was maintained in semi-darkness. On one occasion when relations came to visit Swettenham, he apologized for her absence, saying she had been summoned urgently to Brighton. The lie was revealed when a side-door to the sitting-room was inadvertently opened to reveal the second Lady Swettenham with her ear glued to the keyhole.²⁶

In 1901 Swettenham commented, in a somewhat bitter tone: 'Still these early impressions may account for the fact that the realisation of my ambition, my unreasonable ambition, is not within the gift of Kings.'²⁷ Swettenham's allusion, and the context, are ambiguous, but hint strongly that he was referring to his failure to achieve a happy marriage. The early impressions in the same article, referring to a childhood as an orphan from the age of ten, brought up by an elder sister in Scotland may indicate that he blamed, in part at least, his childhood experiences and lack of family life for his failure to make a success of his own marriage. He was left with cold comfort, as he contemplated the successful divorce proceedings. If he did not write them on this occasion, Swettenham might well have recalled verses written at some time earlier in his career:

Why seek blue roses when the red are fair?
Gladdening the eye and burdening the air
With sweetest perfume, so that all men say
'Gather ye roses, wear them while you may.'

Are you quite wise to crave a fate bizarre
Having so much which others never share?
Life has its limits, even death is dull,
With no more flowers to cull.

But there is worse than death, and that is shame,
For which oneself alone must bear the blame.
Can any turgid scandal you'd acclaim
Be worth the heirloom of a tarnished name?²⁸

NOTES

1. *Free Press*, 23 April 1938.
2. Divorce file, Somerset House, Reg. 7814 Ref. 3/107/85P.

3. *TOM*, 12 May and 10 and 26 June 1916.
4. *TOM*, 23 October 1917.
5. *MM*, 30 December 1920.
6. *MM*, 1, 4 and 7 November 1924.
7. Details in CO 273/551.
8. Papers on 1938 Divorce file, Somerset House.
9. *Free Press*, 4 June 1938.
10. Chapter 42. *Free Press*, 27 May 1938, Law Reports, Swettenham v. Swettenham (1938), p. 216 and 1938 Divorce File in Somerset House cited above.
11. Mrs J. Wijsman, pers. comm.
12. Harrow School Records.
13. The second paragraph, beginning 'Ask him...' is written on a separate slip of paper. The final paragraph, 'I shall pray...' is written across the top of the letter. Original letter among the court records of the 1938 divorce.
14. *Sunday Times*, 12 June 1938.
15. *Footprints*, p. 161.
16. *Free Press*, 5 December 1938.
17. *Free Press*, 4 January 1939 and *Sunday Times*, 28 May 1939. At an early stage in researching this biography, there was in the *Straits Times* photographic archive a revealing photograph of Swettenham, in tail coat and top hat, at the Registry Office, with Vera in fox-fur tippet simpering on his shoulder. Unfortunately the photograph can no longer be traced.
18. *STD*, 27 June 1939.
19. The late Mrs Mary Swettenham, pers. comm.
20. *BM*, November 1936, p. 159 and Chapter 47.
21. The late T.B. Barlow, pers. comm.
22. The late T.B. Barlow, pers. comm., consulted by the Revenue, was aware that Swettenham had simultaneously changed all his professional advisers, but knew nothing of Swettenham's personal circumstances, and so was unable to assist.
23. *Footprints*, p. 4.
24. Mrs J. Wijsman, pers. comm.
25. Tun Ismail Ali, pers. comm. The late Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard met Swettenham in 1946 'in his hotel in Basil Street.' *Taman Budiman: Memoirs of an Unorthodox Civil Servant*, 1979, p. 143, possibly on the same occasion.
26. Mrs J. Wijsman, pers. comm.
27. Quoted in *MM*, 10 July 1901 from article in *Mainly About People*.
28. From the Swettenham Manuscript Papers, Stoodley Coll.

Malayan Union and Finale

It had become obvious to the British government as early as 1942 that plans would have to be prepared for the resumption of British rule in Malaya after the war had ended.¹ Edward Gent, who had worked in the Colonial Office since 1920, became Assistant Under-Secretary for State in the Colonial Office in 1942 and began immediately, with the assistance of such British officials as were available, to make plans for the administration of Malaya after the war. Gent and his colleagues worked on the assumption that British rule would be resumed as a result of the defeat of Japan in a campaign which would involve an invasion of Malaya. After some discussion, it was agreed that the British proposals should be kept confidential until the Japanese had been defeated, to ensure that this information was not used as a propaganda weapon by the Japanese.

The years between the wars were marked by vigorous debates about the value of centralizing the administration, in which Swettenham had had his say. Colonial officials with pre-war experience of Malaya were anxious that the opportunity of a break occasioned by Japanese occupation should be used to fullest advantage to simplify the administration. This was to involve the transfer of the sovereignty of the Malay Rulers to the Crown, and the loss of autonomy of the separate Malay states. Finally a need was felt to extend to the other races the privileges which the Malay community alone had enjoyed, ever since the establishment of British influence began with the Pangkor Engagement of 1874. The extension of such privileges was considered to be only fair to the Indians and Chinese who had come to Malaya since that date, and had done so much to develop the country. It was further argued that in this way the immigrants could be welded, with the Malays, into a cohesive community which would be well placed to face post-war challenges.

Despite the secrecy, students of Malay affairs as well as Malay students in London were aware that constitutional changes were being considered, and submitted a memorandum to the Colonial Office entitled 'Post-War Malaya' in 1944. Yet it was not until 10

October 1945 that the full details were announced in Parliament. The next day Sir Harold MacMichael reached Port Swettenham with a brief to renegotiate treaties with the Sultans to enable the Malayan Union to be created. Swettenham in 1895 had distinguished himself by the alacrity with which he achieved the consent of the Sultans to Federation, but MacMichael stirred up a hornets' nest.

In the first place, all planning for the Malayan Union had taken place in a Britain which had for some three years been isolated from public opinion in Malaya. The Colonial Office officials had little idea of the stirrings of Malay nationalism which had occurred, with not a little encouragement from the Japanese, during the intervening period. They had moreover hoped that the loss of face occasioned by the precipitate collapse of Malaya and Singapore before the Japanese would to some extent have been made good by a vigorous campaign of reconquest. Instead the Japanese had capitulated after the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in early August 1945. Finally the Colonial Office had not consulted the old guard of retired Malayan experts, headed by a vociferous ninety-six-year-old Swettenham.

Initially MacMichael encountered little difficulty in obtaining the signatures he required. He began with Sultan Ibrahim of Johore, and then proceeded north and east. Other Sultans were less ready to sign, and there were clear indications that they felt, not unreasonably, that undue pressure had been used. In the case of the Raja of Perlis and the Sultan of Trengganu, he was dealing with individuals who had only days previously been set on their thrones by British influence, to replace collaborators with the Japanese. In the speed with which he visited the Sultans, and initially at least secured their approval, there was more than an echo of Swettenham's own activities, persuading the predecessors of some of these same Sultans to agree to Federation in 1895.

MacMichael left Singapore for England, his mission as he thought accomplished, on 6 January 1946, and on 22 January the government issued its White Paper. The storm broke, when full details were disclosed. The Sultans meanwhile had had second thoughts, and no less than five of them had written to the Conservative MP, Captain L.D. Gammans bitterly charging the British government with 'naked acquisition,' and extracting signatures under duress.

The Sultans had through all of this become increasingly aware that a vigorous opposition was simultaneously building up in UK. There were two elements to this opposition: young Malays studying or working in UK at the time, and the old colonial hands such as Swettenham. The Malays were headed by Ismail Mohd. Ali, later to become Malaysia's first Malay Governor of the Central Bank. On 5

July 1945 *The Times* published a trenchant letter from him. In it he argued that the various treaties entered into by the British with the Malay States meant that Britain 'was legally and morally bound to preserve the existence of the Malay States and to maintain the identity of the Malay population.' He went on to argue that for the average Malay, loyalty to his Sultan was so total as to preclude any diminution of the Sultans' powers.

Ismail Mohd. Ali's letter was in response to an article on Malayan Union by an unnamed correspondent. In it the correspondent had been rash enough to refer to 'the late Sir Frank Swettenham.' An apology was printed under Ismail Mohd. Ali's letter to *The Times*. It was followed by Swettenham himself: 'May I point out, that, if late, I am still in time to be your obedient servant, Frank Swettenham.'² The old guard of Malaya hands in London, earlier divided on pre-war decentralization issues, now moved as one, with letters to the papers, Downing Street and Parliament. Swettenham, in full cry, renewed the fray five days later.³ A debate in the House of Lords on 29 December finally gave the subject the airing which it deserved, by which time the Sultans had made their reservations publicly known. Swettenham added a further denunciation in April 1946 in which he equated the MacMichael proposals with annexation.⁴

His final contribution to the debate, two months before his death was his signature on the famous 'proconsuls' letter' of 12 April 1946. The list of signatories read like a Who's Who of Colonial Malaya, including Sir Cecil Clementi and Sir Lawrence Guillemard, both former Governors. It was powerful reading, if ironic, in the light of Swettenham's own role at the Pangkor Engagement and in the creation of the Federation in 1896. It began in pompous tones:

We who have held the high appointments mentioned below in the Government services in Malaya, desire to express our profound concern at the manner in which nine Malay rulers, in their loyal trust of the British Government have been "invited" to sign treaties which they imperfectly understood, transferring "full power and jurisdiction to his Majesty the King" in their respective "protected states".⁵

The letter further drew attention to the fact that they were 'invited' to sign by an official whose brief was also 'to scrutinize their loyalty with power to recognize them or to depose them and appoint "suitable Malay personages" in their stead.' The signatories of the letter believed that a true federation of the nine states with the Straits Settlements (including Singapore) could be negotiated, to provide for the rights 'of all persons whose real home is in Malaya.' Noel Sabine, Public Relations Officer for the Colonial Office, which

must have been consulted before the proconsuls' letter was published, retorted in a letter dated 16 April, defending its actions. An acrimonious correspondence and debate continued, while the Sultans boycotted the installation of Malcolm Macdonald as Governor-General of the Malayan Union in Singapore on 22 May. By 11 June, the date of Swettenham's death, it was clear that the Malayan Union scheme would not survive for long.

His death on 11 June 1946 at the age of ninety-six was announced in *The Times* two days later.⁶ The funeral took place on 19 June at St George's, Hanover Square, attended by relatives and representatives of the different Malayan organizations, including the rubber industry, followed by interment at Brookwood Cemetery.⁷

The tragic Sydney, the first Lady Swettenham, survived her former husband by over a year, finally dying on 22 November 1947 at Wyke House, Isleworth, Middlesex. Although she had made a valid will, both of her executors, Henry Chatterton Price and Walter Frith had predeceased her. Walter Frith was not related to her, but was apparently an old friend of long standing, a prolific playwright, novelist and critic, who was most active between 1889 and 1911. He had been educated at Harrow and Trinity Hall, Cambridge, where he read law before becoming a man of letters. A personal tribute in *The Times*⁸ described him as a 'modest, kind and alluring personality.' We may conclude that he had met the Swettenhams on one of their early leaves in London, before 1894, and, charitable man that he was, kept in touch with her in her lonely old age after his own marriage: for which she was grateful. The will contained two specific bequests, some jewellery to Lady Lyle, the wife of an MP and a Malay chain, locket and bracelet, the gift to her of the Sultan of Perak while Swettenham was Resident there, which was to be returned to his successor.

The residue, which was to have been divided between Price and Frith, devolved, since they had predeceased her, onto Price's two sons, and, in Frith's case, to two Holmes nieces, married daughters of her brothers. The estate was valued at £560, so after the deduction of the specific bequests the residue cannot have amounted to very much. The Malayan artifacts in Swettenham's collection were sold under the terms of his will, to the Malayan Government. The collection, which consisted largely of Malay silverware with plates, betel-nut boxes and other items of ceremonial use was undoubtedly the finest of its kind ever assembled. It is now lodged with Muzium Negara, Kuala Lumpur.⁹ The Swettenham collections of Sargent paintings and ceramics were sold at Sotheby's in 1947.¹⁰

The second Lady Swettenham, probably well-off in her own right and undoubtedly well-provided for by her husband, lived on

till October 1970, and is still remembered by those who met her then as a formidable Edwardian lady, with piercingly blue eyes.

Swettenham was by any standards a remarkable man, and certainly one of the three most able British administrators together with Maxwell and Low, to have left their marks on the Malay Peninsula. Both of the rivals owed much to Low as mentor and example. W.E. Maxwell was a man definitely more gifted academically, but one who did not enjoy Swettenham's longevity or his good fortune to serve the whole of his career in one place. For that reason alone, Swettenham's contributions to the Malay Peninsula must be reckoned greater. The continuity of his service, rising eventually to Governor and High Commissioner, was a rare enough achievement in the annals of British Colonial history. Add to this his extreme longevity, and continued involvement in Malayan affairs after his retirement. The result was an outstanding public career which spanned almost the whole period of active British involvement in the Malay States. Starting with the Pangkor Engagement in 1874, there was not a single major issue of importance in the Malay States with which Swettenham was not closely associated until 1903. Thereafter till his death in 1946, the Colonial Office never lacked the benefit of his prolific advice.

In his working career, he was most closely associated with the provision of infrastructure facilities on the west coast of the peninsula, chiefly railways and roads. Without his drive and enthusiasm, it is difficult to imagine how this part of the country could have been opened up at such speed as occurred. The major irony of his career was his espousal of the cause of the Sultans of the states. Yet his contributions in 1874 and particularly at Federation in 1895 greatly diminished their role and standing in the country. By the turn of the century they recognized and resented this: it was one of the several reasons which led to his premature retirement. The rest of his long life was devoted paradoxically to the defence of the position of those same rulers. Swettenham had convinced himself in the course of his retirement that the outward and visible display of pomp with which they were treated by the Colonial government was not just the show he had insisted upon during his own career: it was the real substance of his post-retirement campaigns. It was thus at the end of his life that he found himself in the curious position of backing the rulers in the British press, in defence of their constitutional rights, against Malayan Union and against his own Colonial Office. He was supported by Malay students in London who were to become leading figures in independent Malaya, and later Malaysia. It is doubtful whether Swettenham fully recognized the significance of the support he gave to the Malays against Malayan Union in the last months of his life:

he would have been agreeably amazed by the subsequent distinguished careers of his Malay student co-activists, Tun Ismail Ali and Tun Mohamed Suffian. Yet there was poetic justice as well as irony in the end of his life. Throughout his career, even in the early stages, he had argued that local indigenous Malay institutions should be fostered and supported: the velvet glove which masked the iron fist of British control. By the end of his life he was, perhaps unwittingly, supporting not just the outward and visible signs, but the genuine essence of Malay traditional power structures.

Of his personal characteristics, cynicism, irony and sarcasm were striking features combined with a bonhomie, less forced as the years advanced. As an older man he was both genial and convivial. His stories of which he had a large supply, elaborated as the years passed, enabled him to carve for himself in the Edwardian social world before the First World War a position not usually accorded to retired Colonial Governors. In his youth these characteristics masked a ruthless ambition, to succeed both professionally and socially. He allowed nothing to stand in his way, whether it was professional scruples in his tussle with Maxwell, financial probity, or, most tragically his marriage. This was the blight of his life. It revealed him as cruel, cold-hearted, and deceitful. Moreover the deceit seems to have placed him in a position where he was for several years exposed to blackmail. Add to this a macabre and perhaps sexually associated fascination with death. The result was an outstandingly able and effective man: but scarcely a nice one.

NOTES

1. For a detailed discussion of Malayan Union, see A.J. Stockwell, 1979, *British Policy and Malay Politics during the Malayan Union Experiment, 1942 - 1948*, MBRAS Monograph No.8. See also Albert Lau, 1991, *The Malayan Union Controversy, 1942-1948*. OUP, Singapore.

2. *The Times*, 5 July 1945.

3. *The Times*, 29, 31 October and 6 November 1945, including a letter from C.A. Vlieland. Vlieland was in the MCS between 1914 and 1941, a clever and unorthodox man, who had probably not met Swettenham. As Superintendent of Census, 1931, he produced one of the best decennial analyses in this series. He was, before the debacle, scathing in his criticism of Singapore's defences.

4. *The Times*, 6 April 1946.

5. *The Times*, 12 April 1946.

6. Obituary. *The Times*, 13 June 1946. The death certificate indicated that the cause of death was intestinal.

7. *The Times*, 20 June 1946.

8. *The Times*, 12 August 1941.

9. *STD*, 18 November 1948. Article by J.N. McHugh.

10. *STD*, 14 December 1970.

Appendix

Sir F.A. (FAS) and Sir J.A. (JAS) Swettenham's letters to *The Times* 1919-1946 are listed below, with subject matter.

Author	Date	Subject
FAS	11 July 1919	Fantastic Growth of Public Expenditure
FAS	1 October 1919	Strikers and the Community
FAS	15 March 1920	Departmental Estimates
FAS	24 June 1920	Mesopotamia
FAS	17 August 1920	Direct Action
FAS	9 November 1920	Jutland Papers
FAS	15 August 1921	Economy First
FAS	19 September 1921	The Crown Colonies
JAS	20 September 1921	The Crown Colonies
FAS	30 October 1922	Ministers Old & New
FAS	30 April 1923	Wembley Park Scenes
FAS	19 July 1923	Singapore Base
FAS	24 July 1923	Singapore Base
JAS	26 July 1924	Mr Lloyd George & the Mines
FAS	13 December 1923	The Government's Position
JAS	26 July 1924	Mr Lloyd George & the Mines
JAS	2 September 1924	Officer's Duty under Martial Law
FAS	14 September 1924	India and Opium
FAS	16 September 1924	The Opium Evil
JAS	29 October 1924	Labour & the Social System
FAS	6 August 1924	Settlement of the local Crisis
JAS	10 September 1925	Credit for Russia
FAS	4 April 1927	Firm Policy in China
JAS	11 July 1927	Labour and the Land
JAS	1 August 1927	Labour and the Land
JAS	9 November 1928	Value of the Sovereign
FAS	31 August 1929	Mr Snowden at the Hague
FAS	20 February 1930	Kanchenjunga
FAS	28 February 1930	Kanchenjunga

Swettenham

FAS	1 May 1930	Extravagance in our Time
JAS	5 May 1930	West Indian Sugar
FAS	20 May 1930	"Too much Spending"
FAS	23 June 1930	Women and Indian Policy
FAS	22 September 1930	Gallant Enemies
FAS	15 December 1930	Public Expenditure
FAS	27 May 1931	A Quotation and its Sequel
FAS	22 June 1931	The Male Servant Tax
FAS	29 October 1931	Women & the Budget
JAS	4 April 1932	Lord Kitchener at Alexandria
JAS	16 April 1932	Lord Kitchener at Alexandria
FAS	27 April 1933	The Jamaican Earthquake
FAS	19 October 1933	The Future of Malaya
FAS	14 February 1935	Close the Ranks
FAS	27 August 1936	Dynastic Problems in Malaya
FAS	23 October 1936	Snipe Shooting
FAS	28 September 1937	Morocco Riots
FAS	7 November 1937	".....Dans Cette Galère"
FAS	19 July 1938	The Colonial Office
FAS	23 March 1942	The Loss of Malaya
FAS	13 November 1942	The Malays
FAS	5 July 1945	The Future of Malaya ("the late Sir Frank")
FAS	10 July 1945	A Malay Union
FAS	29 October 1945	A Malay Union
FAS	31 October 1945	A Malayan Union
FAS	6 November 1945	A Malay Union
FAS	6 April 1946	A Malay Union
FAS et al.	12 April 1946	A Malayan Union (Proconsuls' Letter)

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