

The Story of KUALA LUMPUR (1857 – 1939)

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(1857 – 1939)

J.M. Gullick

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A Note on the Name 'Kuala Lumpur'

You may have heard that in Malay the name 'Kuala Lumpur' means 'the Muddy River Junction'. It may be so but there are reasons for doubting whether that is the true origin of the name.

'Kuala Lumpur' is indeed two Malay words. But a Malay speaking his language according to his own idiom would not combine them in that way. There is the problem.

Kuala means the place where a river runs into another larger river or into the sea — the point at which the river loses its identity in some more extensive flow of water. So one links 'kuala' (as a place name) with the name of the river which comes to an end at the *kuala*. Kuala Selangor for example is the estuary of the Selangor River where it runs into the sea. Since Kuala Lumpur lies some twenty miles inland the *kuala* here must be the point of junction with a larger stream. There is of course a confluence of two small rivers in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. It is the point where the Gombak joins the larger Klang.

By Malay usage the place ought to be called Kuala Gombak, the end of the Gombak river. Yet from 1857 if not before it has always been called Kuala Lumpur.

There are a number of theories about this. It could simply be that 'lumpur', which means mud or mire, is here used as an adjective. But it would be more correct to add the adjectival prefix so that one has 'kuala berlumpur' — the muddy junction of rivers.

Another explanation is that the Gombak river is (so it is said) called the Lumpur river higher upstream from the junction in the town. But the evidence for this is slender and it does not explain why, if it changed its name to Gombak before it ran into the Klang, it was nonetheless called the junction of the Lumpur river.

There is a theory which relates it to the traditional name for the old town of Klang which was undoubtedly called 'Pengkalan Batu' — the stone jetty — because there was a stone jetty at Klang.

It is said that when the Chinese reached the upstream terminus of their boat journey they contrasted the muddy landing place ('pengkalan lumpur') with the stone one downstream and that, as Malay is not their language, they soon corrupted 'pengkalan' into the more familiar word 'kuala'. But there is no contemporary evidence to support this theory.

There is an oral tradition which places the original small trading post not at the river junction but 400 yards away (in the area of the modern Lorong Pudu) on higher ground adjacent to a track which connected the mines at Ampang and at Pudu. It is said that the post was established in 1859 and that 'Lumpur' is a corrupt form of a Cantonese word meaning 'flooded jungle' or 'decayed jungle'. There are some improbable elements in this version which is at variance with the accepted tradition committed to writing in the 19th century by Chinese who had been associated with Yap Ah Loy.

So you can make your own choice of whichever seems to you the best explanation.

1

The Pioneers

ONE DAY IN 1857 a flotilla of boats set off from Pengkalan Batu — the Stone Jetty — which is now Klang town. It was a party of eighty-seven Chinese tin miners departing on an expedition up the Klang river into the interior of Selangor.

The boats would carry either ten men each with a load of provisions or just thirty men without a cargo. For this trip they were loaded with sacks of rice, jars of coconut oil, with tobacco, spirits and opium in chests. There were hoes, axes and other tools and also baskets for carrying earth. They took weapons for their protection — muskets, gunpowder, knives and spears. Each man too had his personal bundle or box containing his spare clothes and his few other possessions.

Upstream they poled the clumsy boats along the silent, empty reaches of the winding Klang river. On either side jungle and swamp came down to the water's edge. The gravel of the river bottom showed clear through the green water of the shallows. Here and there along the river they came on a small settlement of a few flimsy houses on the bank. These were villages of traders and miners, mostly Sumatran Malays — but a few of them Chinese. The houses stood at the water's edge, built of jungle poles and covered with roofs and palm thatch. The sparse population of that

empty country clustered along the river bank because the river was the only highway through the jungle, the main road into the heart of Selangor.

Up the river, past Bukit Kuda, Damansara and Petaling went the boats making perhaps five or ten miles in a day. As the crow flies it was a distance of only twenty miles or so but along the winding river much more than that. So they travelled for a number of days. The men clad in shorts and a blanket or tunic, their heads shaded by the umbrella-shaped Chinese wicker hat. They all took their turn at poling. During their spells of rest they squatted on the cargo and chattered to each other. Only the Chinese headman of the expedition and the Malay agent of the district chief of Klang knew the exact purpose on which they had set out.

After several days of travel the flotilla came to the junction — in Malay called *kuala* — of the Gombak stream and the Klang river. If today you stand on the Market Street bridge in the centre of Kuala Lumpur and look upstream towards the mosque you are looking at that spot. But in 1857 it was at most a small hamlet of a few houses and a shop or two. Beyond this point it was difficult to move the fully-laden boats since the water of both rivers became too shallow. Here then the miners clambered ashore up the muddy river bank, unloaded their stores and supplies, made them up into loads which they could carry and moved off in Indian file along the jungle path until they reached the place now called Ampang because of the miners' dams (*ampang* is the Malay word for a dam) two or three miles away. There they began to prospect for tin.

Tin was buried treasure and so hard to find. Tin ore formed in the interstices of subterranean rock in the central range had been washed out over aeons of time to form deposits in the rivers and swamps. But much of it had been overlaid by thick mud. Several feet beneath the surface there might be a layer of coarse black gravel or glistening sand, or even small nuggets of tin ore. But how

to be sure of the place where the tin lay buried? The Chinese miners, strangers in these parts, were glad to rely on the skills of Malay magicians (*pawang*). After all the Malays had been mining for tin in a small way for centuries and might be expected to have established relations with the genies of the country. Swettenham, to whom we shall come later, wrote that 'a Malay Pawang has the same sort of nose for tin that a truffle dog has for truffles'.

The search for tin was a matter of ceremony. First, the magician clad in the black tunic which only he might wear instructed the miners how to build an altar to the local spirits. Then he prayed, standing with his left hand on his hip and waving a long piece of white cloth in his right hand, calling on each *hantu* or spirit by name. Next he walked with a switch in his hand which served as a diviner's wand. From its vibration he knew the spot where the tin lay. Then — as practical men — the miners dug a narrow trial shaft or pit to a depth of six or even ten feet until they found tin — if tin there was. The trial pit was enlarged to ensure that the tin was spread over a sufficient area. When the mine had been proven the miners built for themselves a single large dwelling house — a *kongsi* hut — and they erected runnels of bamboo to carry water from a nearby stream to work their waterwheel pump. A pump was essential since otherwise the mine would soon become flooded. The mine itself was simply a large rectangular pit extended to follow the tin wherever it might be. A felled tree-trunk, notched to make footholds, served as a ladder from ground level down into the pit and another made a second ladder for the upward movement. Miners working in the pit broke up the ore-bearing stratum — the *karang* or pay-dirt — for loading into circular baskets. The carriers had each wooden yoke or pole across his shoulders with a basket loaded at each end. Like ants in an unending stream the coolies made their way down into the pit with empty baskets, loaded them and made their sure-footed way up out of the pit to deposit their loads at the surface. In the sheds

crude separation methods were used to extract the ore from the soil with which it was mixed. In time the stock of ore accumulated to the point at which it was economic to build smelting furnaces, using charcoal, from which the molten tin could be poured to make ingots. It took several months to bring a new mine to the point at which there was tin ready for shipment.

Most of the original party of eighty-seven did not survive to see tin ingots from the mine (*lombong*). As they cleared the jungle and began to dig, water collected in the holes and trenches which they had made. There was their death. Mosquitoes multiplied in the pools and spread the germs of malaria. Many years later doctors working only a mile or two from the first mines of 1857 were to exploit the break-through in medical science which led to the control of malaria. In 1857 malaria was a familiar scourge but no man knew either its cause or its cure. Fever was always worst on a newly opened mine. So it was at Ampang. Each day several more men went down with malaria, lay rambling in delirium for a day or two and then died. Within a month of their first arrival all but eighteen of the eighty-seven pioneers were dead. The first wave had failed.

One hundred and fifty more men, travelling light in five boats, came up the river to take the places and live on the supplies of those who were dead. In time the death rate dropped and the ingots of tin came downstream along the river to repay the initial cost of the venture. More mines were opened and supplied through the landing point at the river junction. Within ten years Kuala Lumpur became one of the great mining centres of Malaya and a focal point in a bitter struggle for power in Selangor.

As you look from the Market Street bridge or the Embankment at the place where Kuala Lumpur began, with its modern buildings, the traffic noise and the passing throng around you, questions pose themselves. Who sent — and went on sending — miners to get tin at such ruthless cost in human life? Why was it so

profitable? How did the remote hamlet of 1857 become the state capital of 1880 and the federal capital of 1896? The chapters which follow are written to supply some of the answers.

The State of Selangor

AS THE MODERN TRAVELLER approaches Kuala Lumpur International Airport his plane swings low over the Selangor coastline and the Klang valley. Here is the industrial heartland of the Malaysian economy. But two hundred years ago this was an empty country. A green canopy of jungle trees, flecked here and there by the crimson Flame of the Forest tree, stretched unbroken from the central Malayan range down to the west coast and the Straits of Malacca. Much of the coast down to the waterline was desolate mud-swamp overgrown by angular thickets of mangrove trees, the haunt of crocodiles. The population of Selangor, almost entirely Malay, was between 10,000 and 20,000, living in small villages at the river estuaries and along the river banks.

For centuries this had been an outlying part of the Malay world whose main centres of power were first at Melaka (Malacca) until it was captured from its Malay Sultan by the Portuguese admiral, D'Albuquerque, in 1511 and then the Johore region at the south end of the Malay Peninsula. In 1641 the Dutch took Malacca from the Portuguese. To the north a branch of the Malay dynasty had established a Sultanate of Perak. In between, the central zone of western Malaya as yet lacked a name but it was important for one reason. It had deposits of alluvial tin washed out of the hills into

the river valleys. The town of Klang in particular, at the estuary of the Klang river, is mentioned as a dependency of other states as far back as the eleventh century A.D.

The makers of Selangor were the Bugis who migrated from the Celebes in the north-west of Indonesia. They were famous sailors and fighting men who journeyed far and wide through the archipelago of southeast Asia in their square-rigged, two-masted ships. Displaced from their homes by Dutch restrictions in the seventeenth century the Bugis settled in the trade ports of Malaya. When Francis Light established the first British outpost in Malaya at Penang in 1786 he found Bugis merchants there —

They are Mohamedans, a proud, warlike, independent people, easily irritated and prone to revenge. Their vessels are always well provided with arms, which they use with dexterity and vigour. They are the best merchants among the Eastern islands The great value of their cargoes, either of bullion or goods, with quantities of opium and piecegoods they export, make their arrival much wished for by all mercantile people.

The arrival of the Bugis in large numbers was also a major disturbance in the Malay world. Like vikings they fought in corselets of chain mail and made their temporary abode wherever their ships were in port. The story of the eighteenth-century wars of the Bugis is too involved to be told here. One result was that a Bugis noble established himself at the mouth of the Selangor river north of Klang and in 1742 assumed the title of Sultan Sallehudin — with the blessing of the older dynasty of Perak. Under Malay custom the new state took its name from the royal capital at Kuala Selangor. Selangor was a maritime kingdom which stretched in a narrow coastal zone from the small port at the mouth of the Bernam river (at the border with Perak) to the northern bank of the Linggi river where Dutch territory around Malacca began. It

was a land of five rivers — Bernam, Selangor, Klang, Langat and Lukut.

The modest economy of the new state was based on the export of 15 or 20 tons of tin each month. Until about 1830 the tin miners were mostly Malays who used a streaming technique called *lampan* mining. The miners worked surface deposits, drawing the pay-dirt with the hoe (*cangkul*) into a fast-running stream of water by which the tin was separated from the earth. The heavier ore fell to the bottom and the mud was swept away. But world demand for tin increased rapidly due to the development of the tin can as a container to hold preserved food. Chinese miners were imported into the Malay States to work full-time in the mines using the open-pit (*lombong*) method. By this means they could carry their workings to a greater depth.

In the 1830s Sultan Mohamed of Selangor and his son, Raja Sulaiman, who ruled the Klang district, borrowed a large sum from Chinese merchants at Malacca to finance the development of mines in the Klang valley. But this venture was a disaster. In 1839 the Sultan, returning from a visit to his Bugis relatives in the south of Malaya, broke his journey at Malacca. Here his creditors threatened to have him arrested and imprisoned until he paid the debt of \$169,000 which he still owed them. From this little local difficulty the Sultan was rescued by one of his Bugis entourage, Raja Juma'at, a successful man of business who gave his personal guarantee that the debt would be paid.

Raja Juma'at soon became the power behind the throne in Selangor in place of the 'indolent and sensual' Sultan. He married the Sultan's daughter and obtained a royal grant in perpetuity of the Lukut valley where he opened very successful tin mines using Chinese labour. At Lukut he established a model local government. Juma'at also persuaded the Sultan to grant the district of Klang to his brother, Raja Abdullah, in 1854. It was the combination of Juma'at and Abdullah who borrowed \$30,000

from two Chinese merchants in Malacca to finance the next — and ultimately successful — attempt to open tin mines around what was to become Kuala Lumpur.

It reads like a success story as — up to to point — it was. Yet it contained the seeds of the disastrous civil war in Selangor which followed. Raja Juma'at himself became ill and died in 1864. Even in his day economic success had stretched the Bugis state of Selangor to breaking point. At each of the five river mouths a district chief ruled by virtue of a royal but arbitrary grant of territory to him. A previous Sultan was said to have fathered sixty children — and such fecundity was not unique. As the boys grew up there were not enough jobs for them. For a Selangor raja there were only two respectable occupations — trade, particularly the development of mines, and the profession of arms. A British contemporary described one of the Selangor rajas as a 'pirate chief of some fame'. Piracy was to his credit — rather like being a celebrated gunfighter in the American west in the same era.

It was just not possible for the Sultan to satisfy everyone with a grant of territory. In granting Klang to Raja Abdullah in 1854 the Sultan had disappointed the son of the chief who had previously ruled the district — a formidable young fighting man called Raja Mahdi. For the time being Raja Mahdi held his rancour in check and made a living as a tin dealer in a town where his father had been the local ruler.

When Sultan Mohamed died in 1857 Raja Juma'at was able to install on the throne (in place of the late Sultan's young son) Sultan Abdul Samad who was another of the old Sultan's sons-in-law. Sultan Abdul Samad had been quite a lad in his day — he was reputed to have killed 99 men with his own hand. But as an elderly man 'his manners were as mild as those of a missionary . . . a small, spare, wizened man, with a kindly smile, fond of a good story, and with a strong sense of humour. His amusements were gardening (in which he sometimes showed remarkable energy),

hoarding money and tin . . .' Behind this exterior he lived in dread of assassination. He did not attempt to govern his state but resolved any difficulties by agreeing with whoever was with him at the time. He was content, he said, 'to leave piracy to the boys, my sons.' Abdul Samad was a professional survivor. In his curious quizzical fashion he reigned for almost forty years — through many changes as we shall see. For all his fear he endured to die peacefully in his bed at the age of 93.

The Bugis rulers of the coastal zone had little control over the inland parts of Selangor. The Malay population of the villages scattered along the rivers were not Bugis but immigrants from different parts of Sumatra — Mandiling, Rawa, Batu Bahara and Menangkabau men — at odds with each other in their tribal loyalties and no respecters of the distant chiefs of the coastal centres. On the contrary the wars of the previous century had left a tradition of enmity between the Bugis and the Sumatran Malays.

In the coming Malay struggle for power the prize was the revenues to be obtained from taxing the output of the rich mines of Kuala Lumpur and other inland centres. The Chinese miners themselves were not a passive element. They were turbulent groups organized in rival 'secret societies' between which there was a perpetual state of rivalry and feud. It is time to look at the build-up of tension in and around Kuala Lumpur.

3

Early Kuala Lumpur

IN THE EARLY 1860s Kuala Lumpur grew rapidly to become a large and flourishing village. This was a period of high prosperity for the tin miners due to buoyant demand — Britain for example doubled its imports of tin from the East and the price was high. Kuala Lumpur became the supply centre for the mines around it in the upper Klang valley. Tin ore, if not smelted on the mine, was sent into the town for smelting. All the tin produced on the mines were sent down the river to Klang town at the mouth. The boats loaded and unloaded their cargo on the east bank just below the junction with the Gombak (at what is now the Embankment). Further up the slope from the river bank and downstream from the loading point were the houses, shops and godowns of the Chinese traders and headmen. Upstream, just above the junction of the rivers was the Malay village; here were the premises of the Sumatran traders which stretched up to the foot of Bukit Nanas, on which later if not at this time there was a defensive stockade. There were no bridges across the river and the west bank, the site of what is now the Padang, was a vacant clearing used by vegetable growers. All around the settlement the jungle shut in the inhabitants with a wall of green and swamps and impeded movement inland.

Kuala Lumpur was more than a trade centre and staging point. When the miners had money to spend — wages were paid at intervals after the tin had been smelted — they came in to town on a jag. There were opium shops and brothels where the women plied their trade in windowless cubicles five feet square. There was a great disparity in the numbers of the sexes — about 10 men to each woman. Above all there was gambling which was then — and still is — an absorbing recreation for many Chinese. This was organized as a municipal enterprise in a large open-sided shed which stood near what is now Old Market Square. Here through night and day a throng of excited Chinese and Malays gambled away their earnings through traditional games of chance.

How did this disorderly and unhygienic community manage its affairs? The Chinese labourers who worked on the mines had been shipped down from China in conditions of overcrowding and great hardship. Mutiny, madness or suicide at sea were not uncommon. When they arrived at Singapore or some other Malayan port the businessmen who had advanced the cost of their passages were entitled to dispose of them under a binding contract to work for their new employer for a year. During this period the employer deducted from their earnings whatever he had paid for them to the recruiter and the cost of food etc. supplied to them. While they were working under contract they were virtual prisoners — on disembarking they were marched off under armed guard and at the place of work they were locked in at night. When they had paid off the initial cost of their recruitment they were promoted from 'newcomer' (*sinkheh*) to 'old hand' (*laukkeh*) and — in theory at least — could choose to work for whom they pleased.

On first arrival the shiploads of newcomers — sick, bewildered, lost in a foreign country — were in desperate need of help. This need was met by joining one of the secret societies which were the main organizations of the Chinese immigrants at this time. In their

native China rural society was organized into clans and district associations to hold property, organize local activities, maintain temples and shrines and so on. In south China there was also a tradition of covert resistance to the alien Manchu emperors from the seventeenth century onwards. Just as they adapted the waterwheels used in their villages in China to irrigate the ricefields, the immigrant Chinese adapted the social institutions of their native country to the living conditions of the frontier in the seaports and in the upcountry mining camps. It was very like the Mafia among the Italian immigrants to the United States.

When he arrived at a Straits port the newcomer was admitted willy-nilly to membership of a society, usually one in which the other members came from the same district of south China or the same dialect group as himself. With a fearsome ritual of a drawn sword poised over his neck and the like he swore to uphold and abide by the rules of the society — to keep secret its affairs, to contribute money to its funds, to help fellow members in a quarrel or a fight or if they fell sick, to obey its officers. In return he could count on such help when he needed it. This was the only government which he knew as no Malay or British official could speak his language. Partly from compulsion and fear, partly from ties of mutual interest in survival, he gave his loyalty to his society (called *huey* or *kongsi*).

It also suited the bosses to have it so. The *towkays* — the Chinese colloquial term for businessmen or employer — were the leaders of the societies and used their machinery to control their labour force. The merchants of the Straits ports and inland towns like Kuala Lumpur, the overseers on the mines, each had their place in the hierarchy of the secret societies. They also provided the capital to finance tin mining. Cash or food were given on credit to the upcountry mine headmen who in turn distributed it to the coolies. When the tin had been won it passed up the same chain to repay the debt and reward those who had taken the risk.

Although the system satisfied the urgent needs of Chinese immigrant society, it also led to grave abuses. To uphold their authority the miners' leaders had an entourage of fighting men (*panglima*) who acted as their bodyguards and led the miners when they were mobilized to fight. The societies, drawn from different dialect groups in the Kwangtung and Fukien provinces of south-eastern China, were often in open conflict. In the mining districts the miners fought for control of the richest deposits of tin and of the watercourses which supplied the motive power for their essential waterwheel pumps. In Kuala Lumpur the dominant society was the Hai San and its leadership was mainly of the Hakka dialect group. Their bitter enemies were Ghi Hin men who were based a few miles to the north around Kanching in Ulu Selangor.

When there was no fighting the bravoes intimidated and bullied the rank and file of their societies and extorted protection money from traders. The *towkays* too exploited their labourers through their monopoly of the supply of food, drink, opium — brothels and gambling hells as well. In this way even a poor mine could be made to yield a profit to the owner.

The Malay traders of Kuala Lumpur did business with the Chinese but, owing to differences of language, religion, diet and custom lived apart from them. The ruling Malay aristocracy on the coast was even more remote. They came to terms with the Chinese immigrants and dealt with each local group through its own leader on whom was conferred the title of Capitan China. Tax was paid to the Malay chief as the tin passed in boats under the brass cannon of his log stockade at the river mouth. A generation before in the time of Raja Juma'at the Malay district chief had sometimes been an intermediary who borrowed money from financiers and advanced it to the mine headmen. But in the 1860s the capital for mining development passed through an entirely Chinese commercial channel and the Malay share was collected as export duty on tin and sometimes as import duty on

supplies brought in.

From 1868 until his death in 1885 the Capitan China of Kuala Lumpur was Yap Ah Loy. Until 1880 he ruled Kuala Lumpur and its surrounding district by the sheer force of his personal authority. His rise to the top is a typical success story of the immigrant community of his time. He had been born in Kwangtung of a Hakka community. When he was 17 a recruiting agent came to his village with glowing tales of wealth to be gained in Malaya. He and other young country boys signed on and were shipped down to Singapore on a sailing vessel. The regulations prescribed 12 square feet of deck for each passenger but few vessels provided it. The ship, overcrowded and appallingly dirty, made its slow voyage before the monsoon to the Straits. Ah Loy's first job was at a mine near Malacca but he moved on to work for a relative who owned a nearby shop. Next he became a camp cook on a mine at Lukut. With his savings he bought a few pigs and drove his herd around the mining camps selling pork on the hoof in exchange for tin. He then moved up the social scale to become a *panglima* to the Capitan China of the mines at Rasah on the outskirts of modern Seremban. There was serious fighting at Rasah from which Yap Ah Loy escaped with no more than a wound in the leg though he narrowly escaped death in a subsequent ambush. The Hai San society to which he belonged regained control of the Rasah mines. The previous Capitan China was dead and so Yap Ah Loy took his place. Then in 1862 another fighting man who had moved to Kuala Lumpur sent word to Ah Loy to join him there. At Kuala Lumpur he branched out into business as a manager of his patron's mines and developed some of his own. He was now a figure of wealth and influence (in his world the two went together). When his patron died in 1868 Yap Ah Loy was promoted to be Capitan China of the rapidly growing Chinese community of Kuala Lumpur. He was only 31. In spite of his evident ability his predecessor's entourage were jealous.

There were opponents both in the town and over the hills at Kanching. But Yap Ah Loy had arrived at the top — just as the storm clouds were gathering.

A portrait of Yap Ah Loy hangs in the Yap clan house in Kuala Lumpur. It shows a short man with a heavy jaw and determined eyes. A Chinese account of him says:

He was not very big or tall but when he spoke his voice was sonorous. His temper was like fire and he had the strength of an elephant. He could support the weight of 100 katis (133 lbs) on his two palms when he stretched his two arms forwards . . . on his forehead between his eyebrows was a mark like a Chinese character.

Sultan Abdul Samad gave him a seal of office and the Malay title of Seri Indra Perkasa Wijaya Bakti. The Malay chief of Klang came up to install him. He was carried round the town in procession borne in a sedan chair. 'His dignity frightened everyone to submission and the scene was so beautiful that all tried to occupy the front lines to see the procession.' So runs the Chinese history.

The Selangor Civil War (1867–1873)

MUCH OF THE FIGHTING in the Selangor civil war happened in other parts of Selangor between men who had no close connection with Kuala Lumpur. Yet it was essentially a struggle for control of the revenues of Kuala Lumpur's tin mines and the political power which the victor could obtain from them.

The death of Raja Juma'at in 1864 marked the beginning of a period of instability in Selangor. Juma'at's prudent manipulation of the Malay balance of power had rested on the foundation of the tin mines of Lukut. But those mines had gone into decline as the deposits were worked out. The main centres of mining were now in inland Selangor around Kuala Lumpur in the upper stretches of the Klang valley and at Kanching to the north of it in the Ulu Selangor district. The bitter enmity between the Hai San men at Kuala Lumpur and the Ghi Hin men at Kanching had been further inflamed in the early 1860s by the arrival in Kuala Lumpur of Hai San refugees. The latter had been driven out of their mines at Larut in Perak by the local Ghi Hin miners after a struggle in which lives had been lost.

In the Malay community also there were old scores to pay off. Those of the Bugis rajas who had by intrigue or family influence gained control of a river estuary taxed the tin which came down

the valley from the interior — but waited nervously for the onslaught of some dispossessed or ambitious rival with a reputation as a warleader and a band of followers who hoped to make their fortunes with him. Raja Mahdi, deprived of his inheritance — the Klang district — on the death of his father ten years before, bided his time. Neither the 'ins' nor the 'outs' could expect either support or reproof from Sultan Abdul Samad who kept his head below the parapet and let the younger men fight it out — as was the custom. The Sultan had made his royal capital in a backwater at Kuala Langat to the south of Selangor. Here he lived 'in retirement in a mud swamp on the bank of a melancholy tidal stream'.

Tension reached flashpoint in 1866. Now that Raja Juma'at was dead Raja Mahdi picked a quarrel with Juma'at's brother who ruled Klang over a demand for payment of tax on Mahdi's opium. Mahdi as a raja claimed exemption. So Raja Mahdi rose in revolt and laid siege to the fort of Klang. His followers — it would be an exaggeration to call these small and lightly-armed raiders an army — were mainly Sumatran traders from Kuala Lumpur. They joined in the fray to obtain revenge for the death of one of their community who had been killed by the small garrison which the Malay chief of Klang had stationed in the fort on Bukit Nanas at Kuala Lumpur as a token of his authority in the town. The Sumatran Malays had a long tradition of enmity against the Bugis rulers of Selangor. Raja Mahdi gained possession of the fort at Klang. The dispossessed Raja Abdullah fled to the sanctuary of Malacca, in British territory, and died there soon afterwards. But one of his sons returned to Klang with an armed party in three small ships to lay siege to Raja Mahdi. The light guns of the ships could not be aimed high enough to bombard the fort on the ground above the town. So there was a stalemate.

Two or three more of the protagonists were soon on stage. Sultan Abdul Samad had married his 'very comely and intelligent'

daughter, Tunku Arfah to Tunku Kudin, a member of the royal family of Kedah way to the north. Kudin persuaded the old man — without too much difficulty — to give him authority (as Viceroy of Selangor) to deal with the little local difficulties which had arisen. In the small and clannish Malay circle around the Sultan there was resentment against Kudin as a cuckoo in the nest. Apart from the fact that he was a 'foreign' Malay from another state his westernized habits gave offence to Malay traditionalists. But Kudin in his quiet way was more effective than most of his rivals. He had political and business connections in the Straits Settlements which enabled him to borrow money with which to fight the civil war. But he was not a man of action and a charismatic warleader like his opponents.

Kudin attempted to arbitrate in the dispute over Klang. But Raja Mahdi and other Selangor rajas defied his authority and insulted him. So Kudin became perforce the leader of one faction and an opponent of Raja Mahdi. The two factions had their backers in the business community of the Straits Settlements who hoped to promote or at least to protect their interests in Selangor tin mining. At the end of the war Selangor was burdened with war debts owed to these backers.

Mahdi was the titular head of his party since as the grandson of the previous Sultan and son of the previous chief of Klang he had recognized pretensions to power. But the two other leaders of his forces were more colourful and effective as leaders. One was Raja Mahmud

'never so happy as when in command of a fight . . . he was about 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 . . . he always spoke the truth because the consequences of doing so were beneath consideration. He was very

smartly dressed, with silk trousers and a silk sarong, a 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 . . . 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.'

But the glamorous young Lochinvar was only one side of the man. Elsewhere Swettenham gives a less romantic account of this restless man for whom action was like the release of a spring. It was compulsive but he had no capacity to follow through what he had done.

The third member of the trio was Syed Mashhor (The prefix 'Syed' denotes part-Arab blood and a presumed descent from the Prophet).

'His forehead is wide and high, his dark eyes rather far apart, with drooping lids that it seems almost an effort to raise. His nose is aquiline and rather long . . . the massive jaw and chin are quite remarkable. The elaborately quiet manner of the man, the studied slowness of his ordinary movements, and his voice — so soft and low, it is an effort to catch his words . . . fascinate the spectator as certain snakes are said to fascinate their victims . . . only the eyes attract attention by the little there is to see of them.'

Syed Mashhor was by far the most effective commander in Mahdi's coalition. But he was essentially cosmopolitan, as much at home in Perak or across the water in Sumatra as in Selangor. A condottiere at home in any country and therefore in none (though he had some family connections with Selangor).

For a year or two the intermittent struggle, a series of surprise attacks, raids, ambushes and sieges rather than a continuous war ebbed and flowed along the Selangor coast. Yap Ah Loy and his tin miners hoped to remain uncommitted in order to go on shipping tin down to the coast. Ah Loy came to terms with Raja Mahdi when he was in control of Klang. Later when the town changed hands again Ah Loy switched over to deal with Tunku Kudin. When Klang was closed as an outlet to the sea by the fighting on the coast the Kuala Lumpur miners shipped their tin overland to the Ulu Langat district to the south and then down river to Kuala Langat — to the considerable satisfaction of the Sultan whose customs revenues increased.

No clever diplomacy could hold off the threat to Kuala Lumpur indefinitely since Kuala Lumpur was the ultimate objective. The first direct attack came from the north in September 1870. A mixed force of Chinese from Kanching and Malays led by Syed Mashhor advanced to within four miles of Kuala Lumpur from the north-east. Ah Loy mobilized his miners and after some preliminary moves succeeded in encircling his opponents who retreated in disorder to the north. Ah Loy then launched a counter-attack and besieged Syed Mashhor at Kuala Kubu in Ulu Selangor. There is however a Malay proverb about the folly of a Malay commander whose besieging force ran out of food before it could starve the besieged garrison into surrender. So it was in 1871. The tide turned again and Mashhor prepared to move in on Kuala Lumpur from both north and south. To rouse his forces to greater efforts Ah Loy paid fifty dollars in silver coins for each head of an enemy delivered to him in public in the market square outside his house. In these attacks and counter-attacks only a few hundred men were engaged on each side. It was not easy to supply the troops over uneven jungle tracks and they could not live off the country which was only sparsely populated.

Most of the fighting men were the followers of Malay rajas or

Chinese miners taken from productive work in the mines or fields to fight for survival. They were lightly equipped. A Chinese soldier paraded in a shirt or tunic and shorts of coarse cotton cloth and wore straw sandals on his feet. He might carry a cape of palm leaves across his shoulders to keep off the rain. His weapons were a long sword or a musket (flintlock or matchlock) and a pouch of gunpowder hung from his wrist. For protection he might wear a leather jerkin or carry a wooden shield. Sometimes he wore a split coconut shell on his head as a helmet. Essentially these were mobile light infantry for hand-to-hand fighting. A Malay soldier was similarly equipped though he usually carried several weapons — a sword, spear, dagger or possibly a musket.

Tunku Kudin reinforced the garrison of Kuala Lumpur by sending up some of his mercenaries. As he could not attract much local support in Selangor he had to raise troops from among the Indian and Malay flotsam of the Straits ports. They were led by a handful of European adventurers. A Malay visitor to Klang in 1872 described the troops in unflattering terms:

Some of them were thin and sickly, and they came in all shapes and sizes . . . they were all shabby and dirty; some wore trousers, some sarongs; some wore jackets and others did not . . . the sepoys presented arms with their rifles and swords, but it was done raggedly because they were still raw and inexperienced."

The detachment sent to Kuala Lumpur were commanded by Van Hagen, an officer of the Netherlands army who had 'lost his commission owing to some breach of discipline . . . a man of birth, character and courage'. Van Hagen was assisted by Cavaliero, 'young, tall, dark and goodlooking, of a pronounced Italian type', who had left some business occupation in Singapore to serve in Tunku Kudin's forces.

Van Hagen established himself in the Malay fort on Bukit

Nanas and took command of Yap Ah Loy's forces, now about a thousand strong. But Mashhor, no mean strategist, got through to the middle reaches of the Klang valley and so cut the lines of communication and supply between Klang and Kuala Lumpur. Van Hagen, whose troops were demoralized, tried to break out but was led astray by his guides. 'The weary wanderers walked straight into the arms' of Syed Mashhor, waiting for them at Petaling, and gave themselves up without a struggle. Van Hagen and Cavaliero were taken back to Kuala Lumpur, which had fallen to Syed Mashhor's forces, and shot. Swettenham relates how in digging foundation trenches many years later a number of skeletons were found of those who had died in the fighting . . . 'Two skeletons were thus discovered. The bones were larger, the figures taller than those usually met with. They were the skeletons of two men face to face, and locked in each other's arms.'

During the diversion of Van Hagen's abortive attempt to get away Yap Ah Loy escaped by a different route. He had lost Kuala Lumpur and about 1,700 men. He got through the jungle to Klang where he appeared, clad only in a pair of pants, dispirited and exhausted. Kudin suggested that he should cut his losses and give up the struggle. But Ah Loy, always resolute, decided to return and attempt to retake Kuala Lumpur.

It was the dark hour before the dawn. Kudin's money and diplomacy had mobilized the support of the Malay ruler of Pahang to the east of Selangor. Early in 1873 a force of Pahang Malays, formidable fighting men, came over the hills to defeat Syed Mashhor and his Sumatran and Chinese levies. This was the end of the war. Yap Ah Loy came back to the ruins of Kuala Lumpur, devastated in the final battles.

Yap Ah Loy's Kuala Lumpur (1873–1880)

WE KNOW THE STORY of Yap Ah Loy's life down to 1873 mainly from Chinese biographies. But the chronicles end in 1873. At that point Tunku Kudin and his ally, Yap Ah Loy, had emerged victorious from the civil war which had devastated Selangor since 1867. Their opponents went into exile. Raja Mahdi died a few years later in Singapore. Syed Mashhor went off to Perak where in his cosmopolitan fashion he also had connections and did not return to Selangor until several years had passed. Raja Mahmud too moved on to Perak where he saved Swettenham's life during the Perak War of 1875. So the victors were in undisputed possession of the spoils. The Chinese chronicles imply that for the remaining twelve years of his life Yap Ah Loy lived happily ever after.

The truth was quite otherwise. For five years more — until his luck turned — Yap Ah Loy fought a grimmer battle against adversity than any of the civil war. In doing so he again saved Kuala Lumpur. But this part of the story has to be put in its context. In 1874 there occurred the sudden reversal of the British policy of non-intervention in the Malay States. In rapid succession Perak, then Selangor and finally the neighbouring Sungei Ujong district of Negri Sembilan came under British protection and

control. In Selangor the immediate pretext of intervention was an act of piracy and murder against a vessel from the British port of Malacca which took place in the anchorage of the royal capital of Kuala Langat. Sultan Abdul Samad was only mildly embarrassed. It was, he said, the sort of thing in which he personally no longer indulged. A British official of this time described the Sultan as 'a rather careless heathen philosopher' — though this does less than justice to the old Sultan's cynical but realistic sense of self-preservation. A better-informed observer said he was 'not the weak, unthinking old man he has been described to be, but is a very shrewd moneyloving man, with full use of his faculties.'

As to the piracy the British seized, convicted and hung the wrong men. The Sultan let them do it and readily agreed to accept a British Resident as his adviser. It would relieve the old man — now 70 — of a great deal of bother. The British were disposed to accept and support Tunku Kudin as viceroy and ruler of Selangor in the Sultan's name. So the new British Resident, who arrived in January 1875, took up his post at Klang in order to be close to and to work with Tunku Kudin. The Resident was James Guthrie Davidson, a Singapore lawyer and businessman, who had been one of Kudin's financial backers and advisers during the civil war. It was awkward that Davidson was also one of the principal creditors of the government which he advised (the Selangor government took over Kudin's war debts). For that and other reasons Davidson moved on to become Resident of Perak in 1876. The court circle around the Sultan at Kuala Langat were hostile to the interloper Kudin and there was anxiety lest this should open a rift between the Sultan and his son-in-law. To nip any such intrigues in the bud an ambitious and talented young administrator, Frank Swettenham, was stationed at the royal capital as Assistant Resident. The Sultan — who knew how to lay on flattery with a trowel — wrote to the Governor that Swettenham (a

fine Malay speaker) 'is very clever with soft words, delicate and sweet, so that all men rejoice in him as in the perfume of an opened flower.' Swettenham gave a less romantic account of his time at Kuala Langat — 'I lived in a Malay hovel in a swamp nearby.'

These arrangements suited Yap Ah Loy very well. He had been visited at Kuala Lumpur in 1872 by Davidson, who brought his young friend Swettenham with him on a sight-seeing tour. Swettenham recollected being given a 'great dinner' by the hospitable Capitan China who had beaten silver dollars into spoons and forks for his European guests. But the British advisers down on the Selangor coast had their hands full and were as hard-pressed for money as Yap Ah Loy himself. When Davidson made his first official visit to Kuala Lumpur in August 1875 he reported that the miners were 'very much depressed — most of the mines were completely flooded out during the last war and all their mine houses, machinery and property were burnt or otherwise destroyed. After the fighting was over they had to reconstruct their mines with borrowed money which had not been paid off. Their creditors are now pressing them and traders will give them scarcely any credit.'

On his return to the ruins of Kuala Lumpur in 1873 Yap Ah Loy had first to persuade his dispirited followers that it was worth rebuilding the town. The Chinese — not least miners — believe in luck. Since 1872 much blood had been shed at Kuala Lumpur, money lost and effort wasted. These were signs that the place was inauspicious. They would have to start again from scratch anyway; fortune would be kinder if they went elsewhere to do it. If those counsels of despair had prevailed the capital of Malaysia would now be somewhere other than Kuala Lumpur. But by sheer force of his personal authority Ah Loy held them to it. Swettenham said later of Ah Loy 'his perseverance alone, I believe, has kept the Chinese in the country.'

So the quiet, determined figure of the Capitan China moved around the mines, on foot or on a pony, directing, deciding, encouraging the work. It was better to keep away from his counting-house facing the market-place of the town and the financial crisis to be confronted there. While they worked the miners had to be fed. Yap Ah Loy borrowed money or obtained supplies on credit from Singapore or Malacca in return for a promise of repayment in tin six or twelve months later. He cajoled the Selangor government, the European firm of Guthrie & Co. (with which Davidson had family links) and above all the Chinese merchants of the Straits ports to give him credit. When he could obtain credit he paid interest at 15, 18 or 20 per cent per annum — very high rates at that time. When the tin began to flow he switched it between his creditors to fob off the most insistent. He also tried to tap the Sultan's reputed treasure — 'The *towkays* landed', reported the Resident, 'and we all proceeded en masse to the Sultan who received us as usual in a very kind way. He seemed quite amused at the idea of his having \$30,000 in two iron chests under his bed, and was very jocular on the subject.' But apart from a good laugh they got nothing out of the old man and went away empty-handed.

Getting the mines back into full production did not solve the problem. The price of tin, always volatile, fell to its lowest level for 30 years. The mines of Kuala Lumpur, supplied over a long and expensive route from coast to interior, could no longer produce tin at a profit. So Yap Ah Loy encouraged the Malays who had settled in increasing numbers around Kuala Lumpur to grow rice and other foodstuffs which he could buy more cheaply than imported supplies.

The crisis reached its climax in 1878. Yap Ah Loy's creditors lost confidence and patience and threatened to cut off the credit which he still so badly needed. The Resident noted that 'the Capitan China's power does hang by a thread as he is on the verge

of bankruptcy.' So Yap Ah Loy stood on the edge of the abyss of financial disaster. Then luck — miner's luck — saved Yap Ah Loy. The world price of tin, ever uncertain, rose as suddenly as it had fallen. In Selangor the price doubled between 1878 and 1879. The mines which had been so laboriously restored to production were now a wildly profitable bonanza. The boom drew in more Chinese miners to open more mines. Within a year the population of Kuala Lumpur increased by a third. Yap Ah Loy could pay his debts — for the rest of his life he was a rich man.

The mines around Kuala Lumpur were the mainstay of his wealth. He also planted a large acreage with tapioca, which was the commercial crop in favour at the time, and he installed an 8-horse-power engine to operate his tapioca mill. In the growing town of Kuala Lumpur he owned at least one in three of the buildings, many of which were let to tenants. He also had a smelting shed and mine workshop, pig-sties, cattle sheds, a lime kiln and a quarry. He built corduroy timber roads to connect the outlying mines with the town. He kept order, administered justice, maintained a primitive hospital for the sick and supported a large number of dependants. As governor of the town he was also its tax collector. He of course had the monopoly of the profitable supply of opium and spirits; the gambling shed and the brothels were his too.

It was all very crude. Kuala Lumpur was an overcrowded and filthy village menaced by epidemic disease. The greatest risk was fire which could spread rapidly across the narrow lanes from one row of wood and palm-thatch huts and shops to the next. Yap Ah Loy's fire precautions were limited to requiring each occupier to maintain a full bucket of water at hand in case of need.

Down to 1879 Yap Ah Loy was Mr. Kuala Lumpur. It was his place. A day's journey away at the mouth of the Klang river there was the Resident and other British officials. In their visits to Kuala Lumpur they travelled by steam launch as far as Damansara and

then rode on ponies over the road, still under construction (inevitably the contract had been let to Yap Ah Loy as a means to recovering what he still owed the State government), to reach Kuala Lumpur from the western side. The old Damansara Road is still commemorated in the modern Damansara Heights overlooking the town. It was a long and exhausting return journey. Ah Loy could expect an official visit about once a month.

For various reasons, to which we shall come in the next chapter, the British capital remained at Klang for too long. As Kuala Lumpur grew it drew trade and traders away from Klang. 'Klang,' said a visitor in early 1879, 'has a blighted look, and deserted houses rapidly falling into decay, overgrown roads, fields choked with weeds, and an absence of life and traffic in the melancholy streets, have a depressing influence.' The first sign of the inevitable move came late in 1879 when a British official was for the first time sent to live permanently at Kuala Lumpur. Then in 1880 the headquarters of the State government in its entirety was moved up-river. It was no longer Yap Ah Loy's Kuala Lumpur.

The State Capital

CAPTAIN BLOOMFIELD DOUGLAS presented an impressive image, even as seen through the eyes of the wife of a colleague who detested him.

The Resident was an old sailor, and very proud of the fact ... I suppose it was in memory of his nautical days that he generally pitched his voice in tones that would have done admirably well for giving orders during a storm at sea.

Captain Douglas had succeeded Davidson as the British Resident at Klang in 1876 and continued in that post until 1882 (having moved his headquarters to Kuala Lumpur in 1880). He was a loud-voiced, brusque martinet who had been a government official in South Australia for twenty years before he moved to Malaya. As a young man he had been for a time the master of James Brooke's yacht *Royalist* in Sarawak.

A much more likeable figure in the new — and still very small — European regime at Klang in the later 1870s was Henry Charles Syers, the superintendent of the Selangor police force. Syers had risen from the ranks since he had been a private soldier in a British regiment stationed in the Straits ports for a year or two before he came to Klang in March 1875. But he became a very

efficient police officer in a quiet way and he was very fluent in Malay. Douglas who could hardly speak Malay used Syers as his interpreter. Few of the Malays and Chinese in Selangor at this time could speak English.

Syers first appears in Kuala Lumpur history in October 1875 when the Sumatran miners and traders in the upper reaches of the Klang and Langat rivers rose in revolt. The rebels were led by Sootan Puasa who had at one time been the headman of the Sumatran community at Kuala Lumpur and an ally of Yap Ah Loy. But in the crisis of 1873 Sootan Puasa deserted to the other side — only to find that he had after all joined the losers. When the war was over he moved away to the village of Kajang in Ulu Langat to the south of Kuala Lumpur. Thence he continued to intrigue with Raja Mahdi, who was then in exile in Johore.

When Sootan Puasa came out in open revolt, Davidson, who was still Resident at that time, sent Syers up to Kuala Lumpur with an advance force to support Yap Ah Loy, who had mobilized his miners. On his first arrival at Klang Syers had taken over the remnants of Tunku Kudin's mercenaries as the nucleus of a police force. This was necessary because the state government could not find the money to pay them off. Syers was able to convert this demoralized ragtag and bobtail into a police detachment (augmented by Malays recruited from Malacca). It tells us a great deal about Syers that the rank and file of his police were attached to him with a loyalty which became legendary. These were the men who came up the river with Syers in the autumn of 1875. Syers and Yap Ah Loy then led their combined forces against Sootan Puasa at Cheras and Kajang. They stormed Sootan Puasa's stockades from the rear, thus evading his 'brass guns loaded to the muzzle with old nails and other rubbish'. Sootan Puasa went off to prison, but was later released. He had learnt his lesson and lived a blameless life as a trader at Klang.

To uphold the peace in this remote area small detachments of

police were stationed permanently in the principal villages to the north and south of Kuala Lumpur and in the town itself. Yap Ah Loy was reluctant to accept this intrusion into his domain but agreed to have the police in the town if they were under his day-to-day control. It was a sensible compromise. Syers acknowledged that if he had tried to police Kuala Lumpur by direct control from Klang, he would have had to use a far larger number of men — which the hard-pressed Selangor government could not afford to maintain.

Two men worked with Yap Ah Loy in keeping the peace in Kuala Lumpur. Yap Ah Shak was second only to Ah Loy in the Chinese community, a wealthy and successful miner who preferred to leave public and political duties to Ah Loy. The other was Mohamed Tahir, the leader of the Malay community at Kuala Lumpur. It was the custom to confer the title of Dato' Dagang (headman of foreign Malays) on such men. He was a very able businessman who developed plantations around Klang; in later years he lived at Klang.

The bone of contention between Bloomfield Douglas, down the river at Klang, and Yap Ah Loy and the Dato' Dagang was the collection of revenue. It had been agreed in Davidson's time that they should have a tax of \$2 per *bahara* (400 lbs) on tin exported to reimburse them for their expenses of governing Kuala Lumpur and its surrounding villages. This tax yielded to each of them a revenue of about \$1,000 per month for unspecified services. By 1877 Douglas had succeeded in commuting the tax into a fixed annual payment of a much reduced amount. It was 'no use trying to pension the Capitan off, as he is one of those men who must work'. In 1877 Selangor, like Perak, established a State Council to include the Resident and Malay and Chinese notables so that government measures might be discussed and advice taken on contentious points. Yap Ah Loy was the only Chinese and indeed the only Kuala Lumpur representative appointed to the Council.

The president was Tunku Kudin (succeeded later by Raja Muda Musa, the Sultan's son) but the Selangor Council had little opportunity of discussion since Douglas was always determined to get his way.

The Kuala Lumpur community was as much out of touch with the Bugis Malay rulers of the state as with the British administrators. To the modern visitor the Malays may seem a united community. Indeed when they look out at other communities that is so. But among themselves differences of culture and custom can still be divisive. A hundred years ago the antipathy was even sharper. A contemporary wrote that 'the Bugis race has kept itself very distinct from the people among whom it dwells.' In Selangor there was a legacy of enmity from the wars of the early eighteenth century between a famous Sumatran paladin, Raja Kechil, and the Bugis who founded the Selangor dynasty. Above all else distance, though it was a mere twenty miles of jungle and winding river, separated the ruling (Bugis) aristocracy from the Sumatrans of the interior. No Sultan of Selangor had been into the interior of the State in the previous hundred years.

With uncharacteristic insight — for he was insensitive on so many things — Douglas urged the old Sultan, now in his mid 70s and always nervous for his own safety, to visit Kuala Lumpur. The old man agreed. In May 1879 he travelled by sea up the coast to Klang, then after a stay there, on by river launch to Damansara. Thence he was carried in a sedan chair over the bumpy track towards Kuala Lumpur. 'The heat was something fearful, the coolies complaining most bitterly.' As the party reached the high ground above Kuala Lumpur they were met by large numbers of Malays who escorted the Sultan towards the town. 'On arriving near the bridge (the first Market Street Bridge) the Sultan left his sedan chair and took my hand . . . I felt the poor old man's hand tremble with excitement but his face was lit up with pleasure and I think some degree of pride at the reception accorded to him.' On

the far bank he was received by Yap Ah Loy and another Chinese headman rigged out 'in very gorgeous array'. So he moved on to the security of Yap Ah Loy's 'extensive premises' and 'a salute of I don't know how many guns was fired'. (Douglas was always obsessed with 21 gun salutes and the like).

With sustained good sense Douglas continued to keep in the background. On the following day a crowd of perhaps 7,000 people assembled. 'The Malays first paid their respects, then the Chinese. The Sultan wore his state uniform . . . a gold-laced suit of clothes . . . and a very strong guard under arms attended under the command of Mr Syers . . . all passed off very well without a hitch or the slightest appearance of anything but normal devoted loyalty to the Sultan.' The authority — the charisma — of Malay royalty had bridged whatever gap there was. The Malay community in and around Kuala Lumpur was from then on among the Sultan's most loyal subjects.

In the afternoon there were sports — 'the Kuala Lumpur Derby, the Celestial Plate and a Consolation Handicap and also foot races, jumping touch races, greasy poles etc.' The greasy pole in particular was a great success — 'Raja Musa I am sure never laughed so much in his whole life'. Raja Musa, the Sultan's son, was a devout, serious and rather intense personality not addicted to frivolity.

Later the Sultan continued his progress southwards into the Malay villages of Ulu Selangor, the base of Sootan Puasa's revolt of four years before. Then he went down the Langat river to his royal capital on the coast at Kuala Langat. The tour had been a great success. The Sultan was to re-visit Kuala Lumpur in 1886 as will be related later.

Douglas said of himself 'I am a naval man not merely a civil officer' (he had in fact held the honorary rank of naval lieutenant while serving in the coastguard for a few years). He took much pleasure in steaming up and down the Selangor coast in the steam

launch *Abdul Samad* which had been built in Hong Kong under his personal supervision — though his wrath was uncontainable when the engine broke down or the vessel went aground — both fairly common events. He much preferred Klang to Kuala Lumpur. The sea breezes made the coast a cooler and healthier station. So long as the mines of Kuala Lumpur were struggling for survival Douglas could resist the pressure for a move of his headquarters to the interior. But when the boom began in 1879 it was impossible to hold out any more. In the course of his visits he had arranged that a British court should sit once a month (with Yap Ah Loy and Yap Ah Shak as assessors) in Kuala Lumpur. In the autumn of 1879 a British official, Dan Daly, was sent up to arrange for the arrival of the state headquarters.

At this time the Malay and Chinese town of Kuala Lumpur stretched along the east bank of the Klang river opposite the junction with the Gombak river. As there were no arrangements for the removal of ordure and refuse from the narrow lanes it was a smelly and unhygienic place. For this reason and to put the river between him and the possibly unruly population Douglas decided to place the government buildings and staff living quarters on the west side of the river. He had exaggerated fears of a native rising. His residency at Klang 'had all the appearance of an armed post amidst a hostile population'. Here he entertained his visitors by sounding the alarm to show how swiftly his police could turn out. At Kuala Lumpur he selected the hill above the Gombak valley as the site for his new residency (this is where the Prime Minister's official residence now stands). There he planned to construct a 'redoubt' from which he could bombard the town if need arose. But his superiors vetoed that project. As the state government was short of money the residency (and other buildings) at Klang were dismantled and moved up the river in pieces for re-assembly on new sites in Kuala Lumpur.

There were other houses for government staff on the rising

ground to the west of the river. The new police headquarters, known as 'the Fort', was built in the Bukit Aman area together with the barracks for the accommodation of the police. Barrack Road behind the Selangor Club perpetuates this part of the original lay-out. All the buildings were set back from the swampy and uneven ground immediately to the west of the Klang river. But the police needed a space on which to practise drill and so the ground was levelled and drained for that purpose. Hence what is now the Padang was at first called the Parade Ground. It was only levelled to its present impeccable standard ten years later when Selangor had a Resident who was even more of an ardent cricketer than some of his predecessors.

Yap Ah Loy no doubt looked across the river at all these changes without enthusiasm (he claimed compensation for the appropriation of what became the parade ground). The new neighbours left him alone. 'He complains, perhaps with some justice,' it was said later, 'that hitherto he has done everything and the government nothing for this town.' The town east of the river comprised about 220 houses of which 70 were in the Malay quarter. Yap Ah Loy owned about half the Chinese town which had 12 opium shops and 225 prostitutes. Houses were let for about \$2 per month and shops for \$5 to \$10. But many of Yap Ah Loy's houses were occupied rent-free by his dependants. The gambling shed already described stood on the Embankment site and further up the slope from the river, on the site of Old Market Square, was 'a very insecure shed called a market'.

On 4 January 1881 the entire town was burnt to the ground by a devastating fire which started when a lamp was overturned in an opium shop. Three people died and five hundred became homeless. The damage was estimated at \$100,000, much of it a personal loss of Yap Ah Loy. The town was rebuilt with slightly wider lanes between the buildings but the fire risk remained. Yap Ah Loy refused to be absent from Kuala Lumpur in seasons of dry

weather so that he should be on hand if the disaster recurred. The year 1881 ended as it had begun with disaster. December was the season of floods (the great flood of December 1926 comes in a later chapter). In December of 1881 the floods completely inundated the mines leaving the mining employers without money to pay their debts at Chinese New Year as custom required. Yap Ah Shak in particular had to borrow \$15,000 — part of it from the government.

Disease made a third source of disaster. The lanes in the centre of the town were not more than twelve feet wide and they were deep in filth. The water supply, whether from the river or from wells, was polluted. In one particularly bad epidemic of cholera in the late 1870s many of the population fled from the town (one is reminded of the exodus from London in 1665, the year of the great plague). The market was a special hazard — 'the filth of the market is indescribable, everything that rots or becomes putrid, all offal and refuse is thrown on the ground . . . the refuse of the drains is simply removed therefrom and laid on the side of the road.'

The municipal problems of Kuala Lumpur had grown to such a size that neither Douglas nor Yap Ah Loy, from their different standpoints, could cope. Douglas was preoccupied with problems of land administration and was struggling to introduce regulations for the use of mining land where there was much dispute and uncertainty. The move to Kuala Lumpur had a most unfortunate effect on Douglas and his colleagues. Malaria was much more prevalent at this inland settlement than at Klang. Even the energetic Syers, who usually took to his bed until the fever left him and then went back to work, had to apply for sick leave. The sickness rate among the police rank and file, accommodated in barracks near the Gombak swamps, was particularly bad. In 1881 Douglas lost one of his daughters who died of cerebral malaria in his arms while the helpless apothecary (there was no doctor)

babbled that 'there was no immediate danger'. Douglas simply went to pieces. He did not begin work until 11 a.m. and so his juniors turned up at 10.30.

The downfall of Douglas was mainly due to excessive reliance on his son-in-law, Dan Daly, for whom Douglas had secured a senior post as officer in charge of Lands, Surveys and Public Works — all of which were mismanaged. An official report stated that 'there was no system, nor to all appearances, any attempt at organising a system.' Yet Daly was a qualified surveyor who had worked for the government of South Australia and later rose to a senior post in North Borneo. There was a blight on them at this time.

There were also serious breaches of official regulations. Daly conducted a public auction of town plots at which Douglas appeared as a bidder. What Chinese would seek to outbid the autocratic Resident? Douglas also bought on his own account and re-sold to the obliging Sultan whatever items of European domestic equipment he felt the Sultan should have. The price was deducted from the Sultan's monthly pension from state funds. As these and other matters came to the knowledge of the Governor in Singapore he removed Douglas from Selangor while an official enquiry was made. Daly was at home on leave. Hence their downfall occurred off-stage — in mid 1882.

Before the story moves on to the successors of Douglas and Daly, what became of the Malay leaders of the civil war period? When Douglas succeeded Davidson (a personal friend of Kudin) in May 1876 he introduced a new and more invasive style of 'British advice' which left Kudin nothing to do as viceroy. By his brusque and noisy methods of public administration Douglas simply crowded out the Malay ruler. Kudin had domestic problems too. He had never been on easy terms with the Selangor royal family into which he had married. His marriage with the imperious Tunku Arfah broke up. An Englishwoman said of the

Malay couple that 'she having lived shut up and veiled in a Malay house all her life was thoroughly Malay in her ways and customs; her ideas which were the narrowest of the narrow, revolted against his, which, truth to tell, were not in all respects improved by contact with Europeans.'

Although Kudin remained titular viceroy of Selangor till 1878 he had returned to live in his native Kedah in 1876 and hardly reappeared again. Many years after his retirement he did come back to try his hand at a commercial venture in Selangor. But it ended in failure. In his last years he lived — very much in the European style — in Penang. Here he drove out in his carriage along the esplanade to join the European parade and catch the sea breeze at evening.

With characteristic Malay kindness both Sultan Abdul Samad and Tunku Kudin put in a word for Douglas at the time of his disgrace and enforced retirement in 1882. But it was to no avail.

Syed Mashhor did not remain idle when he went off to Perak in 1873 at the end of the Selangor civil war. In the troubles known as the Perak War there were Malay fugitives and Mashhor became a bounty hunter who, with characteristic cold determination, brought in his man and earned his reward. He will reappear — in a minor role — late in this story.

Raja Mahdi lingered in Johore and then in Singapore, engaged in endless disputes over money which he claimed was due to him in Selangor. In 1881 he was even allowed to re-visit Selangor to press his claims. But, although there was no longer any popular support for him, he was a centre of uncertainty and so he had to go back to Singapore where he died in 1882.

The third of Kudin's opponents, Raja Mahmud, could never come to terms with the new world in which he found himself. 'Useless to anyone in time of peace . . . he will be loyal enough to the highest bidder in ~~troublesome times~~' was the verdict of Douglas. Mahmud tried to settle down as a country squire at

Sepang in southern Selangor but could never stay in one place or make a success of anything.

A New Town

IF YOU HAD FLED from the squalor and stench of Kuala Lumpur in 1882 and returned a few years later you might almost have believed that you had come to a different place. The town had been rebuilt.

The driving force behind the change was the new Resident, Frank Swettenham, who took up his post in 1882. Swettenham was an ambitious young man of 32 and this was his first independent position. In selecting him for Selangor the Governor, Sir Frederick Weld, had passed over more senior colleagues. Some observers, including the Colonial Office, had their doubts. But Swettenham got his chance — and made a success of it. As is the way with such men he was pushful and not too scrupulous, but he was able, efficient and he knew how to get on with people. He was already well-known both to Yap Ah Loy and to the Sultan.

Swettenham held the post of Resident of Selangor until 1889 but he was away from the state for long periods on other duties. In his absence he was replaced by his deputy, the Commissioner of Lands. This was John Rodger, a charming though less forceful colleague, once described as 'rather amateurish as an administrator'. Rodger came to Selangor almost by chance. He had been educated at Eton and Oxford and obtained a call to the English

Bar. For a time he had done social work in the East End of London — 'not a bad training for a man who is to look after natives' was the comment made by the Colonial Office later. He decided to visit the East and while travelling came to Singapore where he was offered a post in Selangor; he took it and served in Malaya until 1903. He was said to have 'a grand manner, officially, socially and intellectually . . . this was a little overpowering at times'. His wife was described as a 'grande dame'. But he was well liked and sufficiently effectual during his time in Selangor.

On his arrival Swettenham's first move to improve the town was to send in bullock carts and gangs of labourers to clean up the 'pestilential' lanes by removing cartloads of filth. But if the fire risk was to be removed the town must be rebuilt with wider streets. The new houses and shops must also be constructed of less inflammable materials than wood and palm thatch. A scheme for roofs of corrugated iron ran into the problem of lack of materials. So it was decided to rebuild with local materials, i.e. to have walls of brick and tiled roofs. But to meet the much expanded demand a new brick and tile industry was needed. When the rebuilding was at its peak in 1886 Kuala Lumpur had 15 brick kilns and 6 lime kilns; the Brickfields Road (south of the railway station) derives its name from this activity in the 1880s. To phase demand in line with supply property owners were required to rebuild street by street as a block — first Market Street, then Ampang Street, then High Street and so on. Government loans for rebuilding were offered at 5 per cent interest. Any lack of enthusiasm was dispelled by another serious fire in June 1885 which destroyed 31 houses. The programme lasted for about five years. In 1884 there were only four houses in the town which had tiled roofs. By 1887 there were 518 brick buildings in Kuala Lumpur town of which only one was more than five years old. By 1889 it was possible to order the destruction of the few wood and palm-thatched houses which remained. The boom in building

materials was inevitably followed by a slump. By 1890 the Sanitary Board was glumly discussing the 'total absence of building operations' and the Capitan China (Yap Kwan Seng) was complaining of the many government building regulations which discouraged owners from building.

The result of the rebuilding was a great improvement in the appearance of the town. When Weld reported to London on a visit in 1886 he said that Kuala Lumpur was now 'the neatest and prettiest Chinese and Malay town' in Malaya and 'the streets have been widened, metalled and drained, and rows of sufficiently regular yet picturesque houses and shops brightly painted and often ornamented with carving and gilding' had been built.

As the largest property owner Yap Ah Loy was much affected by the rebuilding programme — though he died before it had reached its peak. He submitted to the rebuilding of houses and shops with good grace since he retained them as his property. But he had a tussle with Swettenham over his gambling shed and the market ('the very insecure shed') since the government insisted that they stood on public land. Under pressure he rebuilt the market with brick pillars and a corrugated iron roof. But he held the site under a lease and after his death it was decided to build a larger central market elsewhere and to clear the old site (Old Market Square). There was a long wrangle between Yap Ah Loy's representatives who claimed \$10,000 for the market building and the government which offered only \$2,500.

Although the streets were wider the town retained the same lay-out as before. To this day the streets of Kuala Lumpur in the town centre east of the river follow the line of Yap Ah Loy's town. It was also not possible at this stage to remove all the local industries to a zone away from the town centre. There were still pig-styes, charcoal burners' sheds and the like among the shops and houses. At this time — and for many years afterwards — it was considered better to tolerate and regulate brothels (they were not

prohibited until 1930). It was argued that the imbalance of the sexes (the ratio of Chinese men to women was about 10 to 1) made prostitution inevitable. If the women were volunteers and were subject to regular medical inspection the worst abuses, and the spread of venereal disease, would be at least restrained. Modern opinion may think otherwise but that was the view of the time. Yap Ah Loy and other Chinese in his position had treated prostitution simply as one of the monopolies which they could exploit to make an additional profit from their labourers.

As successors to Yap Ah Loy the British accepted the inevitability of brothels but were appalled at what they found. There were about 300 prostitutes on Ah Loy's premises. The medical officer reported that 'the houses are so soddened with filth and dirt that they are past cleaning . . . the rooms in which the poor women live are much worse than pig-sties and so dark that lamps are in use all day.' The old premises were destroyed and the women moved to brick houses in High Street. Apart from medical inspection there was much concern that women should not be forced into or retained in brothels against their will. New arrivals were questioned and — later on — a refuge was provided for those who wished to escape. Much of this welfare work was in the hands of missionaries. The moving spirit was Rev. Fr. Letessier, head of the Roman Catholic Mission, to whom we shall come later.

The rebuilding of the town did not prevent the continued occurrence of serious fires. In 1884 Bellamy, head of the public works department, offered to form a volunteer fire brigade. It was at first equipped with 'manual engines' (hand pumps on wheels) but in 1888 the government provided a 'steam engine of the latest type' by which the fire brigade could pour 350 gallons of water a minute on the conflagration. The fire engine was therefore a very heavy contraption. In 1893 a fine pair of shire horses, such as were used in England to pull brewers drays, were imported to pull the engine and new fire station was built. The fire alarm in the

town was given by firing the signal gun at the police Fort. The volunteers made their way to the station and the horses had been trained to walk out to their places in front of the fire engine as soon as the alarm was sounded. Service in 'Bellamy's brigade' was — like regular attendance at church — almost compulsory for British officials. The 28 members of the brigade in 1893 were all European or Eurasian. Bellamy himself mounted the box and drove his huge horses, which were the amazement of the local population, through the town. The annual demonstrations and competitions of the fire brigade were one of the events of the Kuala Lumpur social calendar. When Bellamy was away Syers, the head of police, took charge of the brigade.

Gradually the new regime took control of the town and coped with its problems. But Yap Ah Loy still had many public duties since the British regime found it suited them to treat him as the governor of the Chinese community. If there was a commercial dispute it was referred to him — or to Yap Ah Shak — for settlement as magistrates 'for the Chinese'. If there was a fracas on the mines Yap Ah Loy was invited to deal with it. No one asked pressing questions about how he exercised such effectual authority. They were content that it produced results.

Douglas had said that Ah Loy was 'one of those men who must work' and Swettenham later said 'his energy and enterprise are extraordinary'. His major interests were still in tin mining but they now extended much further afield from Kuala Lumpur. He had mines in Ulu Selangor to the north and in Ulu Langat to the south. Under the tax farming system to be described later he contracted with the government to collect its excise revenues mainly from among the Chinese. As an owner of plantations and as a businessman he had a wide range of other interests. He was also an innovator. In 1881 he imported the first steam engine used on a mine in Selangor (to drive the pumps). This engine was brought up-river with much difficulty — since its component

parts were very heavy — and assembled on Yap Ah Loy's largest mine, extending over 411 acres, at Ampang. This mine alone produced 350 tons of tin in a good year.

The prosperity of tin mining in Selangor attracted European participation in 1882. The newcomers thought that they knew it all. They prospected by sinking boreholes — but did not realize that their drills carried traces of tin ore down with them so that the ore-bearing stratum appeared to be deeper than it was. Then they brought in their engines and equipment and a large staff consisting of 'the manager and the sub-manager, the accountant, the engineer, the smelter . . . Machinery is bought, houses are built.' The initial expenditure exhausted their capital and when they reached the tin ore it was 'infinitesimal in value' compared with their expectations. The price of tin, which had peaked in 1882, fell by a fifth in 1884. This sufficed to finish the European mining companies (with one exception which lingered on). Yap Ah Loy and the other Chinese miners obliged their new competitors by selling them mining land. When the European companies failed the *toukays* bought back their mines at bargain prices with a great deal of spanking new equipment. The European mining disasters were indirectly a means of accelerating the mechanization of Chinese mining.

Yap Ah Loy presided over his part of Kuala Lumpur from his extensive but ramshackle house which stood on the south side of Old Market Square. In 1865 he had married a wife born in Malacca. His sons must have been a disappointment. As boys they used to slit the sacks of dollars in their father's counting house to extract silver coins with which to play ducks and drakes, flicking the coins across the rippled surface of the Klang river. The story if true was an omen of the future.

Towards the end of 1884 Ah Loy fell sick of bronchitis and an abscess on the lung. He was only 47 but for thirty years he had driven himself at a hectic pace. He declined the offer of

attendance by the European doctor and treated himself with the Chinese medicines which he had retailed as a shopkeeper in his early days in Kuala Lumpur. His faith in western technology stopped at steam engines. He died early on 15 April 1885. The doctor diagnosed the cause of death as heart failure or the poisonous effect of the fumes from the charcoal brazier which stood near the dead man's head — perhaps to prepare his medicines. The doctor noted the exceptional brightness of his eyes.

Rodger who was acting as Resident reported to Singapore that 'by his death the government has lost one of its most able and faithful officers; personally I have lost a friend for whom I had the most sincere liking and esteem.' On the day of his funeral government offices were closed as a mark of respect. As you pass through the streets of modern Kuala Lumpur you may notice Yap Ah Loy Street near the site of his house. But there are no public monuments. If you seek his memorial remember that you are in Kuala Lumpur.

By 1920 the heirs of Yap Ah Loy had dissipated his vast fortune. His remoter descendants still live in Kuala Lumpur, heirs to an honoured name but nothing more.

Inevitably Yap Ah Shak succeeded to the office of Capitan China. He and Chow Yoke, the headman of the Cantonese in Kuala Lumpur, had been the 'most intimate and trusted friends' of Yap Ah Loy and undertook the administration of his estate. But Ah Shak, always a retiring figure, made no impact and did not outlive his friend, with whom he had been associated since 1860, for long. On the death of Ah Shak in 1889 a third member of the Yap clan (but not a close relative) became Capitan China. This was Yap Kwan Seng — affable, ostentatious in his many gifts to charities, a useful supporter of the government in times of disorder, but in no way a strong personality. He had made his way as an associate of Yap Ah Shak and was a man of great wealth and

fecundity — he had twenty-five children. When the office of Capitan China again fell vacant in 1901 on the death of Yap Kwan Seng the awkward problem of finding a successor acceptable to an increasingly divided Chinese community was avoided by allowing the post to lapse. Times had changed and there was no longer need of a Capitan China of Selangor.

None of the British officials in Kuala Lumpur in the 1880s spoke Chinese and so they remained in blissful ignorance of the continued use of secret societies as the instrument through which Yap Ah Loy and his successors exerted their authority. It was known that immigrant Chinese were still admitted to membership of secret societies on first arrival at Singapore or some other Straits port. The Selangor police found Chinese in possession of receipts for membership dues paid at those ports. But it was believed that in Selangor there was no organized system of branches or 'lodges' through which the individual members could be controlled. Official reports paid complacent tribute to Yap Ah Loy and other leaders for giving information of newly established lodges. In this they were making use of the authorities to suppress any rival organizations which tried to break in on their territory. The experts on Chinese affairs in Singapore however had sufficient evidence that the acknowledged leaders of the Chinese in Selangor — Yap Ah Loy and the rest — were the headmen of active lodges. But the character of the secret societies was itself changing. After 1890, which was a watershed in British policy on the treatment of societies, they receded into the criminal underworld and the Chinese capitalists ceased to be involved in them.

Sickness among miners was still an appalling problem. Malaria and beri-beri (a nutritional deficiency disease) exacted the heaviest toll. The miners crawled — or were carried — in from the mines to die. Even in 1894, 22 per cent of the miners admitted to hospital died there (compared with a general hospital death rate of 6 per cent). Cholera, smallpox and other scourges took a

heavy toll of all classes and occupations. But health and hospitals and the victory over malaria and beri-beri deserve a chapter to themselves, which comes later.

The miners who struggled into the hospitals of Kuala Lumpur came from mines which were as much as twenty miles away. The town was the centre of a large district to which it was connected by roads originally built by Yap Ah Loy and improved by the public works department. It was a market in which the produce of the outlying villages could be sold. The population which had spread out into the villages was predominantly Malay. There was also still a Malay community in Kuala Lumpur itself. The northern part of the town (which had a total population of about 4,000 in the early 1880s) was called Kampung Rawa (the Rawa are one of the Sumatran Malay peoples). The head of the Kuala Lumpur Malay community was now a member of the royal family, Raja Laut, a son of a previous Sultan. Raja Laut was a member of the Selangor State Council, a 'native magistrate' and *penghulu* (district headman) of Kuala Lumpur. Douglas defined the duties of dignitaries of this kind as attending Council meetings, trying court cases within the limits of delegated authority, assisting the police in the detection of crime, arbitrating informally on disputes which did not get to the courts and miscellaneous tasks such as organizing local work to maintain bridle-paths, etc. Raja Laut was unkindly described by another official as being 'absorbed in the contemplation of his own noble rank and the inferiority of those about him.' He seems to have been a dignified figurehead given to making florid public speeches.

In the Malay villages around Kuala Lumpur there was a mixture of Sumatran and Pahang Malay settlers. The Pahang men were the remainder of the forces which had swept over the hills in 1873 to drive Syed Mashhor out of the ruins of Kuala Lumpur and so end the war. The bargain made between Tunku Kudin and the ruler of Pahang required payments to be made to the latter which

Kudin could not find. So it was arranged that one of the Pahang leaders, Haji Mohamed Nor, and his people should remain in Ulu Selangor as an army of occupation and remit the local revenues to Pahang in payment of the war debt. Very little money ever reached the capital of Pahang but the arrangement provided Haji Mohamed Nor with justification for living on the country. Here in fact he remained. He was one of the local notables who welcomed the Sultan to Kuala Lumpur in 1879. Another Pahang man, Panglima Garang, became *penghulu* of Ulu Selangor. There were also still some of the defeated Sumatran leaders in positions of power; one of them was Haji Mohamed Salleh, *penghulu* of Kanching. Although they were close to the town of Kuala Lumpur they lived in feudal state among their following.

Douglas made a trip into this area in 1876 and was impressed by the general prosperity:

This is a colony of Rawa people, three hundred of whom are settled here (Batang Yam) under Sootan Kamala. A nice little township has been built with a line of shops and large quantities of land have been cleared for paddy fields. But the principal part of the men are engaged in collecting gutta-percha. It was very gratifying to see how well these people are progressing.

There were still signs of hostility between the Pahang and Sumatran settlements. When Douglas reached the house of Haji Mohamed Nor he found it 'a sort of half-fortified place on a hill... I was received with a salute from two guns.' In keeping with the traditional life-style there were signs of Malay debt-slavery. This is a complex subject — a sort of domestic bondage of debtor to creditor by which leading men bound their subjects, male or female, to them. To the Victorian Englishman slavery was an abomination which must be rooted out. A girl came to Douglas who relates: 'Haji Mohamed Nor stated that the girl owed him

\$148 for keep. The girl states she does not wish to remain . . . but wishes to follow Bebur, the wife of Tunku Raja, a most respectable Rawa man, to Klang.' Douglas tried persuasion and eventually gave peremptory orders for her release — and there was sullen compliance.

In the settlement of these feuds and problems the new Selangor police played their part. Since 1875 when Syers moved against Sootan Puasa in Ulu Langat there had been a number of small police stations in and around Kuala Lumpur. Syers reported that 'villages sprang up round them; crime ceased to exist, except in very rare instances; and the people soon became reconciled to the fact that robbery and murder could no longer be considered a legitimate occupation.' A trifle complacent perhaps. But the police helped to stabilize a society in which 'no Malay man was ever seen unarmed. The man usually carried from three to eight weapons, and boys of a few years two or three.' It was only gradually possible to forbid the carrying of arms. But Syers was able to report that 'it is a common occurrence to meet a Chinaman carrying a bag of dollars through the jungle without any arms or weapons whatsoever.'

In building up his police force Syers was up against the general Malay prejudice at this period against the police who were regarded as just another form of disorderly rabble such as the Malay chiefs had recruited into their following during the civil war. Even in 1890 the police were called 'running dogs of the government' (*anjing kompani*) and it could be said that 'a respectable man did not care for a constable to come near his house, whilst he would have refused to entertain the idea of giving his daughter in marriage to a man who wore the objectionable uniform.' But on this as on education Malay ideas were to be radically altered in time. Syers was able to recruit police in the British settlement of Malacca — partly because it had no local tradition of ruffianly private armies. So many of the Selangor

police of this period were Malaccan Malays, yet another 'foreign' element in this mixture.

In this fashion the men of war settled down uneasily in the Selangor countryside to beat their swords into ploughshares. Among them we find Syed Mashhor. He had made his peace with the British in Perak in 1875. With the return to Selangor of Swettenham in 1882 Mashhor applied to the old Sultan to intercede for him. In 1883 we find Swettenham authorizing a payment of \$20 to Mashhor (debited to 'casual allowances'). Later in June he was appointed *penghulu* of Kerling. If you drive north from Kuala Lumpur on the main road towards Ipoh you will come (around Mile 30) to the village of Kerling. It lies in the shadow of a hill, cloaked in heavy rain cloud on a wet day. Up the valley is Ulu Kerling. In this gloomy spot Mashhor settled with his faithful personal following to clear the land and make a village. It was a long job. In 1884 they were 'struggling hard for a living'. Sometimes Mashhor could not resist the temptation to go off and leave it behind him. He was found absent from his post without permission for a period of 2 and a half months. No doubt he was reprimanded.

It was suggested to him 'that I should go away to some other country. I am old, and I have no desire to go elsewhere.' So when the next call came from across the Straits of Malacca to go off and join in some bloodthirsty raid he came in to Kuala Lumpur to seek official leave of absence from the Resident. He told Swettenham, with contempt, 'as I walk in the streets, men nudge each other . . . and they huddle together like cowering curs'. No one wished to jostle that lethal figure, the fastest gun in the East. Swettenham gave him leave and in due course he came back with — metaphorically — a notch or two added to the handle of his kris. In time he became 'very devout, and never missed a prayer . . . perhaps not the first sinner who has turned to religion for excitement when he found the world slipping away from him'.

Thus he stayed on at Kerling amid the burnt-out ashes of the world of action in which he had lived as a young man. He was still there in 1900, a local figure of much influence who appeared little in public. A man of the past.

Links with the Outside World

THE TWENTY-ODD MILES which separate Klang from Kuala Lumpur is a short trip which you do not these days make by train. It is a branch line which carries goods rather than passengers. Yet it is one of the most historic stretches of the Malayan railway system. Not quite the first to be built — that honour belongs to an eight-mile stretch opened in Perak a year earlier. But the Klang-Kuala Lumpur line, opened in 1886, changed the entire situation of Kuala Lumpur.

Up to that time Kuala Lumpur had been a remote place. There was only one way to move heavy goods, such as Yap Ah Loy's first steam engine imported to drive the pumps of his Ampang mine in 1881. It had to be poled up the Klang river along its winding course. This could take three days. But passengers and lighter goods could make a slightly more rapid transit — up the river by steam launch to Damansara and then overland by road to Kuala Lumpur. Each leg of that journey normally took three or four hours — so it was a hot and exhausting day's travelling in each direction. When Douglas lived at Klang he used to bring his pony up the river on the launch and ride on from Damansara (the highest point on the river navigable to his launch).

Yap Ah Loy had built the first stretch of the road to link Kuala

Lumpur with the important mining centre of Petaling downstream. When the British came to Klang in 1875 they decided to complete the road link between Petaling and Damansara. But it was a botched job. Douglas in one of his inspections (in December 1876) noted that 'the crown of the road is insufficiently raised, bridges and embankments not properly constructed.' Yap Ah Loy was allowed to work off his debt to the government in the later 1870s by putting his mine labourers on to road work.

Communications were vital to Kuala Lumpur since so much of its supplies were imported. When Yap Ah Loy was on the brink of failure in 1878 Douglas noted that 'it is not so much the low price of tin that affects them, it is the high price of rice.'

When Swettenham took over in 1882 he found that it would cost \$120,000, a third of the state's annual revenue at the time, to remedy the defects of the still unfinished road. So he gave instructions that the last stretch should be completed to a width of 20 feet instead of the planned 32 feet and turned his thoughts to a railway. In later years the British rulers of Malaya were divided into 'wheel men', i.e. those who thought that priority should be given to developing a widespread system of railway communications in Malaya, and 'keel men' who thought it more economic to make maximum use of sea and river lines, augmented by feeder roads to the points of embarkation. Swettenham was an ardent wheel man who saw his solution achieved before he retired (as Governor) in 1904.

No one disputed the case for building a railway to link the mines of Kuala Lumpur with the coast. But it would cost a sum equal to two year's revenue of a state government which in 1882 was still struggling with major financial problems such as the war debts inherited from Tunku Kudin. Swettenham persisted however and it was agreed that half the outlay would be borrowed and the other half provided from current revenue. It was a gamble.

To build the line Selangor borrowed a railway construction

team from Ceylon headed by an engineer called Spence Moss. The work began late in 1883. The twenty-mile stretch of country was fairly level and there were no major obstacles. Wooden sleepers could be provided from the surrounding jungle; this contract went to Hill and Rathbone who were willing to turn their hand to anything. (We shall come to Heslop Hill later.) Yap Ah Loy contracted to provide the unskilled labour. A skilled team of Bengali plate-layers was imported from India. Strict economy was the order of the day. At Klang the line began on the far side of the river from the town to avoid building a large bridge. There were to be no railway buildings other than a shed with a corrugated iron roof at the Kuala Lumpur end to serve as its first railway station. The railway lines and other fabricated material alone had to be purchased from abroad. A derelict railway engine was found in Johore (where a railway project had been abandoned) and it was renamed the *Lady Clarke* (after the wife of the Governor who had first sent a Resident to Selangor in 1875). The construction went very well and the state revenues were buoyant enough to meet almost nine-tenth of the cost from revenue.

In October 1886 all was ready. The Governor from Singapore, Sir Frederick Weld, and old Sultan Abdul Samad, now a sprightly 81, converged on Klang for the inaugural railway journey. The party climbed into the stuffy, little railway carriages and off they went. Weld relates that 'the train went smoothly and all went well. His Highness the Sultan was very much pleased and remarked that it was the best bullock cart he had ever travelled in.' 'No small care' was taken that all should go well and the train went at a very sober pace until it was approaching Kuala Lumpur. Then the elated engine driver opened his throttle and the *Lady Clarke* raced into town at 30 miles per hour.

There was great excitement in Kuala Lumpur. 'The whole place was en fete,' says Weld, 'Malays, Chinese and Tamils had travelled long distances down the country to be present on the occasion.

The scene was an exceedingly gay one, bright with costumes and coloured hangings, and banners, and palm and fern leaves.' There was a 'great banquet' and Weld invested the Sultan with the insignia of the K.C.M.G. Inevitably there were many speeches and loyal addresses. This was an occasion for Raja Laut, the *penghulu* of Kuala Lumpur — 'Previous to the British Government affording us its advice and placing a Resident here to look after the welfare of Selangor, we felt like one wandering in the jungle, our way beset by thickets and thorns . . . since the arrival of the British Resident in this country, we have felt as one lifted up and placed between earth and sky', etc. The Sultan, not to be outdone, expressed the hope that Weld would continue to be Governor for the rest of his life — a remark which Weld (at the end of a seven-year term) relayed to the Colonial Office.

After three weeks of the greatest junketing the town had ever seen — sports, races, firework displays, entertainments — the very important personages departed. The Selangor government had then to wrestle with the unfamiliar problem of running a railway at a profit. This did not prove easy. The railway saved time — but in a country where time was not money to any great extent. In later years Swettenham wrote that 'bullocks cost comparatively little to buy and very little to keep; the carts are rough and inexpensive; harness nil and as the drivers are usually also the owners, a very small sum will support them.' Bullock carts, like modern lorries, had the great advantage that they could pick up their loads at the very start of the trip and deliver them at the end. The railway needed feeder services and double handling.

In the 1880s the government solved many of its management problems by leasing them (the technical term was 'farming') to the Chinese businessmen. Railway traffic 'was temporarily leased out to certain Chinese who got it into excellent working order, since which time it has again been taken over by the State'. By 1889 when Swettenham left Selangor on promotion the railway had become

a money-spinner yielding an annual surplus of 28 per cent on capital invested.

At first there were four trains a day and the journey took 43 minutes. The trains ran in opposite directions on the single line track. There was only one head-on collision on 11 August 1893 in which thirteen people were injured, one fatally. This disaster also marked the end of the *Lady Clarke* which was badly damaged. The second railway station at Kuala Lumpur, 'a handsome, commodious and well situated building' was opened in 1892. Among the decorations on that occasion was 'the effort of a local artist, depicting an exceedingly fat cherub, with quite a new departure in the way of a moustache, pillowed on some billowy clouds'.

The success of the original line to Kuala Lumpur led to its extension north and south into other parts of Selangor. There was a parallel development in Perak and (on a smaller scale) in Negri Sembilan. The final stage, early in this century, was to link these separate local rail systems to provide a through route from Singapore to Penang (and on to Thailand). This was completed by 1909. Kuala Lumpur derived an immediate benefit in its improved local communications. In the later stages it became the hub of a national railway network — with the workshops and headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. This development contributed to the gradual rise of the town to the commercial and ultimately the political primacy of the Malay peninsula.

There was an unhappy end to the Malayan career of Spence Moss who had built the first link. Swettenham's successor as Resident of Selangor was the able, imperious and overbearing William Maxwell. Isabella Bird, a lady visitor, said of him (in 1879) that 'he has no softness and I doubt whether he has any friends and he ignores the humanity, virtues and feelings of people not born to his own social position. I imagine he is hated by his European subordinates on this latter ground.' Robson who was one of his subordinates said that 'His presence always filled

me with awe.'

Maxwell and Swettenham were contemporaries and rivals in the service. Maxwell, eager to secure his railway triumph, proposed a scheme for a railway eastwards from Kuala Lumpur to Pahang. Spence Moss demurred and pointed out that the central range of hills made the project impracticable. Maxwell was also a leading authority on land matters who made a very necessary overhaul of the Selangor land system. In the course of this he discovered that Spence Moss had used his knowledge of the intended line of entry of the railway into Kuala Lumpur to buy up land along that route. He had done the same at Klang. The engineer was a little unfortunate to be made the scapegoat since other officials had also speculated in land (indeed Swettenham himself was marginally implicated). Spence Moss was dismissed.

The original railway line entered Kuala Lumpur from the south through Jalan Cheng Lock, where the first railway station stood. The exceptional width of that street is due to the fact that a railway line once went down the middle. Later there was a line northwards on the other side of the river which ran behind the Selangor Club. Here there was another railway station for the use of the Resident and other officials.

As the railway reached its full extent (on the west coast of Malaya) in 1909 it was already threatened — though this was not apparent — by road transport. The first cars arrived in 1902 though road transport did not become significant until about 1920.

There were other forms of communication developed at this time. News and business letters were as necessary as the movement of goods. From 1879 to 1891 Selangor used Straits Settlements stamps overprinted with a star and crescent and the letter S in an oval. The first Selangor two-cent stamp issued in 1891 bore a picture of a leaping tiger. Until 1897, when the Federated Malay States joined the international postal union,

Selangor, stamps were only valid for letters addressed to persons elsewhere in Malaya. For a foreign letter it was necessary to affix Straits Settlements stamps (obtainable from the Selangor Post Office).

The first telegraph line from Kuala Lumpur to Malacca was opened in 1886 — through Malacca messages could be sent on to more distant places. But the arrival of a postal delivery was still a major event. As soon as a vessel bringing mail was sighted approaching Klang the news was telegraphed to Kuala Lumpur. The post office then hoisted its flag to give warning that a post would soon be available for collection. When the mail arrived the flag was lowered to signal that fact. Until 1892 an outward letter had to be posted at the post office. Then the town got the first three local 'pillar boxes'. The same year saw the arrival of the telephone. By 1895 Kuala Lumpur had 21 telephones, mainly at police posts and government offices.

From 1890 the Selangor Government began to produce its own official *Selangor Gazette*. As the only local printed publication it included advertisements and local news. Then in 1892 the government printer and two young administrators, J.H.M. Robson and W.W. Skeat, launched the *Selangor Journal* (printed on the government press). This was a local magazine containing news, gossip, reminiscences and historical articles. It is a fascinating record of European life in Kuala Lumpur in the 1890s. But it only lasted four years and ceased publication in 1896 when Robson launched the *Malay Mail*, Kuala Lumpur's first newspaper.

For half a century Robson was to be one of the leading citizens of Kuala Lumpur. He is an interesting example of a type of Englishman of whom there were many in eastern countries at this time. Essentially they were restless men, ready to turn their hand to anything as the opportunity offered. Robson, the son of an English clergyman, had come East at the age of 19 to learn the craft of a planter on a tea estate in Ceylon. Soon tiring of that he

had reached Selangor a year later and joined its government service as a junior administrator. When he decided to give up his government post for journalism he was again pitting his wits and trying his luck against the unknown. He had contributed articles to the Singapore newspaper (and had some encouragement from their editors in founding the *Malay Mail*). But journalism was for him a mere recreation. However he found himself some premises in a shophouse (in the modern Jalan Raja Perak), recruited a clerk to assist him, bought a 'primitive' flat hand-operated printing press from a Singapore newspaper which had closed down. Here he produced a daily newspaper of 16 pages with a circulation of 200 copies. Skeat was his financial partner in this venture also but proved a broken reed since he contributed neither ideas nor copy of any kind. Late in life Robson wrote that 'if I had my time over again I should have no desire whatever to start a daily newspaper in Malaya or elsewhere.' It took hours to set the type and run off the copies on his press. He had then to feed the sheets into a folding machine to produce a 16-page issue. He was editor, reporter, business and production manager and everything else as required. Much of his material was local advertisements and local news. But he also published a column or so of 'cable' i.e. foreign news. It was gruelling hard work but he made a success of it. In 1900 a limited company was formed to take over the paper and in 1904 Robson withdrew from active duty as editor of the paper — though he remained a director and one of the leading proprietors.

There were from time to time a number of other English language newspapers. But they all proved short-lived. The *Malay Mail*, under various editors, became an institution of Kuala Lumpur life.

The 1890s saw other improvements in town. The streets were now well-surfaced and busy with traffic of pedestrians on foot as well as rickshaws and gharries (pony-drawn traps). At night the

streets were illuminated by the dim light of kerosene lamps hung from iron lamp-posts. The task of cleaning and trimming the lamps was let out to contractors whose gangs were slack in their duties. In 1894 a bold spirit suggested that the streets should be lit by electricity. This was too much for the Resident who 'regretted that he cannot advise or see the utility of Mr. G.E.V. Thomas's experimental scheme for lighting the town of Kuala Lumpur with electric light'. But despite the rebuke progress was on the side of Mr. Thomas. The first electricity was installed at the railway station in 1895. At the opening ceremony the elated guests staged an impromptu dance on the main line platform. But another ten years was to pass before the ideas of Mr. Thomas came to fruition with a general electric supply throughout the town.

Aviation falls outside the time limits of this book — there was a little civil flying in the 1930s. But this was the age of the balloon. In 1894 a Professor Lawrence, 'Practical Aeronaut and Aerial Engineer' arrived in Kuala Lumpur to make an ascent in a balloon inflated with hot air from a fire laced with paraffin. But there was a poor response in subscriptions received and the mortified aviator at first refused to go up. Then a sporting Chinese spectator guaranteed the required minimum sum. At this point let the *Selangor Journal* take over.

Everything being declared in readiness, the 'Practical Aeronaut and Aerial Engineer' again addressed the throng, informing them that, although not enough money had been subscribed to cover expenses (to say nothing of the damage to the Club grounds; a point which, however, he did not mention), he was about to risk his life, and that he hoped that if he was successful something handsome would be done for him. He then moved off to the parachute, while a local sportsman dashed through the crowd with a bottle of beer wherewith

to refresh him, took leave of his colleague, bade farewell to his wife, ordered the stays to be cast loose, and, amidst enthusiastic clapping and cheering, the balloon slowly soared aloft to a height of 20 feet.

'Everybody's' Kuala Lumpur (1890s)

IN THE 1890s Kuala Lumpur stood for a moment between two stages of its development. Behind it lay the age of Yap Ah Loy and the pioneers. The town was no longer a remote outpost on the jungle frontier. Ahead in the early years of this century lay the rapid political and commercial development which resulted from the federation of the central Malay States, the establishment of a new rubber industry and the mechanization of the tin industry — and also the impact of the motor car on the tempo and style of life.

Although it was a period of transition it had a flavour of its own. The surging mass of immigrant Chinese labourers, artisans and small traders moved restlessly to and fro. The mid 1890s was a period of slump when the price of tin moved back to the level which had almost bankrupted Yap Ah Loy in 1878 — though it had recovered to a boom by 1899. The coffee estates had their brief prosperity before disease and low prices forced the planters to think again about an alternative — rubber. It was in that way a period of stress and strain before economic development resumed its momentum after 1900.

Kuala Lumpur had become a pleasant place to live in — for the well-to-do at least. One of them looked back many years later to say 'life was altogether at a slower pace yet it was comfortable.

Everybody either knew or knew about everybody else. A club was a club and had the matiness of a club.'

'Everybody' meant of course the small number of Europeans and the even smaller number of prosperous Chinese, Indian, Eurasian and other local people with whom the European community at this time had informal social contacts. In 1891 there were only 190 Europeans in the whole of Selangor of whom 45 were women; by 1901 the total had risen to 487. The Selangor Club, which was their main centre of social activity had less than 20 non-European members. But here Alfred Venning, chairman of the Sanitary Board (the town council) played billiards with his chief clerk — which in the starchy, tetchy Kuala Lumpur of ten years later would have been unthinkable. Those who liked to play soccer played in teams drawn from every community. But the Selangor Association Football League, founded in 1906, established a competition between exclusively European, Malay, Chinese and Tamil teams with disastrous results for inter-communal harmony.

There were of course already signs of what was to come. The European community were mainly government officials and their wives with all the gradations of seniority carried from their working into their off-duty lives. Kuala Lumpur, it was said, was 'divided into classes which are as distinctly distinguished from each other as a first and second-class mandarin'. Another contributor to the *Selangor Journal* put it more succinctly — there was 'a doosid lot of side'. Even a popular and hospitable figure like Syers, the head of the police force, could never quite achieve acceptance. He had come to Malaya as a private soldier and his wife had Siamese blood. The Victorian practice of leaving cards 'was most strictly observed on pain of something like social *felo de se*.' This practice had taken hold because domestic servants could never been relied on to say that the mistress was 'Not at home' when in fact she was. But handling small bits of cardboard, an

equally mysterious routine, did not strain the bounds of credibility so much.

'Everybody' belonged to the Selangor Club founded in 1884. In 1892 it had 140 members including some who were absent from Selangor. Before there was a club everybody met everybody at Maynards which was the only European shop in Kuala Lumpur (though there were also two Chinese shops which catered for the European trade). In theory Maynards was a pharmaceutical chemist but it also sold liquor and a wide range of other things. Ladies went shopping in the confidence of meeting friends and lingering to chat. The Selangor Club met a need for a social centre as such. Rodger, then acting Resident, played an active part in establishing it and was able to secure a government grant of \$900. It was originally housed in a 'little plank building with an atap roof' to serve as a cricket as well as a social club. In its early years it had its ups and downs. The first salaried secretary, a Count Bernstorff, disappeared leaving an unexplained deficit of \$1,100 (and was next heard of as 'ADC to the Chinese Viceroy' in north China). But he was replaced by Henry Huttenbach, a coffee planter and merchant, who pulled it through its troubles. The government kept a paternal eye on the Club and the Resident was *ex officio* the president.

To this day one of the favourite disputes among old hands is over the origin of the name 'the Spotted Dog' by which the Selangor Club is always known. The most credible explanation is that it began with a remark made at this time that 'frequenters of the Spotted Dog pub must accept the company as they find it.' This was said with reference to European railway construction staff 'of rough exterior' but came to be understood as meaning the mixed community membership — which was not usual in European clubs in Malaya at this time.

Much of the Asian membership, small in numbers as it was, must have been purely formal. For example the grandson and

heir of the old Sultan accepted an invitation to join the Club but did not apparently take any part in its activities. There were others however who did. Outstanding in that respect was the most prominent Indian businessman, Tamboosamy Pillai, who was to the fore on all occasions. He was a genial man who gave fabulous curry tiffins and became a very popular figure in European circles. There were also a fair number of Eurasian government servants among the members. It was essentially a question of the attraction of club life — compelling for some, alien and awkward for others.

Apart from its organized activities the Club was a great centre of gossip. 'The ladies sitting in a ring on the verandah were wont to discuss the well-worn subjects of the price of ducks and the delinquencies of the "boy" . . . such fragments of conversation as "Oh, I always insist on his sweeping with tea leaves" or "I am giving her equal quantities of Mellin's Food and barley water".' There were amateur theatricals and dances — 'Miss Salzmann wore a simple, girlish toilette of white striped gauze.' It was the late Victorian age when everyone was expected to be able to play an instrument or sing or at least recite. 'Messrs. Alexander and Dougal sang "The Larboard Watch" — they finished together.' There were 'cooperative dinners at the Club . . . Each lady contributed something to the common table; one would send cold pie, another boiled fowls, another salads, another fruit tarts and so on. All the contributors took their own boys with them to dine.' But it was unwise to expose one's domestic staff to unfamiliar tasks. For the St. Andrews Night dinner of 1894 an enthusiastic Scot imported a haggis — but the Chinese cook sliced it up to make sandwiches with it.

On ordinary days as the hot afternoon moved on towards the cooler hour before sunset they went for a drive in the pony trap and returned to sluice themselves down with dippers of water filled from an earthenware 'Shanghai jar' or take a warm bath in a

zinc tub. There was no *mod con* sanitation. Food was stored in chests packed with 15-20 lbs of ice.

They went on picnics to Batu Caves near Kuala Lumpur (not then a Hindu shrine) and explored the caverns by candlelight. There were expeditions to the hot springs at Dusun Tua. For a longer holiday one went up to the relative coolness of Treacher's Hill. The ladies were carried up in sedan chairs. For provisions they drove sheep on the hoof and carried chickens in crates.

In private they might relax a little their familiar standards of dress. But the men went to work in 'tutup' jackets, buttoned up to the chin, and long trousers. The women wore long dresses which trailed to the ground — particularly inconvenient in the red dust of the sidewalks of Kuala Lumpur streets. They could see the absurdity of it — 'I was attired in the idiotic frilled skirts of Europe' — but none dared to break with convention.

The strictest parade was the Sunday church service in the small and stuffy wooden church (later rebuilt on the same site as the St. Mary's Church 'in the Early English style' which still stands where it did). 'The principal church service, as in England, was at 11 a.m. when all were expected to attend dressed as they would be in England — the men with top hats and long black coats etc. and the women of course in long silk or muslin frocks and hats or bonnets, gloves, etc.' If any government official was absent more than once in a while he might expect to be summoned before the Resident to explain himself. Inside the church a sizeable choir led the singing to the accompaniment of a harmonium. Over their heads the heavy air of the enclosed building moved sluggishly under the swish of the punkahs, pulled by Tamil punkah wallahs outside tugging on ropes.

Cricket was an obsession. Residents of the stature of Swettenham, when offered a new recruit for service in Selangor, would enquire — in all seriousness — whether the new man was a good cricketer who would strengthen the local team — and prefer him to

another who was not. Cricket, soccer and hockey soon attracted local players and led to the formation of mixed teams — one of the bridges across the communal divide. Tennis did not at this period have the same general appeal. But Douglas when still at Klang in the 1870s had given the future Sultan Sulaiman 'his first initiation into the game.' The first rugger match was played on the Padang in 1894 between 'a team of planters' and 'the World'.

Among the Europeans only a minority, mainly Scots, were adept and enthusiastic in the mysteries of golf. There was a five-hole course in the centre of the town in the Lake Gardens — this was convenient for the ladies but did not satisfy the aficionados. In time they got a nine-hole course of 80 acres on the slopes of Petaling Hill. The new course (opened in 1893) included the site of an old Chinese graveyard from which it was believed the dead had been disinterred and sent home to China for reburial. But the 'firm rather than scientific use of a niblick' in the remoter parts of the rough would occasionally unearth a bone or a skull. One of the major hazards was known as 'Hell' — a deep ravine from which there was no escape. The caddies were all Malays since no Chinese would stray across this once hallowed ground. Much later the government required the site for a public park and the course was moved (in 1921) to the more commodious grounds of the modern Selangor Golf Club.

Horse racing — in contrast to golf — made an immediate appeal to all communities. There were already fully developed Turf Clubs in Singapore and Penang but Kuala Lumpur began with a more modest Gymkhana Club in 1890. Ah Yoke was a member of the organizing committee and Loke Yew among the first owners. Yearling horses — griffins — were imported from Australia. The land on which the race-course was first made was leased from the Selangor government. Maxwell, imperious as ever, insisted that the lease should include a term which prohibited the employment of professional jockeys (in the same spirit there

was a ban on lawyers appearing in the Selangor courts). For a time the half-yearly meetings limped along with amateur riders — Syers was one of the best of them. It was not too serious — at the inaugural meeting at Chinese New Year 1891 the programme included an obstacle race in which each rider, carrying an unfurled umbrella had to light a cigar before mounting his horse. In 1895 (Maxwell had meanwhile moved on to a more senior post) the Gymkhana Club was wound up and replaced by a Turf Club on different premises and without a ban on professional jockeys.

Race meetings drew the crowds because of the excitement and above all because of the opportunity of having a flutter by backing your fancy. As there were no bookmakers the Chartered Bank closed its doors on race days so that its cashiers could deputise for the 'old firm'. It was not considered proper for a European lady to be seen laying a bet. That difficulty was obviated by arranging that one of the stewards should collect and place the ladies' bets before each race. Class distinctions were not forgotten. The nobles occupied the 'club stand' and the *hoi polloi* viewed the races from the 'native stand'. There was tea with ice-cream dispensed from portable tubs. After the last race everyone strolled around and the ladies had the chance to see and be seen in the latest fashion.

Sports and recreations clubs of all kinds multiplied — with Syers and his friend Dr. Travers active in many of them. There was a Chinese Recreation Club, a Rifle Association — Syers was a first-rate shot — and a Hunt Club with 'a wild and for the most part hairless pack of dogs'. Travers is said to have shot a tiger in Young Road in the centre of Kuala Lumpur.

In their own country the English were taking to the bicycle. In Malaya however it was too hot to be a comfortable mode of getting about. But there were enthusiasts. In Easter 1894 an intrepid band cycled from Kuala Lumpur to Malacca and back — eleven hours on the road each way. A son of Yap Ah Loy was persuaded

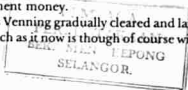
to import a 'penny farthing' but dignity impelled him to leave it to a servant to ride it.

It was a vintage year — 1894. It had brought to Kuala Lumpur the Practical Aviator with his hot air balloon. Another visitor was Mr. Hancock, described as 'a champion walkist'. He offered to race over a distance of four miles round and round the Padang against a relay team of eight local walkers. A team of six Sikhs and two Europeans was organized to accept the challenge. But Lawrence beat them — he claimed to be able to cover eight miles in 17 seconds under one hour.

It may seem rather trivial — the recreations and interests of this small group of temporary sojourners in Kuala Lumpur, shared by a few local citizens. But — by the slow leaven of time — it made its mark. If you doubt it, stand and watch the players going off for their round on the Selangor Golf Club course — a high proportion of them are local players whose grandfathers stood astonished at this curious practice.

Of all the legacies of this period to Kuala Lumpur the most meritorious is surely the Lake Gardens. We have come across Alfred Venning playing billiards at the Selangor Club. He had come to Selangor from Ceylon where he had been a planter. As a planter he was interested in the development of new crops. In 1888 he proposed to Swettenham that a 'botanic garden' should be laid out in the long ravine on the outskirts of the town — 'several acres of swamp, in which briars and lallang, forest trees, screw pines and tree ferns were interspersed in picturesque confusion.' Swettenham was a thorough administrator who like to see things for himself. He and Venning spent several early mornings scrambling through this unpromising terrain. But in the end Swettenham gave the project his approval and authorized a small grant of government money.

Over the next ten years Venning gradually cleared and laid out a park of 173 acres — much as it now is though of course without



some of the present buildings. Common trees were replaced by ornamental and flowering trees and shrubs. Venning had the support of others in what they recognized was a 'labour of love'. Towkay Ah Yoke contributed one hundred chempaka and orange trees to the initial planting programme. A construction engineer called Gordon undertook to dam up the Sungei Bras Bras to make a lake (called 'Sydney Lake' after the first name of Mrs. Swettenham).

The gardens were a splendid amenity which drew in people of all classes and communities. For their entertainment there were afternoon concerts by the police band. As there was a lack of suitable local performers Syers had been allowed to recruit Filipino musicians to form his police band and they were allowed to play for public entertainment. This was just the sort of thing to bring out the absurd in Maxwell. Syers had to publish regulations in the *Selangor Gazette* providing that the band should practise in public from 8 to 10 a.m. except on Sundays when the hours would be 3 to 4 p.m. 'New music is to be practised and the band master is directed not to be satisfied with the repetition of the same pieces over and over again'. Most of these concerts were given on the Padang in front of the Selangor Club but on Thursdays the venue was the Lake Gardens — 'a programme is to be submitted to the Resident the day before.' The band also played at 'private entertainments' with the Resident's general approval. In such cases Syers had to approve the choice of music and 'will direct an officer of the Police Department to see that whatever programme is arranged is properly carried out.' The Resident also required that a copy of the approved programme should be submitted to him for information. Subject to all this bureaucratic control Kuala Lumpur got its band music.

It was another sign of the tendency towards class and communal differentiation that a second club, the Lake Club, was formed with its clubhouse in the Lake Gardens. It was much more exclusive in

its membership than the Spotted Dog. The original 28 members, all European, were 'principal residents' such as the most senior government officials. For many years the Lake Club was regarded as the preserve of those who were or regarded themselves as the elite. It was the beginning of a most unfortunate trend and attitude of which there is more to tell in a later chapter.

The Other Kuala Lumpur

LEAVE BEHIND YOU the police band on the Padang playing music officially approved by the Resident and cross the river by the Market Street bridge. The felled tree trunk which served as a bridge in Yap Ah Loy's time had been rebuilt twice since 1880. First there was a timber bridge and then in 1890 a ninety-foot lattice girder bridge. There were two other bridges as well upstream and downstream. Once across the bridge you enter the Chinese quarter with its rows of shophouses. On the ground floor level each shop is open to the public passing along the 'five foot way' (the covered pavement along the street). From the shops the smells and aromas of the 'stock in trade' are wafted out to contribute to the atmosphere of the town. There are now arrangements for the regular emptying of nightsoil buckets but domestic dustbins were not introduced — as an experiment — until 1895.

When Kuala Lumpur was rebuilt in the 1880s each shop was set back sufficiently to allow space for a covered pavement so that the passers-by need no longer crowd the street itself. The authorities waged war — with mixed success — on street traders whose stalls obstructed the traffic. There were regulations which forbade the leading of buffaloes through the town unless the tips of both

horns had been covered by a transverse bar of wood as a safety precaution. The town teemed with people — Petaling Street was 'lined on each side by stalls; crowded in every conceivable crook and crannie by Chinese; two continuous lines of carriages, gharries and rikishas . . . a glaring sun, a blinding dust and a strong odour of cooking etc. floated around.'

There is a famous catalogue of Chinese occupations which begins:

The Chinese are everything; they are actors, acrobats, artists, musicians, chemists and druggists, clerks, cashiers, engineers, architects, surveyors, missionaries, priests, doctors, schoolmasters, lodging-house keepers, butchers, porksellers, cultivators of pepper and gambier, cake-sellers, cart and hackney-carriage owners, cloth hawkers, distillers of spirits, eating-house keepers, fishmongers, fruitsellers, ferrymen, grass-seller, hawkers, merchants and agents, oil-sellers, opium-shop keepers, pawnbrokers, pig dealers and poulterers . . .

So the list goes on through paper-lantern makers, pea-grinders, tomb-builders, water carriers, to end with beggars, idle vagabonds or *samsengs* and thieves.

In 1890 they were still temporary residents who intended to return to China sooner or later. Most of them were men. The old arrangements for importing indentured coolies — 'the pig business' — had broken down. The working population were now 'free labourers' who could change their employer if they wished. But a newcomer from China with his passage paid by a recruiting agent was still likely to be locked up in a lodging house while the recruiter went off to arrange for his disposal to an employer who could take over the debt.

The Chinese town-dweller of 1890 lived where he could find space to lie down. He either lived on the job or shared a room in a

tenement with a group of friends. If he was out of a job he had to persuade a lodginghouse keeper to give him board and lodging on tick. But in exchange he must surrender his precious box, containing his few belongings, including his tea-pot, opium-pipe and lamp and a few personal treasures — perhaps the latest letter from his village in China with the home news, as security against the risk of his absconding. For clothing he wore short trousers and a jacket of unbleached coarse nankeen. His feet were bare but on his head he wore a conical bamboo hat to shade him from the sun. By now he understood the comfort if not the protection obtained by sleeping under a mosquito-net and did his best to get one. In his daily working life he had few contacts outside his own community. Unless he learnt Malay he had no means of communicating with anyone but other Chinese of the same dialect group as himself.

Occasionally he crossed the path of one of the handful of British officials whose job it was — as the Chinese Protectorate — to supervise the working conditions of Chinese labourers. But without trust inspection could do little. His attitude was likely to be, as a Protectorate officer wrote, 'dumb antipathy'. He was afraid to complain for fear of reprisals afterwards.

So in his tough, stubborn way the Chinese coolie put up with grievances and occasional ill-treatment — until he reached breaking point. Although the secret societies still existed as proscribed underground groups they were no longer the recognized means of control. There was vacuum in Chinese society, a lack of authority. Twice in this period of Kuala Lumpur's history there were serious riots which began from trivial events and got out of hand. First, there was the *dacing* riot of 1897. In any Malaysian market today you will see the *dacing* in use. It is a simple balance scale, a calibrated rod or steelyard. You hang weights at marked points to measure whether goods at the other end of the rod (suspended at the middle) are of measured weight such as a

kati ($1\frac{1}{3}$ lbs). Like most scales the *dacing* can be adjusted to give short weight. In 1897 the police confiscated some faulty *dacings* and so the traders had to buy new ones which were correct. But only one shop in Kuala Lumpur had them for sale.

The rumour spread that the scales had been confiscated to promote the trade of the *dacing* seller. An angry crowd was soon throwing bricks into his shop. The police made a bayonet charge and the crowd gave way before them — but gathered again elsewhere in an ugly mood. At last the Resident (Rodger) and H.C. Ridges, the officers in charge of the Chinese Protectorate, drove down into the town in a gharry. The Resident stood up in his vehicle and harangued the crowd and Ridges translated his message — he would 'stand no nonsense'. This display of official disapproval — and perhaps the attention given to the grievance — sufficed to the surprise of all to quell the disturbance. The crowd dispersed as suddenly as it had gathered. But while the trouble lasted there had been much alarm; the European community even prepared to gather the women and children at the Fort (the police headquarters).

The *tauchang* riots which came much later (in 1912) were more serious but reflected the same absence of effective channels of communication between the mass of working class Chinese in Kuala Lumpur and their own leaders (and the British administrators). Kuala Lumpur had not been much affected by the reform movement in China which led to the revolution of 1911. But one of the more demotic items of the reformers' programme was the abandonment by the Chinese of the wearing of a queue or pigtail as a symbol of the old way of life which held China back from making progress. In 1912, most working-class Chinese still wore their hair in the old style. Europeans made an issue of it.

If my cook came to me with his pigtail curled round his head and no jacket on, I sent him back to dress himself

properly before I would condescend to order dinner . . .
Chinamen are always inclined to be impertinent to the
'mem'.

The riot began however with general hooliganism. It was the season of the Chinese New Year and the town full of labourers who had come in from the surrounding mining areas to join in the celebrations. 'By way of amusement they started throwing Chinese sand-crackers into Petaling Street houses.' As the ribaldry increased some of the crowd began to drag Chinese rickshaw-pullers into nearby barbers' shops and cut off their queues. What began as a joke soon expanded into a riot which lasted a week. Old scores between different dialect and clan groups in the Chinese community flared up into open fighting. There was 'almost a reign of terror among some of the Chinese women and children'. The authorities mobilized the volunteers i.e. the local militia. At one stage the police opened fire. The trouble spread to the mines outside Kuala Lumpur and there was a serious faction fight on a mine at Ampang. In the end the trouble faded out as suddenly as it had begun. Although the European community shared in the general alarm there was at no time any manifestation of anti-European feeling.

One of the consequences of the 1912 riots was a proposal to establish a Chinese Advisory Board, i.e. a representative committee of Chinese notables through whom the authorities could maintain a better — and better informed — contact with the Chinese community. Two administrators fulminating in a pony trap was no answer to the problem.

Another major problem within the Chinese community was still the imbalance in number of the sexes, reflected in a regime of tolerated and supervised prostitution through licensed brothels. There was the risk that women or girls would be imported from China or recruited in Malaya for the brothels against their will.

When a vessel arrived from China at a Malayan port there was a detailed examination of the circumstances of each female passenger. If there was any doubt about the 'relative' who appeared to meet her she would be withheld from him pending further enquiry or in some cases he would be required to give a financial bond to be forfeited if it was later found that she had been disposed of to a brothel. In towns such as Kuala Lumpur there was raids on the brothels in which unwilling inmates were rescued. Some escaped of their own initiative.

For those who were rescued or who escaped a refuge was provided. It began with the renting of a single room in the Chinese quarter at High Street in 1895. Later there was a bungalow near the Roman Catholic mission on Bukit Nanas. Father Letessier, the head of the RC Mission, took the lead in this as in many other social welfare activities of this time. A gentle, kind man who had a deep and tolerant understanding of religions other than his own, he is our principal informant on the great public festivals of the Chinese religion in Kuala Lumpur. In Yap Ah Loy's time the principal protective deity worshipped in Kuala Lumpur was Sen Ta to whom a temple was built. The god personified the spirit of the pioneer with the attributes of protection and success — Chinese religion is very practical. Those in doubt or trouble consulted the oracle in the temple. 'Sick people who follow his prescriptions are almost always cured, traders who invoke him make their fortune, gamblers will not risk the fruit of their toil without having invoked him, and even abandoned women come to ask good luck from this great spirit.'

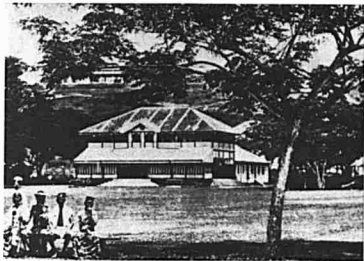
Every year the medium, called Thung Cen, through whom the god spoke went in procession through the streets. At intervals, 1893 and 1902 were two such years, the procession was particularly elaborate. Let Letessier take over:

The Thung Cen, covered in an untidy red garment was seated, as is customary, in front of the altar surrounded by his assistants. All at once he took his hands away from his head, and began to throw himself about in his chair, uttering owl-like cries. 'Sen Ta! Sen Ta!' exclaim the spectators, whose eyes are fixed on the Thung Cen and his cortege of six towkays clad in their long ceremonial robes.

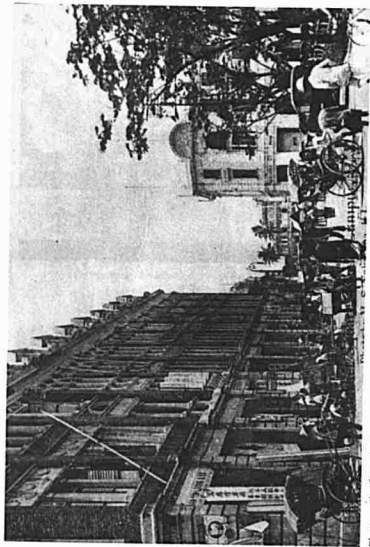
The inspired fanatic bids them hasten to prostrate themselves before the god, and they do so with an air of pious eagerness. He then receives a vase filled with a liquid of which he drinks, and which he rubs on his cheeks both inside and out; then with the spasmodic groans of a dying man with a death rattle in his throat, he seizes a spindle of gold or copper, which is about four or five inches long, broadened out and artistically wrought at one end, and inserts it obliquely in his right cheek; then, bounding from his chair, he rushes towards the door, leaping like a maniac. Outside the pagoda is a sedan-chair, the seat of which bristles with spikes, and upon this he takes his seat resting his bare feet upon a small board covered likewise with spikes of a good size and fairly close together. In this position he is carried during the two or three hours that the procession lasts.

The procession itself was the climax of supporting processions on previous days. 'At intervals were the headmen of the various clans, and men clad in long silk surtouts of the most beautiful and delicate tints were cheek by jowl with coolies dressed lightly and anything but cleanly; the mixture had a most ludicrous effect. The embroidery on many of the banners and emblems were artistic specimens of needlework.' There were 'tablets with Chinese figures and scenery in relieve', a dragon a hundred feet long

The Selangor Club

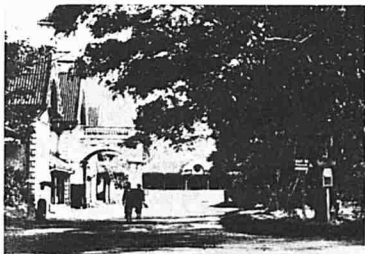


Locals around the showing enclosure, Kuala Lumpur Race Course.



Photograph of Kuala Lumpur in 1925 by a Japanese photographer.

Petaling Street at the turn of the century.



Kuala Lumpur Railway Station.

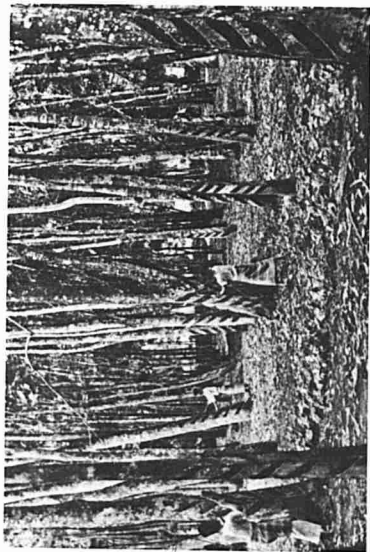


Yap Ah Loy, Capitan China of Kuala Lumpur, 1878.



Early state-run public transport.





Old rubber trees.

LEMBAGA
PERPUSTAKAAN
SEK. MEN. KEPONG
SELAM



Sir William George Maxwell

which had cost \$1,200 and cars of filigree work and brass. 'A band of Klings, playing tom-toms and dancing, accompanied the procession.'

There were of course other cults and temples besides those of Sen Ta. In 1889 for example a new temple had just been built at a cost of \$30,000, all contributed by one wealthy donor.

There were also '*kongsi* houses' built by the different clans — the Cantonese, the Hokkien, the Hakka and so on. Individuals and groups competed in the splendour of their association halls. In all these community activities there was prestige for the wealthy philanthropists, a sense of solidarity and pride for the general body, and often a sensible means of meeting a social need. The refuge for women, for example, also served as a marriage bureau. An applicant for a bride was questioned and his case referred to the member of the management committee who was of the same Chinese dialect group as himself. If he seemed satisfactory (and did not have another wife in China) he would be allowed to meet the girls in the home (Po Leung Kuk) on the 'marriage list'.

They would come along boldly or shyly, but mostly shyly, covering the lower part of their faces with their handkerchiefs as good form demanded. The applicant would then look them over and make his choice. Sometimes the girl would shake her head in a decisive fashion and then the whole thing was off. But if she showed herself well disposed, I would send them off to a corner of the verandah to talk things over.

The man was medically examined (the girl had already been) and he paid a sum for the girl's trousseau (made by the inmates of the home). 'Then the horoscopes of the two were compared by a professional soothsayer and an auspicious day was chosen by him for the wedding. The couple were photographed together, and the bridegroom signed a bond with two sureties for so many

dollars that he would treat his wife well for a whole year!" Usually all went well but occasionally the wife returned — as she was allowed to do — to the home.

A Community of Malays

THE MALAY COMMUNITY in Kuala Lumpur had dwindled as the community dispersed to settle in villages to the north and south of the town. But there was still a Malay presence. Many years passed before the tradition faded that Bukit Nanas was the centre of Malay authority in the town. Here the Sultan's representative resided in what had been the site of a stockade during the civil war.

The Malay quarter of the town had always been to the north of the Chinese village around Market Square. The present Jalan Tun Perak through the centre of Kuala Lumpur has had a succession of different names — it was Mountbatten Road in the last years of colonial rule. But its original name was Java Street. Not far away is Malay Street. Each had a mosque among its buildings in the early days. But in the 1890s the Malay burial ground in the triangle between the two rivers, the very *kuala* of Kuala Lumpur, was closed and later used as the site of the new town-mosque, which stands there to this day, a memorial of the original Malay settlement.

In the last years of the nineteenth century the largest number of Malays in the centre of Kuala Lumpur was found in the police barracks (in the neighbourhood of the present police head-

quarters west of the Padang). For reasons given in an earlier chapter many of the police at this stage were Malaccan Malays. But they settled down in the quarters provided for them and their families until the time came for retirement. The police records mention more than one Malay NCO who served for more than twenty years.

In spite of his difficulties in recruitment Syers persisted in his policy of developing a Malay police force to maintain order in a Malay state. There was a handful of Chinese detectives for criminal investigation but it was even more difficult to persuade the Chinese to join the police. In China itself 'police, soldiers, actors and collectors of nightsoil were regarded as alike belonging to the dregs of society.' In his Malay recruitment policy Syers was at loggerheads with many of his colleagues. The dispute was over the role of the police. Even Swettenham wrote that 'you cannot make a Malay into a highly drilled soldier.' This is nonsense — as subsequent events have shown — but it was said in support of an argument that police should be 'highly trained soldiers'. Many officials believed that the Malay and Chinese communities should be left to their own devices under the control of their own leaders and that the police should be held in reserve at central points and only sent out in large numbers to quell disturbances which had got out of hand. This was the policy in Perak where the police were mainly Sikhs and Pathans recruited from India and led by former officers of the Indian Army. The Perak force even had cavalry ('mounted orderlies') and a battery of mountain guns. Isabella Bird noted that 'they are to all intents and purposes soldiers, drilled and disciplined as such, though called 'Armed Police.' An exasperated Colonial Office official noted that the Perak police were about as suitable for police work as the Household Brigade (which escorts the British sovereign on ceremonial occasions).

Syers took an entirely different view. Since 1875 when he had

established rural police stations to maintain order in the aftermath of the Sootan Puasa rising he had always contended that dispersal was the only effective method of policing the country and that Malay police (allowing that 'the best policemen make the worst soldiers') were the essential element of his force. He wrote that 'the mere fact of small bodies of police being stationed in the interior of the country had the tendency to check crime not from their active interference but from it being known that in the event of crimes being committed the sufferers have some chance of obtaining redress on the spot by lodging their complaints at the police station before the criminal has time to escape.'

Time has shown that Syers was right — but it took many years before this was accepted. The controversy came to a climax over events in Pahang in the early 1890s. It led to a reorganization by which the military wing of the police was hived off to form the 'Malay States Guides' which was a local military defence force — the only one in Malaya for many years to come. Syers, who became the first Commissioner of Police FMS when the Federated Malay States were formed in 1896, thus took control of a police force which was — and was intended to be — a civil police force. Syers himself had been persuaded to enlarge his Selangor Police in 1884 by adding to it a small number of Sikhs and Pathans. But he used them in a restricted role as sentries on important government buildings, guards to accompany convoys of bullion moved between government treasuries, and as riot police when the occasion demanded it.

The police who were to be seen around Kuala Lumpur at this time were mainly Malay constables in uniform. It must have been hot work. A photograph taken in 1904 shows a constable wearing a pillbox hat, a tight-fitting serge tunic with metal buttons and long trousers of some stout material. Syers had experimented with uniforms made of lightweight cloth (probably from India) but it had not proved durable. So he ordered blue serge from the

United Kingdom and supplied each man with two suits of uniform each year. The police were still armed and it proved equally difficult to select a satisfactory firearm. The recoil of a carbine disconcerted his men and a short rifle could only be fitted with a bayonet which was 'top heavy and awkward to use'. When they had to travel the men tended to leave their side-arms behind.

The network of local police stations around the growing town of Kuala Lumpur and in the outlying districts generally sufficed to maintain order. But by the 1890s police work was becoming more complex (finger prints and criminal records came a decade later). Police pressure on the sophisticated criminals of the Straits Settlements towns caused them to move on to the lush pastures of the Malay States. Moreover the mid 1890s were a period of economic depression. All this led to the Selangor crime wave of 1895. For the first time Syers had to deal with criminals who made elaborate plans and, if pressed, shot their way out of trouble 'with revolvers of the latest pattern'.

The secret of good police work is sound intelligence. For a long time Syers was unable to infiltrate an informer into the gang led by the notorious Li Choi who had become the scourge of Kuala Lumpur and the surrounding towns. Angry deputations of indignant citizens called on Syers 'to urge measures for their protection'. At last an informer provided the means of trapping some members of the gang. But Li Choi himself escaped arrest. Syers piled on the pressure 'placing detachments of plain clothes constables and detectives in various places and increasing the number of our night patrols'. In the end he caught Li Choi and saw him convicted on a charge of murder (Syers' reports teem with indignant remarks about the folly of courts in acquitting the men he brought before them). Li Choi, defiant to the end, admitted that his spoils had included three iron safes stolen from government offices.

This was the last of Syers' achievements in Kuala Lumpur. He

did notable work in his one year as Commissioner of Police FMS. But he spent most of the year in other states than Selangor. Then in July 1897 he went off on his ill-fated hunting trip to Pahang. He followed a wounded seladang (the Malayan wild buffalo), failed to stop it with two shots and was fatally gored by its huge horns. The news of his death caused much grief in Kuala Lumpur. Some of his Europeans friends wept and his Malay police were lost in silent despair. An unassuming man, even when he had reached the top, he had taken a leading part in many activities besides the work of the police and he was well-liked by all communities. His funeral was attended by one of the largest processions Kuala Lumpur had ever known. His gravestone may still be seen in the Venning Road burial ground.

After the death of Syers the direction of the police passed into the hands of a commissioner who was at heart a military man (he had come to Malaya as ADC to a governor). But in 1905 the torch which Syers had lit was taken up by another remarkable man, the eldest son and heir apparent of the Sultan of Perak. Raja Alang Iskander returned from Oxford to Malaya and joined the police with the purpose of establishing it in the eyes of his people as a profession of honour and esteem. For twelve years, until his father's death brought him to the throne of Perak, he worked at the police depot in Kuala Lumpur but also travelled widely. He visited Malay villages to explain to *penghulus* and other leaders the advantages and merits of a career in the police. It turned the tide. Since that time the Malay community in Selangor and other states has produced many thousands of enthusiastic recruits to the police.

The other project for Malay advancement in Kuala Lumpur at this time was less successful. From Jalan Ampang or from Jalan Raja Laut you can turn into Jalan Campbell which takes you into the Malay Agricultural Settlement (nowadays usually called Kampung Baharu) which was established in 1899 'to educate the

children of Malays to take part in the administration and to enable them to reap some of the advantages of the present prosperity'. The scheme reflects the anxiety of a group — mainly of British officials — at the decline in the Malay presence in Kuala Lumpur. They hoped that in setting aside 224 acres of land on what was then the outskirts of the town they could reverse the tide. The plan was to make this a residential area, to permit the residents to live as they were accustomed in their villages and to cultivate rice and other crops, and to promote the evolution of Malay handicrafts by a system of apprenticeship and training. The control of the settlement was in the hands of a Board of Management which was predominantly European though the president was the Raja Muda (the heir apparent to the Sultan of Selangor) and in time senior Malay officials came to be members. It was a well-intentioned essay in paternalism.

As a nucleus of the training programme a carpenter and wood-carver was recruited from Rembau in Negri Sembilan. There was also a blacksmith, a silversmith, a master-builder, a tailor, a handloom weaver, a mat-maker and so on. Each craftsman was asked to take on local apprentices. They were also to conduct classes at the Malay school established in the settlement. But the scheme 'suffered from a superfluity of ideals insufficiently attached to reality'. The apprentices drifted off to other jobs. The master craftsmen also proved elusive. The Board of Management at one of its meetings in 1903 learnt that the silversmith, missing for some time, had been located on a pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Malays concerned in the original plan had counselled against including agriculture in the programme. But this advice was ignored and waterwheels were erected to lift water from the river to irrigate the rice fields. In the end the rice fields suffered from a flood and the agricultural element likewise decamped.

The settlement did survive as a Malay residential area in Kuala Lumpur which offered a home to the poorer Malays who wished

to live and work in Kuala Lumpur. The aim was to make an environment where the Malays could 'live their natural village life almost within the precincts of a large town'. Many of them earned their living as subordinates in government offices, or as small traders or shopkeepers. There was a mosque and a Malay school for the needs of the community. The problem which dogged the Board of Management through the many years down to 1940 was how to provide proper services, sanitation, drainage of a low-lying area, lighting and upkeep of roads, etc. within the limits of a budget which could not be fed by any large income from the inhabitants themselves. In 1924 when the responsibility for essential services passed to the Kuala Lumpur Sanitary Board (the municipal authority for Kuala Lumpur as a whole) there were 544 houses in Kampung Baharu and a population of 2,600.

The settlement retains its original character as a Malay enclave near the centre of the town. But as the town grew the needs of the Malay element in the town outstripped the capacity of Kampung Baharu and Malays made their homes in other parts of the town as well.

The Leaders of Kuala Lumpur

KUALA LUMPUR WAS NOW A TOWN of about 30,000 people, the administrative and commercial capital of Selangor (and also from 1896 of the Federated Malay States). But it was not the Malay royal seat of government. Twice old Sultan Abdul Samad had visited Kuala Lumpur (in 1879 and in 1886) but to the end of his life he reigned in comparative obscurity down at Kuala Langat. Here the old man absorbed himself in the encouragement of Malay agriculture. Years before Douglas had noted in his diary — 'afterwards saw His Highness in a padi field up to his waist in mud and water surrounded by a lot of women sorting out padi plants for planting.'

When however the call of duty came the Sultan smartened himself up and went on his travels again. In 1890 Syers and a police detachment — Sikhs this time — escorted the Sultan to Singapore to meet the Duke of Connaught (a son of Queen Victoria). The snooty world of Singapore made complimentary remarks about the smartness of the Selangor police and Syers, more accustomed to brickbats than bouquets on this subject, was pardonably pleased. The Sultan obtained the royal permission to name the new railway bridge across the river at Klang town the 'Connaught Bridge' — the name which it still bears. In 1897 the

four Rulers of the newly-formed Federated Malay States gathered for a durbar at Kuala Kangsar in Perak. Sultan Abdul Samad managed to get there but 'a very weak state of health prevented him from taking a prominent part'.

In extreme old age memories haunted the old man. He 'frequently referred with dismay to the time when turbulent chiefs were constantly fighting in almost every part of Selangor and he was powerless to end their dissensions'. He died in February 1898 at the age of 93.

When Tunku Kudin gave up the position of viceroy his place as the Sultan's deputy was taken by the Sultan's son and heir, the devout and eccentric Raja Muda Musa. But Musa died in 1884 and the mantle devolved onto the Sultan's grandson, Raja Muda Sulaiman, whom we met learning to play tennis on the Residency lawn at Klang in 1879. He had other accomplishments. When the Malay Raja school was established in Kuala Lumpur in 1890 Raja Sulaiman, at the mature age of 25, went back to school to learn English, arithmetic and geography for a year or two. He reigned as Sultan Sulaiman for forty years (1898-1938), an intelligent, dignified but rather retiring figure. Although he was often in Kuala Lumpur he preferred to maintain his royal seat at the historic town of Klang and to keep out of the shadow of the colonial bureaucracy in Kuala Lumpur.

Up on the Residency hill a succession of British Residents presided over the government of the state. It was here that Bloomfield Douglas had planned to make his last stand and to bombard the town from his redoubt if the need arose. Then came Frank Swettenham, the railway king, forceful, suave and diplomatic. His successor was William Maxwell, an able but arrogant bureaucrat. After them came lesser men — among them Birch whose enthusiasm for cricket (even greater than Swettenham's) led to the levelling of the Padang to give it the billiard-table effect of today. Another of them was Treacher who helped to found Kuala

Lumpur's leading secondary school, the Victoria Institution.

When the Resident travelled he came down the hill to join the train at the railway station which had been built alongside the Padang for his convenience. If he was leaving the state there was a ceremonial send-off with 'loyal addresses'. As might be expected Maxwell's final departure in 1893 was attended by unusual pomp. A ceremonial arch had been erected at the entrance to the Residency grounds. Here the Malay notables, headed by Raja Laut, presented their compliments. When Maxwell reached the railway station the Chinese saluted him in verse:

*So do we, men of Kwangtung and Fukien, remote from our homesteads
Join in spirit in longing for our dear fatherland
Still resting here, united and happy, in the State of Selangor
We feel joy in the land of our adoption, the mother of our trade.*

And so on — until the train was ready to go.

On the other hills around the Padang — but at a suitably lower altitude — stood the bungalows of the lesser bureaucrats (and away in the Lake Gardens in isolated splendour dwelt the Resident-General FMS at 'Carcosa' — now the residence of the UK High Commissioner). The officials toiled away in the Saracenic splendours of the new Secretariat (or other government buildings) and returned by pony trap in the afternoon to their neat house and garden, aloof from the town. Their careers would take them on to Penang, or Ipoh or Singapore. For most of them Kuala Lumpur was a temporary port of call.

Since 1890 the municipal affairs of Kuala Lumpur had been the responsibility of an appointed (not elected) town council, unhappily named a Sanitary Board. Its first chairman was Alfred Venning and it included other officials (Bellamy of the public works department and the volunteer fire brigade and Syers of the police) and also local notables such as Raja Laut and Raja Bot, Yap Kwan Seng (Capitan China) and Chow Ah Yoke who had given Venning

chempaka trees for his Lake Garden. Under the energetic but part-time leadership of Venning (who was also State Treasurer) the board coped with the numerous problems of a growing town. Among lesser topics they found time to consider the welfare of animals. Syers, always interested in horses, pressed for rules to prevent the overworking of the ponies which pulled the gharries plying for hire. There was 'a conviction for cruelty to a rat by pouring kerosene oil over it and then setting fire to the oil — a not uncommon method of killing vermin caught in traps.' In 1895 the board was 'considering the purchase of a typewriting machine'.

The individuals who sat on the Sanitary Board and filled many other positions of president or chairman of this or that club or committee within their own community were — like Kuala Lumpur itself — poised between two worlds. They had grown up in the pioneer age but had come to terms with a different world. No one can imagine Yap Ah Loy or Syed Mashhor sitting in committee to debate the purchase of a typewriter. Let us take Raja Bot who shared with Raja Laut the representation of the Malay community on the Sanitary Board — though not for long. Raja Bot's long life spanned the years from 1847 to 1916.

Raja Bot was the son of Raja Juma'at of Lukut, the power behind the throne of Selangor in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1858 when he was 11 his father had arranged for him to be educated in English at a school in Malacca. This did not last long but it led on to an apprenticeship in the counting-house of a Malacca Chinese merchant who did business with his father. Here he became acquainted with 'prices and other details of business' and 'was required to keep accounts of dealings between my people and the Chinese merchant'. This training was most unusual at a time when few of the Malay raja class could read or write. He returned to Lukut where his father entrusted him with 'the food arrangements for the coolies at the mines buying the various necessities and selling them to the coolies'.

On his father's death in 1864 Raja Bot still only 17, inherited the district of Lukut which a former Sultan had granted to Raja Juma'at in perpetuity. But the tin mines of Lukut were approaching exhaustion and the miners moved on to other centres such as Kuala Lumpur. Within a few years Lukut under Raja Bot, who lacked his father's business ability, was a 'ghost town'. Because it was worthless Raja Bot was able to keep Lukut clear of the fighting in the civil war. But the final blow came in 1878. The British administrators of Selangor and the neighbouring territory of Sungei Ujong (part of Negri Sembilan) agreed to straighten the boundary by an exchange of territory in which Lukut was to be ceded to Sungei Ujong. Sultan Abdul Samad readily agreed to ceding what his predecessor had alienated in perpetuity. Raja Bot protested but to no avail. His quarrel with the Sultan estranged him from the Selangor royal family (he was a nephew of the Sultan through his mother) until the death of the Sultan in 1898.

In 1880 Raja Bot took his compensation money — with bad grace and moved on. It is likely that he visited India since in later years he spoke with knowledge of the Indian railways. By 1887 he had made his peace with the British authorities in Selangor and obtained the post of *penghulu* of Sungei Buloh, north of Kuala Lumpur. He obtained loans from the state government to finance projects for sago planting and tin mining in his district. But, although he was not a warrior like Syed Mashhor or Raja Mahmud, he was beset by the same restlessness. He could never settle down in his rural backwater. The district officer reported that 'I have a high opinion of his shrewdness and experience but

he never resides in place and visits it rarely.' This led to his dismissal in 1895.

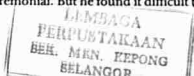
In the meantime he had found other avenues to the top. He had been appointed a member of the Selangor State Council in 1888 and held this position until his death in 1916. He was assiduous in his attendance at meetings of the Council and spoke frequently

on a variety of subjects concerned with trade and Malay education. He was particularly interested in Malay village schools and encouraged his community to send their children to school — over which they had their doubts at this time as we shall see later. When the smallpox epidemic swept through the Malay States in 1888 there was much Malay opposition to the official vaccination campaign. Raja Mahmud, the veteran of the civil war, resigned his position as a district headman rather than organize a vaccination campaign in it. But Raja Bot was on the side of the progress. He himself trained as a vaccinator in order to promote the campaign among the Malay community.

Another of his interests was religion. He was a member of the committee which supervised the building of the mosque at the junction of the rivers in Kuala Lumpur and he sat as an assessor when Muslim divorce cases came before the magistrate's court. His membership of the Sanitary Board was very brief. His business interests included the collection of revenue at the town market and this conflict led to his resignation in 1892.

The succession of Sultan Sulaiman, who was his nephew, in 1898 brought Raja Bot back into the royal circle. He became court chamberlain in charge of protocol and ceremonial matters of great importance at a Malay court. His business interests included pepper and later rubber planting — but not with great success. In his later years he was hopelessly in debt and a constant petitioner for government financial aid. His impecuniosity was attributed to an itch for gambling — he used to go off to Singapore to gamble there without being censured in Selangor — and to the claims of a large family.

Raja Bot is an interesting example of the adaptation of the old Malay aristocratic tradition to the new world of public life and commercial ventures. He was not a success in business but he found a useful role in the State Council, the welfare of the Malay community and the court ceremonial. But he found it difficult to



resist the temptations which came his way. The chequered career of Raja Mahmud was a less successful reaction to the same situation. Only Syed Mashhor — with characteristic determination — served to the end in the role of a district headman in a remote valley. Some of the Pahang mercenary captains who came to Selangor in the civil war and settled in Ulu Selangor came from a simpler world and were less subject to distractions.

Among the Chinese the old pattern of authority — secret societies and a Capitan China at the top — had passed with Yap Ah Loy and his immediate successors. But secret societies, now reduced to criminal activity as extortion gangs, were still a major problem. In his day Syers had always found it difficult to get convictions because witnesses were too frightened to testify in open court. As a substitute for open trial the government took power to order the banishment to China of those who were found (by a tribunal sitting in private) to be members of a secret society. Banishment was much feared since the authorities in China dealt summarily with anyone returned to them in this fashion.

The successful miners and businessmen were able, however, to exert much influence by the use of their economic power. This was recognized in the system of 'tax farms'. Even before the period of British rule most of the revenues of the state had come from the Chinese. But Malay chiefs, like British administrators after them, found it very difficult to collect excise, i.e. internal taxes on consumption of opium or the profits of a gambling establishment in a Chinese mining camp such as Kuala Lumpur. Corruption, smuggling and disorder stood in the way of direct tax collection. It was much easier to lease the right to collect taxes in a specified area to a 'tax farmer.' Each year (or sometimes at intervals of say three years) tenders were invited and the 'farms' were let to the highest bidder. Unless the tax farmer became insolvent the government was assured of a fixed amount of revenue for the period.

The tax farmer could increase his profit by investing in new mines etc. in his district so as to bring in additional workers and add to the tax receipts. The policy of the British administrators was always to let the farms to those who were most likely to promote development by reason of their involvement in the economy of their district. Yap Ah Loy regarded the tax farms of Kuala Lumpur, and later of outlying Selangor districts, as more or less his perquisite. He complained if some interloper outbid him to secure the farms in his area. The farmers might have other business links with the community from which they collected taxes. As major capitalists they made loans to the lesser entrepreneurs. As employers they sold food and other supplies to their workers. It was risky but it could be very profitable. In 1893 the Selangor tax farmers made a profit of 35 per cent and in 1894 a profit of 70 per cent. In such cases the government was a loser and there might well be abuses when so much power was held by those who were so little accountable. From 1900 onwards the Selangor government introduced direct collection of its taxes.

While it lasted however tax farming was lucrative. It was the magnet which drew into Selangor the most fabulous of its Chinese millionaires, Loke Yew. He arrived in the late 1880s as a tax farmer and he made Kuala Lumpur his home for the remaining thirty years of his life.

The story of Loke Yew's rise from rags to riches is part of the Malayan Chinese legend. Born the son of a peasant in China he reached Singapore in 1858 at the age of 11. By four years' work as a shop assistant he accumulated \$99 as his initial capital. (One is a little doubtful about a figure like \$99 but it is the one always given.) With this money he established his own shop under the style Chop Heng Loong, which he used for the rest of his life. He next appears in the civil war in the Larut district of Perak in the early 1870s. Here too there are marvellous stories. He recruited Orang Asli (aborigine) guides to lead his convoys of porters

through the jungle by unknown routes. In this way he was able to beat the blockade. He also told exciting stories of silent flotillas of boats drifting downriver in the dark. But however it was done he got the supplies through and made money out of it.

His business career had its downs as well as its ups. When his capital had reached \$140,000 (a huge sum at that time) he invested it in opening tin mines in Perak and lost every penny when the price of tin fell. But like Yap Ah Loy, Loke Yew hung on. The introduction of the steam engine to drive the pumps which dewatered tin mines made it possible to mine the deeper deposits in the swampy Kinta valley of Perak. By the mid 1880s Kinta had become — as it still is — the most important mining district in Perak. In this expansion Loke Yew made another fortune. Then he turned his attention to Selangor where he became the principal tax farmer and tin miner. This achievement — and his generous philanthropy — brought him a seat on the Selangor State Council and a place in public life in Kuala Lumpur. Thereafter he was for twenty years until his death (in 1917) the richest and most influential Chinese businessman in Selangor.

Loke Yew had a flair for seeing an opportunity before others did and for finding associates and employees through whom he could manage his business empire after it had grown to a size which no one man could control. He had interests all over Selangor and also over the central range in the Bentong district of Pahang, which was developed through his initiative. Although so much of his money was made from mining and commerce he was the son of a peasant for whom agriculture was the best enterprise of all. He owned substantial plantations and became a leading proprietor in the rubber industry of Selangor. He also had substantial property in both Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

His method was to find someone whom he trusted and to put him in immediate charge of a particular venture. In 1900 he took on as an 'English clerk' a young man, Choo Kia Peng, who had

just left school in Penang. After a year Loke Yew had sufficient confidence in Kia Peng to appoint him to the management of his interests in Ulu Selangor, where one mine alone employed 3,000 men. Loke Yew was also prepared to experiment with new technology. He was the first miner to install an electric power plant on a tin mine and was one of the first car owners in Kuala Lumpur. He established the first cement works and built a large coconut-oil mill.

In 1904 Loke Yew was looking for someone to manage his property interests and he engaged Robson, the founder of the *Malay Mail*, who was now seeking out new fields to conquer. Like Choo Kia Peng, Robson remained a friend as well as a business associate of Loke Yew for the rest of his life. Robson has left us a very vivid account of the kind of man he worked for. 'He would listen to any amount of advice, but having a very decided will of his own it was always problematical whether he would take it.' But Robson could work with Loke Yew because, like Choo Kia Peng, he was trusted. Robson once consulted Loke Yew on a large property deal which he was arranging for him. Loke Yew listened to him, asked a question about the rate of interest on a mortgage, and approved the deal without more discussion.

Robson found Yoke Lew

"an attractive personality whose charm lay partly in the simplicity of his nature, partly in his extraordinary ability (though he had no education) and partly in the natural courtesy of his manner and his innate kindness of heart . . . generally the least expensively dressed man in his own office, he kept and used old motor cars which other people would have sold, and often went backwards and forwards to his office in a rickshaw."

He was careful over small sums of money but very generous in his gifts to good causes. His donations were so numerous that

some were even overlooked. Thus he gave \$30,000 in 1904 for technical education and this sum lay neglected in a bank account till it came to light in 1957. His philanthropy earned him many honours. He was the first Chinese to be awarded an honorary degree by the University of Hong Kong (there was no university in Malaya at the time). He withdrew from public life after 1900 but continued to play a leading part in his own community.

Like so many successful tycoons of every nation Loke Yew was a 'workaholic'. His wife once went down by car to bring him home from his estate and found him out in the rain with a *cangkul* (a draw-hoe) demonstrating to a labourer how to dig. He knew that his decentralized system of management opened the way to misappropriation. He once told Robson that his share of the profits of a particular enterprise was 60 per cent. Robson enquired who was the associate who took the other 40 per cent. Loke Yew smiled and replied, 'Ah that is what I should like to know.' In old age he drove himself on and on to keep control of his vast business empire. Robson suggested that he should let up and relax. The old *toukay* made an elaborate pantomime of a man hauling on a rope and said, 'I know. I know, but I can't let go.' Characteristically he was out on his rubber estate paying wages when an onset of malaria brought him to his death bed.

The immediate successor to Loke Yew as the leading Chinese *toukay* in Selangor, when Loke Yew withdrew from public life, was Eu Tong Seng who became the first Chinese member of the FMS Federal Council established in 1909. Eu Tong Seng was the son of a pioneer and inherited his father's fortune while still a boy. He completed his education in China and then got himself an English education with a private tutor in Penang, giving proper attention to it — he studied for two and a half years before returning to take control of his patrimony.

The death of Loke Yew in 1917 was followed by the death of Eu Tong Seng in 1921. Choo Kia Peng, who had been given his first

chance by Loke Yew in 1900, then became the administrator of Loke Yew's huge estate and the successor to Eu Tong Seng in the Federal Council. Among the English-educated Chinese Kia Peng was outstanding and the recognized leader down to the end of our period. In the years after the Second World War he wrote his autobiography while living in retirement. It is a fascinating personal record which gives a vivid picture of the pull of Chinese tradition against the new world of twentieth-century Malaya.

Choo Kia Peng was born in 1881, the son of a chief clerk of a tin mine at Kamunting in Perak. His father lost his job and his mother took her small son back to her village near Swatow in China. Here they lived in poverty. By degrees his mother pawned her only treasure, a gold chain, by cutting off half an inch at a time to sell. She and her two daughters worked 10 hours a day stitching shoes. The father in Malaya was still unemployed. But the boy was sent to school in the village:

I was accompanied to school by Pa's cousin and I was dressed in B.A. (Bachelor of Arts) uniform, a far distant hope that I might attain to the BA degree . . . I did not like to go to school to read books like Confucius in a blind way because for the first three years the master never explained a single sentence or word of what they mean . . . I was able at the end of the third year to repeat the whole book of Confucius in three hours without understanding a word, but I received 40 copper cash as a present from the master.

On the voyage back to rejoin his father in Malaya he slept on deck alongside a stock of fresh garlic which smelt abominably. He was now 14. He found his father scraping a living as caretaker of a *kongsi* (clan association) assembly hall and as a part-time teacher in Penang. At first he was apprenticed in a Chinese spirit and opium shop. But his father, 'stern and conscientious', decided that he

should continue his education at an English language secondary school in Penang. This too was a bruising experience since Kia Peng was by far the oldest boy and the only Teochew in a class of Hokkiens. 'After school in the afternoon about half the boys of my class shouted at me and called me names and sometimes kicked me. I was like a circus bear being led with a band through the village.'

But the hobbledehoy stuck it out and at the age of 19 passed his 'Senior Cambridge', the mark of a successful secondary education. He wished to go on to try for the Queen's Scholarship which might have taken him to an English university. But his father vetoed this hope. Instead his father, who had known Loke Yew at Larut in 1873, sent him on to the *toukay* who gave him his first job at \$35 p.m. plus board. From this harsh beginning — an experience shared by many Chinese — he rose to the top by ability and the qualities of Chinese character which he himself described as 'stamina, dourness and an endless reservoir of perseverance'. He still had his roots in the China from which his parents had come and in which he had spent years as a boy. Much later when he was a wealthy man he went back to visit his mother, still living in China. She asked him to buy himself the rank of a fourth class mandarin since she could then claim to be a mandarin lady of the first class. Her other request was that he should buy her a coffin.

In his early years in the service of Loke Yew he lived in Ulu Selangor and often it was a rough life. 'I slept in the *kongsi* (the miners' hut) with about 40 labourers. I could hardly sleep that night as there were four tables of mahjong and I did not like to stop the labourers having their fling.' By now the Chinese community in Malaya was divided by barriers of class as much as dialect group. The *toukays* were generally Malayan-born but the labourers were immigrants. Kia Peng mentions how he cooled the rancour of an angry crowd of about a thousand mine labourers by telling them that although born in Malaya he had been educated in

China. It made him almost one of them.

In the later years of his prominence in Kuala Lumpur he had to be suitably ostentatious. When he was appointed to the Federal Council in 1921 'all the 29 guilds in Kuala Lumpur came in procession to make a presentation to me and in return I invited them all to dinner, putting up three large FMS Volunteer marquees to have 56 tables, 8 at each with a bottle of Hennessy (brandy) — fortunately it was less than \$4 per bottle.' Later he went to make a formal call on each of the four Malay rulers of the Federated Malay States at their istanas.

Ever since the days of Yap Ah Loy the most difficult task of an acknowledged leader was to weld together the different dialect groups of the Chinese community — Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka, etc. Yap Kwan Seng, the last Capitan China, had been famous for the emollient effect of his lavish hospitality. Loke Yew used to call meetings of Chinese notables at his office. But this was too personal a regime for some. So San Ah Wing, 'a public spirited gentleman of Kuala Lumpur, began an active agitation in favour of the establishment of a properly constituted Chamber of Commerce by a series of lucid and forcible articles written by him and published in the *Malay Mail*'. Loke Yew gave ground and in due course the inaugural meeting of the Selangor Chinese Chamber of Commerce was held on 27 March 1904. Inevitably it was under the chairmanship of Loke Yew but it was held on neutral ground at the Selangor Miners Association (of which Loke Yew was president). Loke Yew became the first president of the new Chamber and the public-spirited San Ah Wing, its first secretary. The committee of twenty was large enough to include everybody who was anybody.

In Choo Kia Peng's time there was a long-running dispute about erecting a building for Chinese community activities. In the high prosperity of the rubber boom in 1910 everyone supported the project but there was deep disagreement over the relationship

between the new building, when built, and the existing club and association premises. Kia Peng obtained an initial donation of \$50,000 from the ageing Loke Yew to a fund which would provide for the erection of an Assembly Hall on land at the bottom of Petaling Street (formerly reserved for use as a depot for immigrant coolies). The Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Selangor Miners Association were placated with the promise of use of committee rooms in the new building. All this took Kia Peng two or three years of intricate negotiation to contrive. The building fund had meanwhile risen to \$170,000. But in the ups and downs of the period at the end of the war the European building contractor ran into difficulties and abandoned the project. Four years passed and the Selangor government cancelled the land title since the building conditions had not been satisfied. In the end Kia Peng was able to raise some more money — costs had increased — and all seemed set fair.

However a furious row then ensued over the name of the new building. Dr. Sun Yat Sen had visited Kuala Lumpur in 1906. But his eloquent appeal for support in his campaign to overthrow the Manchu dynasty in China had attracted very little support. At that time he seemed a dangerous or at least a harebrained agitator in the rather parochial world of Kuala Lumpur. But in 1920 the revolution in China was an accomplished fact. The guilds imposed a condition on their further financial contributions that the new building should be called the 'Sun Yat Sen Hall'. However everyone was agog at the time with the news that the viceroy, Chen Chiung Ming, had driven Sun Yat Sen out of Canton. The viceroy was a Fui Chew Hakka, the same dialect group as that of Yap Ah Loy and still a strong element in the Kuala Lumpur community. This group insisted that the name should be the 'Yap Shak Hall' (after Yap Ah Loy's successor).

The British Resident weighed in with a stipulation that if the government reinstated the land title to the site the name must be

'the Chinese Assembly Hall' and that no bust or portrait of any Chinese should be exhibited in it. Kia Peng had therefore to cope with what was likely to be a very stormy public meeting. Through their wives he persuaded the protagonists to hold their peace. But he also had some police on hand in case of disorder. In the end Kuala Lumpur got — as it still has — its Chinese Assembly Hall.

Apart from his involvement in Chinese community affairs Kia Peng was active in other fields. At the time of the *tauchang* riots of 1912 he was one of the few Chinese leaders who appeared in public to help the authorities to quell the rising tide of disorder. He was the first Chinese to join the FMS Volunteers, raised in 1910. He recollected how they were required to march in full rig from the Chinese Assembly Hall to Rifle Range Road, a distance (he says) of 4 miles, in 45 minutes and then to fire practice volleys at decreasing ranges while advancing at the double.

There were of course other notable Chinese in Kuala Lumpur in Kia Peng's time. But the others have not left such a fascinating record (an unpublished autobiography) of their lives.

The much smaller Indian community was as much fragmented as the Chinese. Some were Muslim, some Sikh, and some Hindu. Their most prominent leader was Thamboosamy Pillai. He had been born in Singapore about 1850 and educated at the Raffles Institution there. He joined a Singapore law firm as a clerk and came to Selangor in 1875 when one of the firm's partners, J.G. Davidson, became the first British Resident. Davidson soon moved on but Thamboosamy stayed on as chief clerk in the Treasury. He left the government service in 1889 to make his way in mining and business. His first venture was the management of a tin mine at Rawang. He also undertook the contract for the construction of the road from Kuala Lumpur to Rawang and on to Kuala Kubu. Like so many others he became a partner of Loke Yew in various mining projects. He developed coffee estates around Klang and he owned much of the land in Kuala Lumpur

along what is now Jalan Tun Perak. As we have seen he was a prominent and active Asian member of the Selangor Club. He liked a flutter as a race-horse owner though he found that 'racing is a sport and not a profitable business.' He died in 1902.

This may seem a routine story of success. But, like so many others of his period, he was a likeable man who lived life to the full. Robson said of him that 'he knew everybody and was known to everybody and became quite an institution . . . a curry tiffin at his house on the Batu Road was something to remember.' He was very generous and was particularly remembered for his endowment of the Hindu Mariamman temple in the High Street, 'among the most prestigious and affluent temples in Malaya'. As will happen in such cases the control of the temple remained in the hands of his family and circle of cronies for many years after his death. This situation led to 'a very noisy and contentious meeting' of the congregation in 1924. A very full record of the meeting was published and remains to give us the flavour of the affair.

Essentially it was a conflict between the group which had control and a congregation which was no longer willing to leave its religious centre in the hands of a minority. One speaker argued that 'the right of functioning in the Temple belongs to an individual viz the descendent of the late Mr. Thamboosamy Pillai'. This was hotly disputed and there were appeals for moderation — 'no room for bikerings and heart-burnings'. But 'half a dozen people began to heckle and ask questions jointly and severally.' Some, it was said, 'would be crudely and monomania-cally crying above the moon.' A Brahmin journalist was introduced as an arbitrator but 'that judge of a Daniel was hooted and heckled'. In the end the congregation (the Oorar) asserted its authority over its main centre of worship.

The disputes over the management of the Mariamman temple revealed the weakness of the Indian community, i.e. its tendency

to split into factions. In an attempt to counter this tendency, the leading figures of the Indian community in 1909 formed the Selangor Indian Association with the backing of business and professional leading men and the influential senior clerical staff employed in the government offices. But it was never possible to achieve effective unity.

The Chettyar bankers or moneylenders in particular formed a separate and inconspicuous group within the Indian community. The Chetties are a caste represented in Malaya by the Nattukottai Chettyar sub-caste whose home is in the Ramnad district south of Madras. Young men were sent forth to Malaya (and also to Burma) to follow the family trade of moneylending for a fixed period, usually of three years, after which they returned to their homes and were replaced in the local business by another member of the family. The Chetties had the reputation of being honest but tough businessmen, who drove a hard bargain. They lent money to Malay smallholders in return for a mortgage of the borrowers' land. For a time the government regarded these practices as a beneficial source of rural credit. But the slump of 1932 exposed the insolvency of many borrowers and led to legislation to prohibit the mortgaging of Malay lands. The Chetties preferred to further their own interests through a separate organization, the Chettyar Chamber of Commerce.

Few of the Europeans, even those who spent long years in Kuala Lumpur, really struck root in the town and made it their home. Syers was one and Robson another who did become men of Kuala Lumpur in a real sense. Robson's great gift was his ability to make friends. In his long association with Loke Yew he worked in harmony with the employer whom he — and other members of Loke Yew's team — always referred to as 'the old man'.

At the beginning of his Malayan career Robson had been an assistant district officer at Rawang which brought him into contact with the rural Malay community — 'a most enjoyable

evening can be passed, either discussing local affairs (sometimes faintly tinged with scandal), telling oriental tales or some other sort of *main main* (amusement)'. By way of contrast he mentions 'the English official, often a young man, who tries to instil into the natives the benefit of English ideas, who mixes with but does not become one of the natives'.

When Loke Yew died in 1917 Robson had considerable business interests of his own. He was still one of the proprietors of the *Malay Mail*, though he had long since ceased to be its editor, and he had taken his part in the development of the rubber industry. As a prominent businessman he was appointed a member of the first FMS Federal Council for a term which ended in 1913 and he served again on the Council between 1921 and 1927. In this second period he took a leading part in the controversy over 'decentralization' which split the official hierarchy into warring camps, as will be related later. Throughout his time on the Council in the 1920s Robson worked closely with Choo Kia Peng. In 1927 Robson planned to retire but, finding life in England uncongenial, soon returned to Kuala Lumpur. Late in life he had married the widow of his great friend Syers. In 1942 he fell into the hands of the Japanese and he died in internment in 1945.

To this group we should add Dr. Travers who came to Selangor as the government medical officer in 1891 after brief service in Negri Sembilan. He was far more than a doctor — though he was remembered for his work among the lepers. Robson's picture of Travers is — 'for three or four decades he was the life and soul of the European community here — to say nothing of his influence among the Asiatics — uncommonly shrewd, temperate in his habits and never idle.' He left the government service and went into practice in 1909.

During the period down to about 1905 the commerce of Kuala Lumpur was mostly carried on by Chinese and Indian business-

men. The handful of European businessmen had generally come to Kuala Lumpur as government employees, like Robson, but left it to strike out on their own. Another of them was Harper, originally an inspector of police, who founded the business which later became the leading British firm of Harper, Gilfillan. Harper was a natural entrepreneur who could see and grasp an opportunity. His first coup was the contract to carry supplies over the difficult mountain road across the central range to meet the needs of the forces deployed between 1892 and 1894 against the Malay insurgents in Pahang. Later when the age of the motor car arrived Harper became a leading distributor of petrol who supplied about three-quarters of the total consumption of Selangor and Pahang.

Another home-grown Selangor businessman was J.A. ('Archie') Russell who had come to Kuala Lumpur as a boy with his widowed father, the superintendent of the government printing department. Robson could remember Russell and his four brothers in the 1890s 'on their way to church or Sunday school in their best Sunday suits'.

When Russell grew up he went into mining in Perak and applied himself to learning Chinese (as well as Malay). It was said that he could speak Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka and Kuo Yu (the national Chinese dialect). He could also read and write Chinese — a very rare accomplishment among the Europeans of his day, especially for those who had had no instruction. His linguistic talents enabled him to develop close working contacts with Chinese miners. As the railway system grew Russell was one of those who saw the possibilities of exploiting the coal, admittedly of low quality, from the Batu Arang deposits near Kuala Lumpur. The original coal-mining syndicate failed and sold out within two years to Russell who was remembered as the founder of the Malayan Collieries (which came to its end after the Second World War with the advent of the diesel locomotive). Another of

Russell's pioneer ventures was tea planting on the Cameron Highlands.

The business world of Kuala Lumpur in the years just after 1900 was about to be changed and expanded out of all recognition by the rubber boom which had begun to make its effect felt from 1905 onwards.

Rubber and Tin

THERE ARE NO RUBBER ESTATES in the town of Kuala Lumpur — though in the 1880s Weld Hill was a coffee estate. Yet the increase of population from 30,000 in 1900 to 80,000 in 1920 was due mainly to the rubber industry. Rubber also added a new dimension to Kuala Lumpur. Until 1900 it had been the centre of state government and since 1896 of federal government also. It was a growing commercial and mining centre in which the main enterprises were owned and managed by Chinese businessmen. With the coming of rubber it became a boom town (and later on a slump town) and also the 'bright lights' which drew in the planters from their estates like moths around a lamp.

Rubber was the last and most phenomenally successful in a sequence of plantation crops. In the early days Yap Ah Loy owned 12,000 acres of land along the road between Damansara and Kuala Lumpur. He cleared only a fraction of his concession to plant tapioca but in its day it was the largest estate in Malaya. He built a tapioca mill and employed an English engineer to run it for him. This is commemorated in the Chinese name for Petaling Street — Shu Chong Kai or Tapioca Factory Street. But tapioca soon exhausted the fertility of the land which had then to be abandoned to recuperate over a long period of years. Government

policy was therefore against alienating land for tapioca since shifting cultivation was so destructive. Large areas of tapioca land which had been abandoned were later taken up for planting rubber. One pioneer rubber planter described his property as an 'open lallang prairie'. Like pepper and gambier tapioca flourished for a time but failed as a permanent crop.

Coffee was the crop which immediately preceded rubber. It reached Kuala Lumpur in 1881. This brings us to the most famous of the early planters in Selangor, Heslop Hill. He and others like him had previously grown coffee in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) but had been driven forth by the disease which devastated their estates in the 1870s. Hill's first coffee estate in Malaya was near Seremban in Negri Sembilan. Later he took over the first coffee estate in Selangor from its original owner, R.B. Downall. Downall had planted his coffee on a hill in Kuala Lumpur which he named Weld Hill after Sir Frederick Weld who was governor of the Straits Settlements at the time. In Seremban Heslop Hill was getting promising results and he was minded to expand his interests. But he was a rolling stone who was always pressed for money. In 1882 Hill went into partnership with another of his kind from Sri Lanka, Ambrose Rathbone, who had some capital. The firm of Hill and Rathbone, described as 'Planters, Agents and Contractors', were ready to turn their hand to anything. It was they who supplied the wooden sleepers for the first stretch of railway line from Klang to Kuala Lumpur. They were also road construction contractors to the public works department. They bought Weld Hill estate from Downall. Heslop Hill looked after the firm's interests in Selangor. He grew cinchona, cocoa, tea and pepper as well as coffee on Weld Hill. On another estate at a greater altitude on the range between Selangor and Pahang he experimented with Arabian coffee but this was not a success and was soon abandoned.

In the lowlands Liberian coffee seemed to grow well in Malaya.

Selangor became the main centre of the coffee industry which at its peak in 1896 had reached a total of more than 10,000 planted acres divided among sixty to seventy estates. Coffee requires intensive cultivation and so estates were of moderate size. Then disease and a slump in the world price, caused by increased production in Brazil, dealt the new Selangor coffee industry a fatal blow. Hill for once got his timing right by selling his coffee estates at the top of the boom to an English company with which he retained a connection both as shareholder and general manager. But financial sleight of hand could not save coffee.

The collapse of the coffee industry in 1897 might have been a severe setback to Kuala Lumpur if the plantation owners had not already begun to grow rubber experimentally, or as trees to provide the shade which the coffee bushes need. Those who had planted some rubber found that it was a bonanza. One of the stories of legendary success tells of a planter who sold his coffee estate for £4,000, reinvested in rubber and saw the value of his shareholding rise to £250,000 only ten years later. The same adventurous spirits often lived on to see their rubber estates lurch into slump and financial crisis a few years further on.

This was the age of the motor car. The world suddenly needed enormous and rapidly increasing quantities of rubber for making tyres. Brazil, where the rubber tree grows wild, could not meet the demand. In southeast Asia, and especially in Malaya, rubber (from seeds imported via Kew from Brazil) had been grown as an experimental economic crop for twenty years before world demand suddenly stimulated the widespread cultivation of this new type of plantation. The old coffee estates and tapioca clearings were insufficient to satisfy the demand. On much of the land it was first necessary to clear the virgin jungle.

The planters were not generally literary gents — but there were exceptions. Once such was Henri Fauconnier, one of the early rubber planters in Selangor. He wrote about it thus:

The dense undergrowth through which the Malays dart about like monkeys, has first to be chopped away. Then they attack the forest trees. On all sides I hear the axe blows biting steadily into the trunks. The night moisture falls from the higher branches in great drops. The jungle smells of fresh shavings and crushed leaves. Hour after hour the axes thud against the stem before a single tree falls; the fellers begin by observing the line and angle of the tree, the disposition of the thick encrusting network of lianas, and then they cut one deep gash in one side only so that the tree is left standing. But the colossus that towers above that throng of giants, is the last to be felled, and its collapse will bring down all the rest. Sometimes the structure of it is so vast, it grips the earth with such an array of buttresses, that it has to be surrounded with scaffolding like a cathedral before the cylindrical part of the trunk can be reached. Then balanced on a frail swaying framework, little brown men nibble at the enormous column . . . I keep on thinking it must fall . . . I must not unnerve these men; they are risking their lives in the attack, on an unknown power that may indeed be a tree, or a spirit in the guise of a tree. Is it certain that the sorcerer's incantations and the white cock he has sacrificed have appeased the dark soul of the jungle? . . . Slackening their effort, they listen to the dull vibration that succeeds each blow, mark the tension of the fibres, the rustle of the foliage and sniff the wind. Soon, very soon, they must leap down and fly through the brushwood; fly, terrified but victorious, shouting defiance with the thunderous crash . . .

After the felling the jungle trees were left for two months so that the brushwood might dry out. Then came the second moment of drama — the 'burn' — when the mass of fallen branches was set

alight to be reduced to ash, leaving only the trunks and stumps of the larger trees to rot away more gradually. The routine of planting out the seeds or seedlings in their measured lines was prosaic by comparison. Then the planter had to wait for seven years until his new rubber trees had grown to a size at which they could be tapped for rubber. The long wait between planting and tapping explains the instability of the early rubber industry. Vast new areas were planted in times of high prosperity only to produce a glut if the maturity of the new trees coincided with a recession of demand.

The investment required to develop rubber estates of hundreds or thousands of acres over a period of years was beyond the resources of individual proprietary planters like Heslop Hill, or the Kindersley brothers who first planted rubber in Selangor. Capital was raised in London and poured into the western Malay states through the great commercial houses of Singapore, which acted as 'managing agents' of the new enterprises. With so much new business to be done in and around the former sleepy hollow of upcountry Kuala Lumpur the Singapore agency houses, Harrisons & Crosfield, Guthrie & Co., and rubber manufacturers like Dunlop opened branches in Kuala Lumpur. Many new firms were established to provide supplies or new light industries to meet the needs of the rubber industry. Thus Kuala Lumpur grew rapidly to become the metropolis of a new rubber industry.

Out on the new estates, especially during the early years before the rubber had come into bearing, the planters lived a lonely life in primitive conditions. One of them wrote that there was 'nothing beautiful about a rubber estate, only a monotony of regularity' in the endless rows of rubber trees planted up and down the undulating slopes. The industry satisfied its need for labour by importing Tamils from south India, thus adding the third element to the kaleidoscope of Malayan communities. Before dawn, while the day was still cool, the planter rose to

supervise the muster of his labour force and see the gangs off to their allotted tasks. Then followed several hours of plodding about in the humid and airless heat of the estate, ending in the early afternoon with the collection and measurement of the milky latex obtained by the separate incision (a very skilled task at which Indian women as much as men became adept) of the bark of each of thousands of trees. Finally came the smelly routine of turning the latex sour by adding acid to produce a spongy 'cheese' which — on the following day — would be compressed in a hand mangle to squeeze out the moisture. It was then cured in wood smoke to produce the 'ribbed smoked sheet' (RSS) which was the standard product of the industry, exported in bales or boxes and sold in faraway places.

In the early days the planters followed agricultural and tapping techniques, based on their experience of other crops, which would have killed anything less robust than *Hevea brasiliensis*. But in time experiment and scientific research, much of it undertaken at the Rubber Research Institute in Kuala Lumpur (established in 1926), produced a sound technical basis for planting practice.

The early planters escaped from the routine of the estate by coming in to town for an occasional night off. Before the war cars were still a rarity. Some made the trip in pony traps; others rode bicycles. Occasionally a lonely wayfarer was attacked by robbers. The risk of that 'used to come back to me sometimes when after an occasional late night at the club . . . I was cycling back to my lonely home . . . on a push-bike through ten miles of jungle.' The alternative was to stay in town after a late night until dawn when a rickshaw puller could be persuaded (for ten cents a mile) to take the road.

Apart from the ordinary Saturday night celebrations there were special occasions such as Christmas or St. Andrews Night (always a major occasion for the Scots who were numerous among the early planters). One of them remembered that a 'gala dinner'

menu of 1910 was 'stuffed eggs, tinned mulligatawny soup, *ikan merah* (red snapper) and scraggy chicken'. But there was plenty to drink and perhaps too much was drunk. The pleasure lay in each other's company which they did not often enjoy owing to the distance between estates. Each month every manager had to come in to Kuala Lumpur to draw money from the bank to pay wages. So they had an understanding that they would all make this visit on the first Saturday of the month.

Before setting out on the long trip back to the estate they met at the Selangor Club. On such a day wrote Fauconnier, 'The town awakes in agitation like a nest of white ants invaded by red ants.' After completing his business at the bank and having a haircut in the Club's barber shop ('the aerial scissors clicked hypnotically round my head'), 'I made my way to the bar. It was packed. The semi-circular counter, edged by an unbroken line of lifted elbows was inaccessible. But beyond it were a few little cane tables and chairs for those whose thirst was not so urgent. The company always arranged itself in geographical order and I was familiar with the zone of occupation assigned to my district.' He goes on to describe a good-humoured but uproarious session —

three cheers were given, followed by the cry of the Malayan tiger, Rrrraumph, then all in a circle, with joined hands and marking time with their elbows, they sang 'For he's a jolly good fellow . . . Flowerpet unbuckling his leather belt, tried to make it into a crown for me, with the great key rings dangling over my ears.

The first rubber planters were veterans mainly of the defunct coffee industry. But as the rubber industry grew the old hands were joined by new recruits. It was not uncommon to employ half a dozen European staff on an estate of a few hundred acres. By tradition the new arrival was given a rough reception to prepare him for the hard life to come. After a perfunctory and uninforma-

tive interview at the London office of the company which owned the estate the young man, usually no more than 19 or 20, sailed to find his fortune in the East. One of them relates how after a long, slow journey by bullock cart he reached his destination after midnight. The estate manager received him in grim silence and at length said, 'I suppose you want something to eat.' He ordered the Chinese cook to bring food and went off to bed, saying that his new assistant would be called at 5.30 a.m. The meal was dreadful — 'soup appeared first . . . with the additional nourishment supplied by the corpses of numerous small ants which formed a thin crust on its surface.' Tinned soft roes on toast, and then tinned beef 'exquisitely tough and stringy and flavoured with a sharp metallic tang . . . large dry biscuits of the dog variety . . . the butter wallowed semi-molten in a tin.' The meal ended in a 'shattering' fashion with coffee for which it was 'the cook's invariable habit of using one of the manager's socks as a strainer.' He went to bed and was awakened by a 'terrific banging on the door . . . and an angry bellowing voice roared, 'Get up you lazy b—, how many times do you expect to be called?' This was too much. The young man went out and threatened to punch his manager's head. It was the beginning of a relationship with a manager whom he later regarded as 'a splendid character'.

The staff took their evening meal together. The manager sat with a .22 air rifle and potted rats, tarantulas, snakes, etc., from his seat at the table. Each night two frogs approached the manager's chair and a lighted cigarette was held at their mouths 'at which they puffed away solemnly with every sign of satisfaction and enjoyment before flopping back into the darkness of the night'. After dinner the manager balanced a violin 'in a somewhat novel and complicated manner on his stomach . . . all the tunes which he played were Scotch, full of the sadness of the Highlands and memories of home.'

Other managers tended to be ultra-conventional rather than

eccentric. Another 'creeper' (the old Ceylon planter's name for a trainee) describes the collective staff dinner:

We dressed for this event, that is we discarded our working khaki, and clothed ourselves in fancy pyjamas, or the even more glorious Malay sarong. Larkin, in his role of lord and master, rounded off his dinner with port and a gingerbread nut; the understrappers might luxuriate on the biscuits, but not the port. Scarcely a word was ever spoken after the evening meal; relaxed in long chairs we improved our minds with such literature as the place provided. Larkin's taste in this respect was peculiar. I never saw him read a book, but he devoured the 'Weekly Times', 'Reynold's Weekly' and 'Ally Sloper's Half Holiday'. I deeply lament the demise of the last mentioned journal.

In time the life style would change. The slumps, to which we shall come later, led to drastic reductions in the number of assistants on an estate. Those who stayed on became car owners (after the war) and were able, even on a weekday, to drive in to Kuala Lumpur 'spending from five to seven o'clock at the Spotted Dog, playing tennis and even rugger, and imbibing more drinks than were absolutely necessary at the famous long bar of the Club'. On Sundays they went to the local Swimming Club and had the traditional large curry tiffin for lunch.

The old hands were no less rough, sometimes violent, with their estate labourers. Fauconnier describes his first manager as a 'shell-backed pioneer of rubber' who justified the use of his rattan cane (forbidden by law) by saying that 'it is a mistake to locate the dignity of a man in the skin of his posterior . . . prison is the only degrading punishment'. But he always contrived to be friendly next day with a man whom he had hit and was careful never to assault a Malay (who might retaliate).

The decade 1900-1910 also saw major changes in the tin industry. Until then it had been a predominantly Chinese industry (except for the brief and catastrophic European participation in 1882). Apart from the traditional waterwheel pump and later the steam engine (to drive mine pumps) the method was much the same as that pioneered by Yap Ah Loy and his contemporaries. A large rectangular pit, sometimes very large, was dug and the ore was extracted and lifted to the surface by the labour of many coolies. But as the richest deposits were worked out labour-intensive methods became uneconomic. The first major innovation was the use of pumps to break down the soil in which the ore was found and to lift it to the surface. The first such gravel-pump (an extension of an earlier technique called 'hydraulicing') was installed in 1906. Down in the mine pit a powerful jet of water was directed at the vertical working face. The slurry of mud, ore and water was then pumped up out of the mine. Although the method was first used by European miners it soon became the standard practice of Chinese miners. It is a flexible method, well suited to smaller areas; it has a relatively low initial capital investment but is expensive in energy consumption.

The second major change of mining technique, the use of dredges, reached Malaya just before the First World War but did not really make its impact until the 1920s when it tipped the balance of the tin industry over to domination by European enterprises until the 1960s. Instead of removing the water from the mine pit to keep it relatively dry, the dredge creates a mining pool on which it floats. A revolving chain of buckets, driven from the floating dredge, scoops up mud and ore from a vertical working surface at one end of the pool. The discarded waste is returned to the pool from the back end of the dredge after the tin ore has been separated out. A dredge can thus move its own means of support, the pool of water, forward as it works. This is a capital intensive technique in which the heavy initial outlay is only

recovered by working a very large area over a period of say twenty years. Chinese miners did not have the means to raise capital on a scale required to finance dredge mining. Moreover it was government policy to reserve for European (including Australian) companies the very large areas of low-yielding land suitable for dredging. The important result of these new methods was that it became economic to work — in some cases to re-work for a second or even a third time — low-yielding areas. When Loke Yew was making his fortune by traditional methods in the Kinta valley in the 1880s it was common to recover a *kati* of tin ore from a cubic yard of spoil. Half a century later a dredge could mine profitably land which yielded only a $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. of ore per cubic yard. Much of course depended on the world price of tin which continued to fluctuate sharply, causing as much grief to a later generation as to Yap Ah Loy in the 1870s.

MEMORANDUM
PERKUTATAN
SEK. MEN. KEPONG
SELANGOR.

The Age of the Motor Car

THE FIRST MAN to bring a motor car to Kuala Lumpur was H.C.E. Zacharias ('Zac' to his friends). Robson, another enthusiast, described Zac as 'a strange character but a very likeable man.' He came to Malaya from Europe — probably the only doctor of philosophy in Kuala Lumpur in his day. When he eventually left Kuala Lumpur many years later he became a lay worker in a monastery in Belgium. He died about 1950 in America.

Zacharias was one of those men — Robson and Russell were others of the same type — who turned his hand to whatever opportunities came his way. He was one of the leading importers of American goods though he was also agent for British manufacturers. He handled Danish dairy products, French brandy, Ceylon tea and a variety of engineering and machinery items for which the growing rubber industry created new demands. He was reputed to have been the first exporter of rubber from the Federated Malay States. His other interests included insurance, real estate, sharebroking, tin and rubber. From 1904 to 1919 he was secretary to the United Planting Association which represented the interests of the planting community. It was said that he could cope with any branch of mechanical engineering from the repair of a motor car to the installation of machinery on an estate

or a mine.

He was already a car owner when he first reached Kuala Lumpur soon after 1900. His car was a British 'Roots and Venables' model. In later years he became a leading importer of cars and owned two garages at which he also sold petrol. As the new-fangled monsters became more familiar Zacharias established a garage service for the Chinese, which had an entirely Chinese staff and traded in Chinese style as Chop Tong Fatt.

Robson soon became one of the leading authorities on these strange contraptions. When an official guidebook to Malaya was published in 1911 Robson contributed a chapter entitled 'Hints for Motorists' which included a twelve-day itinerary by which the visitor could travel comfortably and see the sights all the way — 400-odd miles — from Penang to Singapore. Robson also devoted a chapter of his memoirs to the early days of cars. His first car, purchased in 1904, was a six horse-power de Dion Bouton. He soon became so expert that he taught others how to drive. Loke Yew also bought a car (later he had several) but he imported a 'professional driver' from England to drive him about. The government decided that car drivers should have licences. These were numbered silver discs (this was the era of the slump in the world price of silver which so much depressed the value of the Malayan dollar). Each disc bore the holder's name.

In the years before 1914 car ownership was a minority interest but there was no doubt about the enthusiasm of the aficionados. When the Governor from Singapore visited Kuala Lumpur there was a motor car parade in his honour on the Padang — nine cars and one motor cycle. The first lady motorist came up country on a tour from Singapore. This was Mrs. G.P. Owen, who drove a 'pedals to push Adams Hewitt' with a starting handle which was two feet long and which was inserted into the side of the car to crank it up. Mrs. Owen was a lady of parts — prominent in ladies' lawn tennis, amateur theatricals, and talented enough to write

light verse and play in an orchestral concert. No doubt she coped with motoring without too much difficulty.

The early cars were extremely unreliable but it was a matter of pride to do one's own repairs even if one ended as a 'cheerful mass of sweat, grease and dirt by the time we had finished'. The first wave of French cars was succeeded by American monsters. Robson recalls, 'a big Duryea . . . so powerfully that its owner was said to be afraid to drive it.' But Henry Ford was developing the mass production of the much smaller model T. After the war cars were less enormous.

Gradually the habit of car ownership spread. Most Europeans and well-to-do Asians had previously used a carriage and horses, kept in a stable at the back of the house and tended by a Boyanese or Malay syce. When the first car was acquired the stable became a garage and the syce was taught to drive it. Robson advised visitors in 1911: 'A very few words of Malay will carry travellers all through the Peninsula but it is advisable to engage a Malay driver or cleaner to assist with tyre renewals etc. He should not be allowed to drive or adjust a strange car. The cleaning will probably be of a somewhat perfunctory nature.'

Zacharias and Loke Yew as men of business could see the possibilities of the motor vehicle as a means of opening up rapid communications. Zacharias persuaded Loke Yew to put up the money for the first bus service, to link Kuala Lumpur with Bentong over the central range in Pahang, where Loke Yew had substantial mining interests. For the long haul up the winding road through the pass Zacharias decided that 'locomotive steam cars' would be more suitable than conventional motor buses which would overheat on the climb. But, says Robson, 'it was a lamentable failure . . . they were delightful little cars to ride in but unfortunately they had a habit of setting themselves on fire or otherwise misbehaving.' One is reminded of the perils of early railway travel between Klang and Kuala Lumpur when sparks

from the engine often set fire to the upholstery of the seats.

Loke Yew lost his money but he made his point. The French consul in Kuala Lumpur, M. Kestler, imported conventional de Dion cars complete with French drivers. These vehicles provided a satisfactory service over to Bentong, hurtling along at a top speed of 14 miles per hour. But it was impossible to make the service pay. Finally in 1907 the government instituted a bus service to Pahang which used Milnes-Daimler and Thorneycroft charabancs but was run at a loss. Thus began the network of country bus services which has become an integral part of rural life in Malaya — and a considerable competitor to the railway system.

After the 1914–1918 war everyone who could afford it wished to use a form of transport which was now reliable and familiar. The planters in particular found that it offered the means of escape from the lonely monotony of their estates. They had come, a visitor noted in 1921, to 'regard motor cars as the one necessity of their social existence. At dusk the roads resound to their hoots as they carry them to the nearest town.' The car also became a status symbol. When a commission reviewed the pay of civil servants in 1919 it was contented that every government official should have a salary sufficient to enable him to own a car — 'if only to uphold the prestige of the Government'.

By 1940 Malaya as a whole had almost 20,000 private cars plus 2,500 motor cycles, 1,500 buses, 1,000 taxis and 5,000 lorries. One of the incidental consequences which took its steady course through the period between the wars was the widening and other improvement of the road system, first established a generation before. Kuala Lumpur, isolated before the Klang rail link was opened in 1886, was now linked by trunk roads with Singapore, the Thai border to the north and Kuantan on the east coast. The secondary road system served to open up the whole of Selangor to village settlement and economic development.

Before and after the Great War (1914–1918)

IN THE 1890S no one objected (in public at least) to a little good-humoured ridicule on social occasions. The *Selangor Journal* teems with it.

Although cricket played seriously was almost a religion even cricketers could sometimes relax. A team of gentlemen once played a team of ladies in public view on the Padang. The gentlemen were handicapped by bowling with the left hand and batting with broomsticks. Even so one left-handed bowler was tactless enough to dismiss the Resident's wife for a duck with his first ball. The reporter in the *Selangor Journal* ended with 'one concluding word of advice to the ladies — the grand rule of whist, silence, should also be observed while fielding.'

In the outstations the same spirit lasted into the early 1900s. Choo Kia Peng who lived at Kuala Kubu until 1908 recollected that he and the Chinese staff of the government offices were all members of the club and were included in the local jollifications —

it was a small but jolly good show. We had the Selangor State Band for the occasion. After dinner and the Royal Toast, the DO proposed that every guest or host must either make a short speech or sing a song and he started

away with 'Old Folks at Home'. When it came to my turn I could not even sing 'The Three Blind Mice' . . . before the night was out we all marched with the Selangor State Band through Serendah town.

In Kuala Lumpur however the situation was changing. There was a prolonged and acrimonious row over 'first class' railway carriages. Relatively few Chinese wished to travel first class. But if they did should there be segregation of European and non-European travellers? The problem became more significant as the railway network extended north and south to Penang and Singapore with the result that travellers shared the same overnight facilities. Under European pressure there was a first official attempt at segregation in 1904. Loke Yew himself was turned out of a 'Europeans only' carriage. The Selangor Chinese Chamber of Commerce, of which he was chairman, protested. Characteristically Loke Yew also looked for a harmonious solution by printing and circulating among his countrymen a note on etiquette. In the presence of European ladies in the same carriage they should abstain from 'coarse talk', chewing betelnut, or removing their shoes or outer garments. Robson, as editor of the *Malay Mail*, took an unpopular line with his readers by arguing against segregation. In the end the system of formal allocation of 'A' and 'B' (these were European only) first-class carriages was withdrawn. But more covert and indirect means of segregation did apparently continue. There was more controversy in 1911 but eventually the trouble died away.

Soccer also became an irritant. A Selangor Association Football League was formed in 1906 to run a formal competition. By 1912 the eight teams in the League comprised three which were exclusively European, three Malay, one Indian and one Chinese. Competition between communal teams roused too much enthusiasm among supporters who were similarly divided. There was

serious friction between European and Malay teams with allegations of fouling against the latter. This led to some rather pompous comment in the English language press to the effect that 'race hatred' would be avoided if the competition was abandoned. In 1914 the League did in fact break up.

One should not exaggerate. Friction between the European and other communities in Kuala Lumpur never equalled the acute problem of British India. The early tradition of friendliness and informality was carried into the twentieth century by influential figures such as Loke Yew, Choo Kia Peng and Robson. But it was no longer the generally accepted attitude of the European community in particular and so it came under increasing strain. The period after the war saw a change (we will come to the Rotary Club later) and an effort to keep the problem under control which had fair success.

Meanwhile what were the underlying causes of the bitchy atmosphere before 1914? First, the European community had greatly increased in size though it remained a minute (but very privileged) minority. In 1891 a population in Kuala Lumpur of 20,000 included only some 150 Europeans. By 1911 total population had increased to 47,000 but the European community had risen to 1,396, a tenfold expansion. Larger numbers and a higher proportion of European women made the community more self-contained and aloof. European wives accompanied their husbands in the round of social life; Asian wives did not. In 1911 it was noted that 'amongst the Chinese of Malaya the social conditions are, generally speaking, similar in broad outline to those obtaining in China; but in regard to domestic arrangements many of the Straits-born Chinese are assimilating, as far as their means permit, European ideas. As in China, the family life is developed rather than the social life. There is no system of formal calls, and what interchange of courtesies there is takes place between ladies and ladies and between gentlemen and gentlemen.'

In Kuala Lumpur there had always been residential segregation but it was not absolute. Europeans as well as Loke Yew and Thamboosamy Pillai lived along Batu Road (now Jalan Raja Laut). But the official guidebook of 1911 emphasized that 'the European inhabitants occupy the white bungalows, each with its own garden, which dot the hills on the west and the rising ground on the east beyond the native town' (the latter is described as 'a rabbit warren on the flats near the river').

As the European community grew larger it differentiated itself into groups which competed for status. The high prosperity of the first rubber boom (1905-1910) enabled the planters and businessmen to 'live it up' in a fashion which was the envy of the civil servants and their wives. Civil service salaries were for many years pegged to the value of the local currency, which fell with the decline in the world price of silver. The civil servants demanded parity and contended that the 'prestige' of the regime required that its staff should not be poorer than other Europeans. One of the minor details of the civil service case was that a household needed seven domestic servants.

There were some Europeans who were not, like the majority, of the English middle class. The outstanding case was the British engine-drivers who were imported to run the trains. The prison warders were another. (One of the bizarre features of Kuala Lumpur's Pudu Gaol was that at this time its three European chief warders bore the actual surnames Fish, Currie and Rice). Engine-drivers were gradually replaced by local men. It was felt that their presence was a reproach to their better paid colleagues.

Status, established within the European community, became an obsession which affected relations with others. A modern historian has noted that 'implicit in British thinking about their rule throughout the Empire was the principle that their power was based on prestige rather than military might... since prestige was the basis of power it was absolutely essential to do everything

possible to maintain that prestige and to eliminate anything which threatened to undermine it.' On this principle the government paid the passages home to the United Kingdom of Europeans who became unemployed during times of slump.

The trial in 1911 of a European woman on a charge of murder touched a raw nerve. You have probably never heard of Ethel Proudlock. But you may well have read 'The Letter', the most famous of Somerset Maugham's Malayan short stories. This is an adaptation of the facts of the Proudlock case. If perchance you have seen the film be assured that Ethel Proudlock was not much like the electrifying Bette Davis in that version. But Maugham had a brilliant gift of using actual events as material for storytelling in which the characters are much more highly coloured than the real people involved.

On 23 April 1911 Ethel Proudlock, wife of the acting headmaster of the Victoria Institution, Kuala Lumpur's leading secondary school, fired six shots from a revolver into William Steward and killed him. At the trial her story was that he had come uninvited to her house during her husband's absence and tried to rape her. She said that 'her hand came in contact with a revolver' and she fired to protect herself. The fact which damned her was that after she had put two shots into him he tried to escape and she fired four more shots. His body lay at a distance from the house where the alleged rape was said to have occurred.

It was never established that Ethel Proudlock was Steward's mistress or that he had come to see her at her request after an estrangement between them. But she admitted that she had met him at the Club the day before and that she had suggested that he should come to see her and her husband some evening. There was also evidence that Steward had an appointment with some unknown person that evening — and he had of course turned up at the Proudlock house.

The court evidently did not believe Ethel Proudlock's story and

convicted her on a charge of murder. In Somerset Maugham's story there are two essential differences. The wife is acquitted and there is vital evidence, which would have convicted her — the letter which she wrote to summon her lover to the house. The story is about the recovery and destruction of the letter and the effect of its existence on those who know of it. In particular the husband (in the story he was a planter not a schoolmaster) is prepared to ruin himself to pay for the delivery to him of the letter.

Although the real trial lacked the backstage excitement of the Maugham story it was sordid enough. There was evidence of the character, mental and sexual condition of Mrs. Proudlock and of Steward which would have rejoiced the heart of the editor of an English Sunday newspaper of the sensational type. Few can have believed that Mrs. Proudlock was innocent but there were many who wished to do so in order to avoid having to admit that a sordid relationship between Europeans had ended in murder. Much of the uproar was misdirected at the absence of trial by jury. In the nineteenth century there had been a system of trial by jury in the FMS. But it had been abolished in 1899 on the ground that it worked badly, i.e. juries were unreliable. If one argued that Mrs. Proudlock as an Englishwoman had been convicted without the benefit of the constitutional safeguard available in her native country the issue was shifted to less embarrassing ground. At the actual trial the European judge was assisted by two assessors, also both European. But when the court had convicted there were petitions for a pardon.

Since Selangor was a Malay state the prerogative of mercy rested with the Sultan. The court had passed a sentence of death but added a recommendation that it should be commuted to imprisonment. The petition came before the State Executive Council of which the Sultan was president and the trial judge a member. The judge justified the conviction but again recom-

mended that the death sentence should be commuted. The Sultan decided to grant a pardon. Mrs. Proudlock left for England immediately.

'The Letter' is only one of several stories which Somerset Maugham wrote using material which he had collected during his visit after the war. He took much trouble to achieve accuracy of detail in his local colour. As an example take this picture of the husband in *The Letter*: 'He was a rubber planter, hard with the constant exercise of walking over the estate, and with the tennis which was his relaxation when the day's work was over. He was deeply sunburned. His hairy hands, his feet in clumsy boots were enormous . . . the khaki shorts he wore, showing his red hairy thighs, the tennis shirt open at the neck, without a tie, and the dirty khaki jacket with the ends of the sleeves turned up . . . He looked as though he had just come in from a long tramp among the rubber trees.' The man comes alive on the printed page.

The European community in Malaya was understandably indignant at the sensational picture of their life which emerged so vividly from these stories. It was not a true picture of them. Maugham himself acknowledged this in his preface:

Most of the stories are on the tragic side. But the reader must not suppose that the incidents I have narrated were of common occurrence . . . The majority of these people . . . were good, decent normal people. . . but they are not the sort of people I can write stories about. I write stories about people who have some singularity of character . . . or about people who by some accident or another, accident of temperament, accident of environment, have been involved in unusual contingencies. But, I repeat, they are the exception.

Unfortunately many who read the stories do not read the preface

which makes this disclaimer. You can always read the Malayan stories of Maugham with two different kinds of focus of attention. In the foreground is a dramatic and unusual story told by a master of character and narrative. If you focus on the background you have a description of a style of life by a master of observation and description.

Somerset Maugham came to Malaya in 1922 (and while staying in Kuala Lumpur was the guest of one of the lawyers who had defended Ethel Proudlock). The controversy over his stories as a picture of European life therefore came in the later 1920s ('The Letter' was published in 1924). It added to indignation against the Hollywood film industry for its lurid picture of European and American life generally (especially in the posters which advertised the films). One of the old hands wrote that all this was 'detrimental to the white man's prestige in a country where . . . the Oriental's respect for the white man's woman decreases in inverse proportion to the amount of her body which she exposes.' Yet this comment applies a double standard. The same writer recalls his visits to the brothels, 'The Japanese dolls had laughed and clapped their hands, while the fat mistress of the house raked in our dollars, gauging her charges by the state of our hilarity.'

There was also tension over a subtler threat to the European position as a distinct and privileged group. As the years passed the Asian middle class adopted some of the practices of Europeans and thereby tended to close the gap between them. 'With the general adoption of European dress by the Oriental middle-classes it is extraordinarily difficult even for a European resident of long standing to recognise at once the nationality of a Malay, a Chinese, or a Japanese.' To wear the emperor's clothes may not leave him naked but deprives him of his dignity.

The years before the First World War were the high summer of British rule — but the sun was passing its zenith and moving however slowly towards the inevitable sunset. Anxiety over the

rise of Japan began with her victory over Russia in 1905. What would happen next? In China too a new age was beginning. Dr. Sun Yat Sen had visited Kuala Lumpur in 1906 and been able to establish a local branch of his reform movement — though few of the influential *towkays* seemed to have supported it. By the time of the Chinese Assembly Hall affair after the war, related in an earlier chapter, events in China were beginning to rock the boat in Malaya.

Local disorders added to the sense of insecurity. One such episode was the *tauchang* riots of 1912. The secret societies were kept under control by the police using informers and securing the banishment of the leaders. But occasionally the societies got out of hand. The Pudu temple affair of 1909 was described by the police as 'probably the largest gathering of secret society members which had taken place since Federation' (in 1896). The main object of the secret society leaders was to make money by extortion and intimidation but on this occasion 'the success of the movement caused the leaders to lose their heads and they foolishly planned to take over the government of the country.'

At the last moment information came to the police of this menacing affair. There was to be a large assembly of secret society members at the Chinese temple at Pudu on the southern outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. A party of about 40 police commanded by three Europeans was hastily assembled and approached under cover of darkness. When the alarm was sounded 'the Chinese stampeded in all directions' and fought their way out through a fusillade by the police. When it was over the police entered the temple — 'the dead were still wearing their red sashes . . . an elaborate ritual had been in progress.'

This was the period when 'gang robberies', i.e. open attacks by thieves using weapons, were quite common. The outbreak of war in the autumn of 1914 encouraged the robbers who believed that the police were preoccupied with defence and security tasks. As

an example on the night of 26 November 1914 a gang of about fifty Chinese, some armed with revolvers, descended after 6 p.m. on the village of Semenyeh in Ulu Langat, south of Kuala Lumpur. The police report states that 'the robbers then proceeded to the shops, posted a guard near the police station, broke upon 5 sundry goods shops, 2 Tamil and 3 Chinese, and one chandu (opium) shop, smashed boxes, drawers and safes, and went away with about \$1,800 worth of cash and goods. They shot one Chinese clerk, who offered no resistance. He died later.' In spite of the robber guard covering the police station a police sergeant got out and took cover in a drain. From here he opened fire. The bandits took cover in the Sanitary Board dustbins and returned his fire. While it lasted an attack of this kind was open war. Naturally it caused alarm.

There had been some over-reaction in August 1914 when the first news of the outbreak of war reached Kuala Lumpur. Far away and cut off from reliable news it was difficult to judge what this world event meant to Kuala Lumpur. The Selangor Chamber of Commerce (not to be confused with the Chinese Chamber) held an emergency meeting on 2 August and appointed a committee with an all-European membership to seek an interview with the Chief Secretary FMS (the head of the federal government in Kuala Lumpur). He accorded to the delegation a 'polite but somewhat chilly' reception.

The government was urged to restrict the withdrawal of money from the banks, to mobilize the FMS Volunteers to maintain order (there was no disorder), to impose controls on the price of foodstuffs and to require the rubber estates to allocate part of their land to growing food crops. But life continued in a normal way and none of these anticipated crises arose.

The one real local crisis was economic. At the outbreak of war trading was suspended on the London tin market on which Malayan output was sold. To prevent a severe fall in the local price of tin the FMS government undertook to buy all tin offered

to it at a fixed price of \$60 per picul. This stabilized the local situation until normal market arrangements were restored.

Then — just as tense nerves began to relax — the real threat to European security materialized — or so for a short time it appeared. This was the mutiny of a battalion of the Indian Army stationed in Singapore which occurred on 15 February 1915. It was the second day of the Chinese New Year, always a season of tension (the *tauchang* riots of 1912 had happened at Chinese New Year). The story of the mutiny is part of the history of Singapore not Kuala Lumpur. The mutineers released the German prisoners of war and killed a total of 44 Europeans and Asians casually encountered on the streets of Singapore. But a force of local volunteers together with a detachment of the Johor Military Forces and a naval party landed from a warship then in port was soon able to round up most of the mutineers. Meanwhile European women and children were called in to a central collecting point and moved to ships in the harbour. It was all over within two days. Thirty-seven mutineers were tried by court martial, sentenced to death and shot in public outside the Outram Road Gaol in Singapore.

When the news reached Kuala Lumpur there was much anxiety lest it should touch off a local disturbance. The Chinese however remained blithely indifferent to an affair which meant little to them and continued with the celebration of their New Year. When the Europeans returned to their bungalows they found that the Chinese servants had not after all made off with their valuables but were ready to serve the next meal. There was a salutary sense of anti-climax as the alarm receded.

The only element in the faraway armageddon which touched a local nerve was the involvement of Turkey as an enemy fighting the British in Mesopotamia, Palestine, Salonica and for a time at the Dardanelles. In the past the Malay community had identified itself to some extent with Turkey since the Caliph was the temporal head of the orthodox (*Sunni*) Islamic world community and

Turkey was the guardian of Mecca and other holy places. In 1892 a minor Malay chief in Negri Sembilan had even petitioned a Turkish admiral, then visiting Singapore, to rid Malaya of the infidel British. The Turkish admiral did not react but the British Resident in Negri Sembilan did!

There was however no wavering in the support given by all communities to Britain before and during the war. When the British Navy was expanded the Malay rulers of the FMS consented to a gift (in 1912) from FMS funds of money to build a battleship — HMS *Malaya*. There were many individual gifts. Eu Tong Sen, the first Chinese member of the FMS Federal Council, gave a tank and an aircraft. Other wealthy Chinese made similar gifts. There was a sequence of public testimonials of Malayan support for the British cause.

The general role of Malaya was to produce rubber and tin as sinews of war (and to earn American and other currencies). But among the small British community many men of military age gave up the security of civilian jobs and went off to fight — in some cases to be killed — in the theatres of war. Those who remained behind or could not go read the communiques reproduced in the *Malay Mail*, stuck their coloured pins in maps, and hoped for victory as the carnage went on. The editor of the *Malay Mail* at this time was A.F.M. Price, formerly of *The Times*. According to Robson, Price could always discern the first signs of victory and made his paper 'the most optimistic journal in Malaya' during the long years of the war.

It was when the war was over that real troubles for Malaya began. In the astonishing success story of rubber there had been setbacks before. But no one was prepared for the economic typhoon which came down on Malaya out of a blue sky. World production of war material, including tyres for motor vehicles, was halted abruptly and there was a hiatus before civilian demand revived. During the war stocks of rubber had been accumulated

in Malaya and other producing countries for lack of shipping to take it away. It was suddenly released — Malayan exports in 1919 were double those of 1918. To make matters still worse it happened that large areas of land had been planted with rubber for the first time during the boom of 1910. These new trees were now mature and coming into full production.

The world price of rubber fell somewhat but at the beginning of 1920 it was still at the profitable level of $2\frac{1}{2}$ d per lb. By the end of the year it had fallen to 11d. Tin also suffered a setback. The price was £175 per ton in November 1920 compared with a wartime level of about £250.

For the first time rubber growers had to make a serious attempt to cut their costs. One result was a drastic reduction in the number of planters employed to manage estates. Some lost their jobs and those who remained had to supervise much larger areas. The most drastic effect of the slump of 1921 was mass unemployment among Indian and Chinese labourers. The government's response to this major social problem was to export it abroad by offering to repatriate the unemployed to India or China. According to Choo Kia Peng,

People used to rush into the office (of the Secretary for Chinese Affairs) in High Street . . . some of them tried to rush through the windows. In the first two or three months we must have repatriated 30,000 Chinese labourers alone . . . the slump came quite suddenly and labourers were thrown out from the mines and estates in very large numbers. I have gone through several slumps but none so severe as in 1921.

The government itself was in trouble. During the war years shortages of materials and the prudent caution of the rather pedestrian administrators in high places had kept public revenue

and expenditure in balance. Then in 1920 a new Governor (Sir Lawrence Guillemard) arrived with the brief that 'there was lots of work to be done and plenty of money to do it with.' Under his influence the FMS budgetted to spend \$114 million in 1921 (as compared with \$45 million in 1918) and found that its actual revenue was no more than \$54 million. It was possible to meet one year's huge deficit out of the large reserves accumulated by careful men in fat years of the past. But the FMS government had to retrench in order to bring its expenditure down to the level of its resources — over the years 1922 it had about \$50 million per annum of revenue which was less than half the level contemplated in the optimism of 1920. It was nonetheless a period of expansion of social services, such as education and health, to which the next chapter is devoted.

The war was a catalyst which accelerated the pace of social change. It seemed to purge the stuffiness out of the European community. The men and women who came back or who for the first time were aware that they lived in an uncertain world in which there were things which mattered more than leaving visiting cards and preserving status. It also made them live at a hectic pace. Robson noted of the new generation of administrators that 'if and when they get about in their districts they travel in fast motor cars'. The car made a difference to the whole tempo of living — and not only for the European community. Another observer wrote (in 1935) that 'the civil servant in Malaya works harder today than he did in my time' (about 1910). But in the evening there was 'an exaggerated concentration on alcohol . . . mainly responsible for that absence of intellectual interests which is a defective feature of British colonial life in tropical countries . . . The Englishman . . . floodlit the old church in Malacca, but he did not read its history.'

The absence of many European men during the war obliged the government to employ junior Malay administrative officers in

more senior posts than had been intended when the Malay College at Kuala Kangsar ('the Malay Eton') was founded in 1905. This gave responsibility and experience to a generation of Malay administrators from whom came the men who led Malaya to independence in the 1950s. One of them was Raja Uda, a member of the Selangor aristocracy, who became District Officer of Kuala Lumpur and later (in the 1950s) the Chief Minister of Selangor. In a more diffuse way these factors began to restore the confidence of the upper-class Malays in their ability to take over the government of their country from the foreigners who had displaced them in 1874. It created the climate for the first stirrings of Malay nationalism, to which we will come in a later chapter.

The Chinese were in search of their identity. Strong ties of tradition still bound them to China, for many of them the country of their birth and for all of them the very core of being Chinese. Only a few came of families long settled in Malaya. These Straits Chinese, the dominant group in the Straits Settlements, were less numerous and less important among the Chinese *towkay* in Kuala Lumpur. Yet China, with which they identified themselves, was in the 1920s in the throes of the greatest upheaval in its social values which it had experienced in centuries. The impact of the new China made itself felt especially through the Chinese schools which still drew many of its teachers from the schools of China. Around them in Malaya, where they had made their home, western influence was strong.

Among the upper class at least there was a marked change in behaviour. In 1910 a visit to a Chinese house had been a formal affair.

I could see again the towkay himself, his resplendent Chinese robes, his glossy pigtail, the long nail on his little finger, his series of profound bows. The bows had been frequent even during the conversation. We had sipped

tea, fragrant yet almost colourless, from cups so fragile and so light that one had to be careful not to spill the tea by raising them too quickly.

In 1935 it was different —

Freddie's friend received us in his office or, to be exact, we just walked into his office. The towkay, his hair cut and neatly parted in European fashion, was sitting in European shirt and trousers. His coat was hanging on the wall. He was smoking a cheroot. His chair was tilted back, and his feet were firmly planted on the top edge of his desk As we came in he jumped up, "Hello, Freddie," he said.

It showed itself in amusements also. As we have seen golf was a mystery in the 1890s. By 1909 Choo Kia Peng had become the first Chinese member of the Selangor Golf Club. By 1920 'a handful of prominent Asian residents were members but Asian interest in the game of golf was, generally speaking, negligible.' But by the late 1930s golf was becoming popular among Asians and the Sulaiman Golf Club was formed.

The Indian community too was uncertain of its identity and still much divided by differences of religion and language, as well as of class and education, within its ranks. The Selangor Indian Association made another attempt to pull together. From 1932 it began to publish its own journal, *The Selangor Indian*. Yet membership was still confined mainly to the English-educated minority; in 1937 it had a membership of not more than 200. Like the Chinese the Indians were more absorbed in the affairs of their distant home country, then passing through a difficult and controversial period of political development, than with their position in Malaya. But they struggled for recognition granted by according to them representation on the Selangor State Council

and lesser official bodies with nominated members. The educated minority found it offensive that fellow Indians should be exploited, as they saw it, by employment at a meagre wage on rubber estates, in the railways, the public works department and elsewhere. They joined in the political movement of India by supplying to Indian nationalists their picture of conditions on rubber estates etc. It led to a ban on further organized immigration of Indian labourers to Malaya, imposed by the Indian Government in 1938.

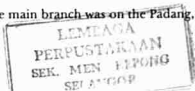
In commerce the Indian community stood a poor second to the Chinese. But in the professions they forged ahead. As we have seen a journalist ('that judge of a Daniel') was called in as an arbitrator — though to little effect — in the row at the Mariamman temple in 1924. Tamil language newspapers, published or circulating in Kuala Lumpur, were the main forum of controversy. Gradually the lawyers came to the fore. In the early days the British administrators had banned lawyers of any nationality from practising as advocates before the courts of Kuala Lumpur. The ban was lifted in 1896, partly under pressure by the planters who felt the need of lawyers to represent them in their dealings with the government over such matters as land grants. By 1913 there were 13 lawyers in practice in Kuala Lumpur; one was Indian and the rest European. In the period between the wars the total number of lawyers in practice and the proportion of Indians among them had much increased. The Selangor legal system was modelled on the law of England, some of it adapted by codification as Indian law. Accordingly there was no difficulty in a lawyer who had qualified in England or India coming to pursue his profession in Kuala Lumpur.

In the more relaxed atmosphere of the 1920s leading members of the various communities recognized 'the need in Kuala Lumpur for a non-communal social club, where men and women of various races could meet on an equal footing.' In later years a number of citizens laid claim to the credit of establishing the

Kuala Lumpur Rotary Club. The booklet which the Club published in 1955 kept the peace by allowing each prominent member to record his own account of how the Club came to be formed. The most convincing story is that of an Indian lawyer, Talalla, who became eventually the first secretary of the new body. He relates that while visiting the exhibition at Wembley in 1925 he met two British administrators from Malaya to whom 'I mentioned our decision to start a Concord Club.' When Rotary International heard of this tentative move they sent an envoy to Kuala Lumpur to persuade the leaders that the Rotary movement offered them a suitable format for their project. The inaugural dinner was held at 'the Chinese millionaires' club' and the British Resident (later Sir Andrew Caldecott) became the first president. The Rotary Club was a great success both in its activities and in bringing the leaders of the communities together. The members included Choo Kia Peng, and also Raja Uda. An Indian member wrote in 1955 that 'it had succeeded not in levelling race and creed, but in finding a meeting point among the welter of faiths and factions.'

A chapter which covers the 1920s must find space for an account of the great flood of 1926. Ever since the days of Yap Ah Loy seasons of heavy rain had caused flooding, sometimes serious, in Kuala Lumpur. The Klang river meandered through the town and the channel became obstructed by silt carried down from the mines upstream. December 1926 brought record rainfall and flooded the town to a depth of three feet in the central area. The flood began on Monday evening, 27 December 1926. The *Malay Mail* records that 'boats and rafts were again seen in Kuala Lumpur streets'. The rickshaw pullers united in teams of five to pull their fares through the fast-flowing current. The staff of the post office arrived by *sampan* and entered their office through the windows.

The Chartered Bank, whose main branch was on the Padang,



tried to seal its underground strong-room with cement. But the water got in. When the flood subsided several million dollars worth of soggy banknotes were taken out to dry in the sunshine, spread out on the Padang under the watchful eye of an armed guard.

The lesson had been learnt. A new and straighter channel, with flood retention walls on either side, was excavated along the stretch now flanked by Lornie Road (Lornie was the British Resident at the time). This sufficed to carry an equally dangerous flood tide through the town without overflow in 1930. But the sheer rapidity of the flow in the new channel swept away a tiger which was observed floating through the town — the last time a tiger at liberty (more or less) has been through Kuala Lumpur.

Hospitals and Schools

MOST OF THE 87 CHINESE MINERS who came up the Klang River in 1857 to open the mines at Kuala Lumpur soon died of virulent malaria. There was always a risk of contracting malaria but it had been noted that any clearing of the jungle was followed by an upsurge in the rate of attack. But why? No one knew. There were all sorts of theories. In 1878 an old timer wrote that 'when the trees are cut down the miasma that arises from the ground has nothing to absorb it.' The extensive clearing of jungle land to plant rubber in the decade 1900-1910 produced similar devastating effects from the miasma or other cause. In 1908 for example the average death rate on 21 rubber estates in Selangor was one in five of the labour force. Yet by 1939 Kuala Lumpur, with a population of 140,000 had only twenty recorded cases of malaria.

To trace the success of the fight against malaria, much of it achieved in and around Kuala Lumpur for the general benefit of the tropical regions of the world, obliges us to follow the clues of a detective story through to its denouement.

It began in faraway places. In 1880 a French doctor in West Africa identified for the first time the parasitic germ of malaria in the bloodstream of the victim. By 1897 a British doctor in India

had discovered how that germ was transmitted. In sucking the blood of the human being whom it bites the mosquito absorbs the germ into its own system. It develops there and later when the mosquito bites another person, it injects infected saliva to prevent the blood clotting while it sucks.

With this knowledge of the sequence of causation how does one break the chain? Here we come to Malcolm Watson, the doctor in charge of the hospital at Klang in 1901. In November of that year there was so much malaria at Klang that the Chinese closed their shops and decamped. There was also appalling malaria nearby at the newly opened Port Swettenham (now part of Port Klang). When the port opened the government transferred to it 176 government servants to run the port. Within three months of arrival 118 of them had gone down with malaria.

Watson decided to go forth from his hospital and try to prevent malaria from spreading by eliminating the breeding grounds of the mosquitoes in the swamps around Klang and Port Swettenham. He did this by clearing and draining the ground around each town. There was a dramatic improvement. Cases of malaria admitted to his hospital fell from 301 in 1901 to 50 in 1903.

It seemed that the battle had been won. But this proved an illusion. In Kuala Lumpur a considerable area of Federal Hill had been cleared to provide houses for the many additional bureaucrats employed in the service of the FMS government (established in 1896). Cases of malaria among residents in this area steadily increased. In 1906 the method of drainage of swamps at the foot of ravines, developed by Watson at Klang, was applied to Federal Hill. But it made matters worse. A scientific survey established that in the newly drained areas there were more mosquito larvae than in the remaining uncleared land.

The explanation is that there are numerous different kinds of mosquito. *Anopheles umbrosus* is the type prevalent in the coastal areas around Klang, breeding in shaded or stagnant water. So

Watson's open drains had been effective in destroying the breeding grounds of *A. umbrosus*. But there is another type of mosquito — *A. maculatus* (the striped mosquito) which positively prefers open water as a breeding ground. So in inland areas such as Kuala Lumpur the latter type was prevalent, multiplying in the swamp drains at the foot of ravines around Federal Hill.

It took years of controversy among the health experts to identify *A. maculatus* as the scourge of Kuala Lumpur (and many other inland areas), to recognize the conditions which are favourable to its breeding, and to find methods of destroying those conditions. In this and much other medical research the Institute of Medical Research at Kuala Lumpur was the main centre. The IMR, founded in 1909, was part of a world-wide drive to improve health in the tropics. Schools of Tropical Medicine were established in Liverpool and London in 1899. But the work would have to be carried through in areas where diseases were prevalent. Malaya with its huge programme of railway construction and plantation development was suffering from all the major diseases — malaria, beri-beri, dysentery, cholera, smallpox. The hospital in Kuala Lumpur alone had treated 16,000 cases of beri-beri from 1890 to 1900 and 3,000 of them had died. Hence Kuala Lumpur was chosen as one of the centres of research in the tropics.

To return to the campaign to eliminate *A. maculatus*. It was found that the most effective method of checking its breeding was to construct a network of subsoil or covered drains which carried off the heavy rains without exposing clear water in which the mosquitoes could breed. It worked — in Kuala Lumpur the annual death-rate from malaria dropped from 9.7 per 1,000 in 1907 to 4.2 in 1920. By 1939 Kuala Lumpur had a controlled area of 32 square miles covered by a network of 248 miles of subsoil drains. The engineer who carried out this massive programme was known for the rest of his career as 'Drainpipe Evans'.

It was not practicable to build subsoil drains — at heavy cost — on estates, where the area to be controlled was huge in relation to the human population to be protected. As a rule of thumb it was reckoned that every centre of population should be surrounded by a controlled area extending outwards for half a mile since this is generally the maximum distance over which the mosquito will fly. But even if it were economic to put in subsoil drains around the residential area of a rubber estate the roots of the rubber trees would get into the drains and block them. If on the other hand a half-mile zone was left unplanted there would be a waste of much otherwise productive land. Were there any other ways of controlling the mosquito?

One scientist had a theory that mosquito larvae could be killed by shock waves of an explosion just as dynamite will kill fish. The authorities would not permit an outdoor experiment with explosives. There was a trial in the laboratory by lighting Chinese crackers underneath a petrol tin of water containing mosquito larvae. The report concludes 'the water was spilt but the larvae were unharmed.' Again it was Dr. Watson who made the breakthrough. He was by now a world famous expert who visited many tropical countries to see their methods of control. On a visit to Panama in 1913 Watson had seen oil sprayed on the surface of static water to form a surface film (oil floats on water without mixing with it) through which the mosquito could not penetrate. It could not therefore breed in the water. Watson doubted whether in Malaya the very thin oil film would persist on the surface of water running away through open drains. But it was worth trying. An experiment with a modified oil mixture on an estate in 1914 demonstrated that the oil would after all persist for some days. The sight of a health department employee with his knapsack sprayer walking alongside a drain is familiar enough. It became one of the most economical techniques for preventing the breeding of *A. maculatus*.

There are of course many other methods used to combat malaria, notably the use of suppressive drugs. The development of synthetic substitutes for quinine in the 1930s and during the Second World War made possible the world-wide campaigns against malaria after the war. If the human population can be rid of the disease it breaks the transmission sequence i.e. the mosquito may bite as painfully as ever but it does not carry away the germ. Unfortunately the benefits may not be enduring, especially those obtained from insecticides. To sleep under a mosquito net or in a wire cage is a general precaution carried on from the days when mosquitoes were still regarded as a nocturnal nuisance rather than a menace.

The other persistent scourge of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century which was defeated in and around Kuala Lumpur was beri-beri. Here too the story begins with some curious and then inexplicable contrasts. The settled Malay population in their villages did not suffer from beri-beri. But there was appalling mortality among the immigrant labourers. Few of them reached the hospitals in the towns from the distant mines. Apart from the difficulty of transport there was a marked reluctance among the Chinese to enter these strange European institutions and submit to western medical treatment. Even so the beri-beri cases admitted to hospitals in Selangor rose from 308 in 1884 to 2,817 in 1894. One in five or six of these patients died. It was said in 1887 that many patients 'die within 24 hours of admission, crawling or being carried to the hospitals when literally in extremis'. Some twenty prominent Chinese were appointed as official 'hospital visitors' in 1894 to encourage their countrymen to come to the hospitals before their case was hopeless.

But no hospital knew how to cure beri-beri. There were many theories. Some Dutch doctors in Java said that beri-beri was an infectious fever but others believed that it was caused in some way

by diet. One writer blamed the prevalence of beri-beri among Chinese on fish imported from China which he believed contained poison. Another theory attributed it to intestinal worms. A British doctor in Malaya suggested in 1893 that beri-beri was contracted from poison in the soil absorbed by continued residence in an infected spot.

This brings us to Dr. Albert Braddon whose discovery that beri-beri was related to rice, the main element in the diet of all local peoples, concentrated research in the correct field. He derived his theory from the work of a Dutch expert who in turn relied on observation of a similar disease which affected poultry. Braddon demonstrated that something about rice was the cause of beri-beri by a famous experiment. His explanation of the exact causation was wrong but after his experiment there could be no doubt that rice must be the cause.

Braddon who was State Surgeon, i.e. government medical officer, in Negri Sembilan at the time was an eccentric and controversial figure. 'A sun-helmet in the daytime he found too hot but needed it at night to keep off the dew . . . he disliked 'kickshaws' saying that a piece of meat should be hung from the ceiling by a string so that each diner could cut chunks from it with a knife.' In his own house if he disliked his dinner he would summon his cook at the end of the meal and order him to give him another and better one — he would then wait for and eat it. Could such a weird mind be right? Many doubted it.

In 1904 however Braddon submitted to the Colonial Office a detailed report on his work on beri-beri and in 1907 he published it as a book. He based his theory on the difference between parboiled rice (which is partially cooked in the husk before being milled) and ordinary polished white rice. Indian labourers who preferred parboiled rice did not suffer from beri-beri. Braddon argued that the ordinary white milled rice eaten by Chinese labourers was often kept so long in store that it had become stale.

He believed that in this condition the white rice contained an unidentified poison. On that point he was wrong.

The experts at the IMR became interested in Braddon's work and he willingly cooperated with them in the Durian Tipus experiment which proved his point. A gang of 300 Javanese labourers employed on road work at Durian Tipus in Negri Sembilan was divided into two groups. One was supplied with ordinary white rice as their diet and the other with parboiled rice. After three months the group fed on white rice began to contract beri-beri and continued to do so until its diet was changed to parboiled rice. The group fed on parboiled rice from the start was untroubled by beri-beri.

The reason why milled rice induced beri-beri had then to be found. Three years of experiments at the IMR demolished Braddon's theory that such rice contained a poison. But it did reveal that white rice, which was often overmilled to make it appear whiter and more palatable, lost its outer skin. This was the period when research work in Europe had revealed the existence of the minute but essential substances in the diet known as vitamins. The outer skin of a grain of milled rice contained Vitamin B1; overmilling removed that vitamin and led to a vitamin deficiency disease — beri-beri. Parboiled rice did not produce beri-beri because boiling it before the husk was removed dissolved the vitamin in the outer skin and diffused it into the central grain before milling. The conclusion was clinched by treating beri-beri cases with doses containing Vitamin B1 — they recovered.

Thereafter it was necessary to tackle the social conditions which had made beri-beri such a scourge. Overmilling of white rice was forbidden; publicity aimed at combatting the general consumer preference for overmilled rice; patients who contracted beri-beri were treated with a rice extract containing Vitamin B1. As a footnote to this story the Malay villager did not suffer from beri-

beri because his primitive methods of dehusking home-grown padi by pestle and mortar did not remove the outer skin of the rice grain.

From diseases we pass on to hospitals. The first hospital in Kuala Lumpur was established in High Street by Yap Ah Loy in the 1870s. It was little more than a death-house. The sick were tended and fed but little or no medical treatment was given — since none was available. If natural causes did not induce a recovery the patient was likely to die. In 1880, a boom year on the mines, it had only 28 inmates. To meet the cost of upkeep Yap Ah Loy levied a tax of \$1 on every pig slaughtered for meat on the mines.

By 1883 the British regime had established a 'General Hospital' and a 'Pauper Hospital' each with 40 beds. These were replaced by larger buildings (on what are still hospital sites) in 1889-1890. The Pauper Hospital received destitute labourers who were often incurable or chronic cases. It was hoped to restore them to health so that they might be shipped back to China. But this did not often happen. Increasingly the beds were occupied by incurable cases. To relieve that problem an addition Taiwah ward for incurables was added in 1894. The maintenance of the Pauper Hospital was in the hands of a committee of Chinese notables to which the government made over its revenues obtained from the registration of brothels and the weighing of tin. It is an interesting example of a partnership between the colonial regime and the local community which runs through the history of social services at this period. Treatment and accommodation at the Pauper Hospital was free. At General Hospital there were three classes of ward (also a characteristic of the time) with daily charges of \$3, \$1.50 and 20 cents respectively. There was a bullock-cart ambulance service which brought in sick labourers from outside the town.

The Chinese community was not content to rely on European medical treatment as given at both the Pauper and the General

Hospital. Yap Ah Loy himself had declined such treatment in his final illness. In 1892 Yap Kwan Seng, the last of the Capitan China, at his own expense established a Chinese hospital at Pudu Road known as the 'P'ui Shin Tong' with a staff of two Chinese doctors who practised Chinese medicine. This was a great success. In 1895 the Chinese community took over the upkeep of the hospital at an estimated annual cost of \$9,000. It had two wards with 200 beds. An official report described it as a hospital and dispensary for the practice of 'native pathological principles'. The senior British medical administrator praised the Chinese hospital for its cleanliness and efficient administration.

Nonetheless European medicine found greater acceptance among the settled Chinese population. An official report for 1893 records that 'several protests have reached me from local chemists that their trade has considerably fallen off among the lower class of natives in consequence of the free distribution of medicines by the State dispensaries.'

By 1911 Kuala Lumpur had eight hospitals — and there were smaller district hospitals in the outlying places. Inevitably the European community had a hospital to itself (the modern Bungsar hospital). There were special hospitals for infectious disease, lepers (a special interest of Dr. Travers) and a lunatic asylum. Even in the days when there was only one general hospital it had contained a ward for mental cases and a padded cell. Most of the patients were Chinese 'suffering from melancholia in its various stages'. It is too easy to forget the strain to which hardship, anxiety and physical illness exposed the Chinese pioneers.

In the brave new world — as it seemed for a year or two — after the end of the war in 1918 the Selangor government planned to build a much larger General Hospital in Kuala Lumpur at a cost of \$2 million or more. When the crash came in 1922 followed by the need to retrench, the project was shelved. This led to one of the most celebrated scandals of the period. When the contract was

let the Government Architect, Major Huxley, was permitted to resign his post in order that he might tender for the contract. He secured the contract on the basis that he would be paid the amount of his expenditure on labour and materials plus a management fee of 15 per cent. The intention was that the bulk of the materials would be procured by the government direct from its suppliers so that Huxley would not earn his percentage fee on that substantial part of the total cost. But the contract did not make that intention clear. It cost the government \$225,000 to settle with Major Huxley when his contract was cancelled in March 1921.

In the early days there was little demand for education in Kuala Lumpur because there were very few wives or children. The Chinese did not bring their wives from China nor did they usually marry in Malaya. But Yap Ah Loy was an exception; he had married a Chinese girl from Malacca in 1865 and had several children. In time the demand for a school became insistent and the first Chinese school in Kuala Lumpur opened its doors in 1885. Yap Ah Loy recruited the teacher and paid his salary. The leading *towkays* visited the school, which had about 30 pupils in 1886, to test the knowledge of the pupils.

Many of the institutions which the Chinese community established to meet its needs were bedevilled by the jealousies and competing claims for prestige of the leaders of the different language groups. The Kuala Lumpur school was no exception. The quarrel was over the choice of the teacher, which in turn would determine which Chinese dialect was to be used as the medium of instruction. Yap Ah Loy was of course a Hakka. There was 'determined opposition' to the teacher of his choice from the Hokkien and Macao *towkays*. The school did not flourish and by 1890 the attendance had fallen to 18. There were complaints that the teacher was elderly and ineffectual. Like all other Chinese schools in Malaya the Kuala Lumpur school concentrated on the

teaching of the Chinese classics by mere repetition and memorising. At his school in China Choo Kia Peng had simply learnt the classical texts by heart without ever receiving a word of explanation of their meaning. The Kuala Lumpur school did apparently teach reading, writing and accounts as well.

One of the fruits of the reform which accompanied the revolution in China was the adoption of a 'National Language' (Kuo Yu) as the medium of instruction in all schools. That resolved the argument over choice of dialect. But the Chinese schools, in Kuala Lumpur and elsewhere in Malaya, were beset by other difficulties. The schools were established and managed by committees of local *towkays*; the teachers were recruited from the new China and brought with them the nationalism which swept China around 1920. The pupils showed little respect for their poorly paid teachers who lacked security of employment and professional standing. At best an education in a Chinese school fitted the pupils for a career in the small business world from which they came.

At first the British regime left the Chinese to run their schools as they saw fit. When it was realized that through the teachers there was a constant flow of anti-British propaganda official inspectors of schools were appointed to restrain it. But as one of them wrote 'the solution was purely a negative one.' The underlying problem was that a generation of Malayan-born Chinese children were being educated through the use of textbooks printed in China to retain their mental and spiritual orientation towards China. Yet Malaya was now their home even if neither their parents nor the local government had come to terms with that fact. It was a system of education which at best preserved the classical culture of which the Chinese are justifiably proud. But it did so at the cost of isolating a generation from the country in which they grew up. Towards the end of our period the government began to make grants to assist the Chinese schools in raising their standards. But

the real effort to integrate the education system of Malaya did not come until the 1950s — when previous neglect had made it much more difficult to achieve.

Government education policy throughout the period down to 1939 was concerned mainly with the development of English and Malay language schools. It also promoted education in Tamil and other Indian dialects among the children of estate labourers by requiring the employers to provide schools at their expense — a very controversial subject with the planters. Since there was very little Tamil education in the town of Kuala Lumpur nothing more is said of it here.

The most conspicuous and successful English school in Kuala Lumpur was the Victoria Institution. By the 1890s there was a widespread demand for an English language secondary school. In that era English was the language of government and of the community leaders. The government had need of English-educated subordinate staff and the local middle class wished to open the doors of a career to their children. But like every other good cause it would cost money. There was an unspent balance in a fund launched to celebrate Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1887 (hence the school came to be called the Victoria Institution). This was augmented by a government grant and a public subscription was launched with Sultan Abdul Samad, Yap Kwan Seng, Loke Yew and Thamboosamy Pillai among the leading donors. In the end the fund reached the considerable sum of \$21,641 which sufficed to provide new buildings, described as 'picturesque, substantial and suitable' in the High Street (at a cost of \$16,550). School fees could not cover the running costs but there was a government grant and a municipal rate of one per cent on house rents in Kuala Lumpur. The pupils themselves were required to pay \$1 per month.

The school opened its doors in June 1894 to 198 pupils drawn from several communities i.e. 104 Chinese, 60 Indians, 24

Eurasians but only 10 Malays (to which we will come later). By 1910 its accommodation had been increased to a capacity of 600. It was then divided into three departments. The preparatory department was staffed entirely by lady teachers. Here the boys, — 6 to 9 years old, were taught to speak English by the 'natural' method. The lower school covered the 10–13 age group and the upper school the 14–16 age group. The first headmaster, Bennett Shaw, continued in office for many years and became a pillar of the Kuala Lumpur establishment.

The trustees declared that their 'chief object . . . is to provide a sound English education for the boys so that they may be fitted to enter the service of the Government (note the capital G), to engage in commercial pursuits, or to study in special schools for the various professions.' The whole bias of the curriculum was academic. Thus the English (not Malayan) history syllabus for Forms I and II required a study of '20 biographies or important events in English history from the landing of the Romans to Henry VII'. As the pupil progressed to the higher forms he studied later periods of English history but he did not proceed beyond 1784, i.e. two years before the occupation of Penang by Francis Light began the period of British rule in Malaya. The study of English prose similarly took the pupil down to Addison's *Spectator* written in the early eighteenth century. Choo Kia Peng who studied at a similar school in Penang recollected that the boys were given periods free to read in the library but they used this time mainly to commit passages to memory. In essentials it was an education which did not differ very much from Kia Peng's earlier mechanical study of the Chinese classics at a traditional school in China.

In keeping with the English ethos of the time much emphasis was placed on sport, drill, physical training, etc. The older pupils were appointed prefects under the English public school system. Singing in unison in class and school plays were also important.

'Even the younger boys,' it was said, 'seem able to follow with ease and to criticise intelligently such a play as *the Merchant of Venice*.' Some frivolity got in nonetheless — 'As the school playground was close to the river during the recess the masters, who wore shorts, went to the river to pot at crocodiles who swarmed up to the market.'

By the 1920s a breath of fresh air came in to the V. I. with the arrival of a new headmaster, Richard Sidney. Among other things Sidney invited a planter friend to 'give us a dissertation on planting and methods of tapping; it seemed absurd that my boys should know all about wheat growing in Canada and little about rubber in Malaya . . . ' He followed this up with a visit to a rubber estate — 'many of us tried our skill (with the tapping knife) and realised that what the tapping coolie did in a few seconds was quite beyond us without much practice.'

Sidney was a great enthusiast for school productions of Shakespeare's plays. He himself played leading parts and persuaded a stout Indian master (known as 'Substance') to play parts such as Falstaff. The school productions were put on in the Kuala Lumpur Town Hall for the general public and then taken on tour as far afield as Penang and Singapore. The audience discovered that Eng. Lit. could be fun — some Shakespeare's humour caused them to become 'delirious with mirth'. Reading between the lines of the press notices which Sidney quotes with complacency the standard of acting was at the 'gallant try' level. Even so letting real life into the curriculum, as Sidney tried to do, was all too rare.

There were other comparable English secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur besides the V.I. In 1906 the Roman Catholic missionaries had established the St. John's Institution; a year earlier the methodists had founded the Methodist Boys' School. The early story of the latter illustrates how hard the missionaries sometimes had to work, giving years of dedicated work to making their schools a success. In 1897 a methodist, Dr. Kensett, opened

an 'Anglo-Tamil' school in scratch premises in a shophouse in Batu Road. By 1904 this school had an enrolment of 90, all Tamils, but it still had no buildings of its own. From 1902 its headmaster, Rev. W.E. Horley (another honoured name in Kuala Lumpur's education story) had been allowed to use the old fruit market in Malacca Street. In 1905 when the market was required for re-development the school moved to the Methodist mission hall in Sultan Street. By now it was a well-established institution and an appeal raised sufficient money to erect school buildings for 400 boys. The school moved into its new premises in 1905.

There was a short-lived girls' school near the original V.I. 'Small Chinese girls were brought to school by their amahs, but no Chinese came after about 10 years of age, as they were then secluded. The older girls were mostly Eurasians . . . with small European boys and girls at the kindergarten stage.' But this school was not apparently very well run. When the Roman Catholic Convent offered an alternative, the Roman Catholic children left and the school was closed.

The Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus began in 1899. Like the Methodist Boys School it struggled through some early difficulties. The advance party of nuns looked for premises — 'the Sisters who had vainly searched for a house all day at last about seven o'clock at night were offered a building which stood in the midst of a large garden on the Ampang Road. This was the country house of a Chinese lady who rented it to the Sisters for 45 dollars a month.' (In passing one may mention that the Ampang Road became in time the most prestigious Chinese residential area of Kuala Lumpur with a number of large, if rather pretentious mansions standing in extensive grounds.) A year later the Convent needed larger premises — 'the Victoria Hotel was bought from Dorasamy, a rich Tamil. As the lady Superior had no means of paying for the house the government allowed a money lottery to take place, and the first prize of 20,000 dollars was given to the Convent to pay off

the debt.' By 1910 the Convent had grown to the Lady Superior, 8 choir nuns, 9 lay sisters, 22 boarders, 60 orphans, 100 day scholars, a creche for 12 infants under the Sisters' care and there were plans to open a Refuge for Women.

Thus the pattern and character of secondary education through the medium of English language teaching was established in Kuala Lumpur. The remainder of the period down to 1939 saw much expansion and improvement but no essential change. It was a reasonably good and effective system for preparing a minority of the younger generation for clerical and other like work in their adult lives. A small number of exceptionally gifted or fortunate individuals made it a launching pad for a career usually in the professions. The limitations were that it stood in isolation from Malay and Chinese cultures — even a reformer like Richard Sidney put on plays by Shakespeare rather than local Malay or Chinese drama (which would indeed have been quite impracticable in the situation in which he then stood). It served an urban community and so it offered little opportunity to the predominantly rural Malays. It was an excessively academic education which gave little or no recognition to technical and scientific subjects. It was incomplete in that it gave only a secondary education and had no tertiary level.

The need for technical training became more pressing as the local economy became more complex. But it did not raise technical training to parity of esteem with academic subjects. The main achievement was the establishment of a Technical School (the forerunner of the modern Technical University) in 1906. Its purpose was to prepare its pupils for service as technical assistants in the Railway or Public Works Departments. But it was — initially at least — a rather half-hearted project. At the end of the first year the Resident-General reported that, 'A large part of the Instructor's time has had to be given to elementary instruction which the pupils should have acquired before coming to him. They have,

moreover, had to attend their offices for the greater part of their time and have to attend the school only for an hour or two at a time, once or twice a week, as they could be spared. It has thus been necessary to form a large number of very small classes . . . under the present system only apprentices employed in Kuala Lumpur have been able to attend the school.'

Malay language education was a substantial part of the system as a whole. But most of the Malays lived in villages outside towns such as Kuala Lumpur. Apart from the school at the Malay Agricultural Settlement, there were few Malay schools in or near Kuala Lumpur. The official mind was dominated by an anxiety lest in educating the Malay child it should alienate him from the traditional world to which it was felt he belonged. The aim therefore was 'to make the son of the fisherman or peasant a more intelligent fisherman or peasant than his father had been'. It did not open the doors to a wider world.

For the sons of Malay aristocrats it was necessary to find some other avenue. They could not be confined to their traditional role of governing their states since that function had been usurped by British administrators. For a generation after 1874 British administrators gave intermittent attention to schemes for educating sons of rajas (no one was concerned with educating their daughters although this could create difficulties as the story of Tunku Kudin and Raja Arfah well illustrates). The Raja School in Kuala Lumpur only lasted four years (1890-1894) but it did mark a significant stage in the evolution of a policy which found its fulfilment with the establishment of the Malay College at Kuala Kangsar in Perak in 1905.

The Raja School gave its name to the modern Jalan Raja which skirts the Padang. The school building stood near the junction with Gombak Lane. Its purpose was to offer an English education to the sons of Malay rajas to fit them for official duties in which they could cooperate with the British regime — and be kept out of

mischievous and idleness. In the choice of Frank William Haines to take charge of this new venture the essentially amateur character of the scheme is revealed. Haines was an Oxford graduate who came to Selangor as a clergyman to fill the combined posts of Tutor (i.e. headmaster of the Raja School), Chaplain (i.e. vicar of St Mary's Church) and Inspector of Schools for Selangor as a whole. He had been selected because he was a gentleman and as a clergyman considered suitable to instil in his pupils the moral values which would 'build their characters' to the standards of the English public school. He had no experience of teaching and he did not speak Malay — his pupils spoke little or no English. He was a likeable man about whom 'splendid stories' were told in his later years. He soon took a leading part in amateur theatricals and he was notoriously partial to a *setengah* a (whisky and soda).

During the short life of the Raja School it had a total of 16 pupils, all of whom came from the Malay upper class. Most of them were aged about 14 or 15 and had some education in a Malay school or with a Malay domestic tutor in their father's house. As we have seen the Raja Muda, although much older, was sufficiently interested to attend for a year or more. Almost all the pupils came from homes at a distance from Kuala Lumpur. So a 'Raja Resthouse' was built for their accommodation.

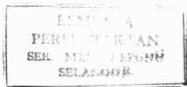
Classes were held on six mornings a week and Haines taught his pupils English, Arithmetic and Geography — though without framing any syllabus or programme. Haines reported that his boys made 'fair progress' and that they seemed 'most interested in Geography'. It is not clear whether any textbooks were used. There were no progress examinations.

Maxwell, who was Resident at the time, had selected Haines and visited the School occasionally. As academic subjects were proving tedious he suggested that a police inspector should practise the boys in drill three times a week and that ponies should be bought so that they might learn to ride — but nothing came of

this latter suggestion. At the end of the year prizes were given for regular attendance (it would have been difficult to award prizes for anything else). Haines suggested that the prizes should be two of three watches and chains — 'inexpensive ones' — and two or three silver mounted Malacca canes.

With the foundation of the Victoria Institution in 1894 it was agreed that the 11 pupils then attending the Raja School should transfer to the new school. The Raja School then closed — Haines found that it took up more of his time than his other duties permitted. It was also an expensive means of educating a handful of pupils. In time a more dedicated enthusiast in the cause of education for upper-class Malays — R.J. Wilkinson — persuaded a reluctant Governor to sanction a much larger and better organized school in Perak for the FMS as a whole — the Malay College, Kuala Kangsar, which exists to this day. The Selangor Malay aristocracy obtained places at the College for their sons. From the College many pupils went on to a career in the Malay Administrative Service, leading to promotion — for a few — to the Malayan Civil Service i.e. parity with the British administrators. These developments had their general effect on Selangor as well other states. But they lie outside the scope of a history of Kuala Lumpur in particular.

Haines left Selangor in 1899 to become Chaplain at Malacca and later on at Penang. The supervision of the growing education system in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor passed into more professional hands. In time the FMS government established an Education Department to promote more uniform educational policies throughout the FMS states.



Capital City

KUALA LUMPUR MOVED INTO THE 1930s in an atmosphere of uncertainty and foreboding as to the future. The world slump of 1931 brought the prices of rubber and tin down with a run to levels at which stringent economy and retrenchment were inevitable. The effects of the recession were deep and prolonged though there was a slow improvement from 1934 onwards. The local crisis was less dramatic than during the slump of 1921. As it was not possible to repatriate labourers on the scale of the earlier slump there was more local unemployment. This in turn led to unrest and strikes. Those who had jobs realized that the economic situation was precarious and that money was no longer plentiful. Further afield Japan posed a growing threat to the British economic and political hegemony in Malaya. Work on the great illusion, the Singapore naval base, picked up from the lethargy in which it had been engulfed. The Japanese invasion of China was followed by turmoil in Europe as Hitler came to power in Germany and Mussolini invaded Ethiopia. The long shadow of war came nearer.

On the surface of life there were no great changes. A British official wrote of a spell of duty in Kuala Lumpur in the late 1920s that 'tennis and squash at the Lake Club, football with a Malay

team in the town, and hockey at the Selangor Club, race meetings at the Turf Club . . . visits to the Polo Club, and an occasional Saturday night dance could easily have monopolised all my leisure hours.' But — be it said — he found time for more serious things such as organizing assistance to Malays to enter the modern world of business and government employment. Service in the local volunteer force (and attendance at training exercises and drills) became a serious matter to which men of the Asian as well as the European middle class gave more of their time. The first regular local defence unit, the Malay Regiment, was formed in 1935 — but its headquarters were not in Selangor.

Earlier chapter have touched on the slow, imperceptible change in life-style throughout the period between the wars. European dress became more informal and better adapted to the local climate. The official guidebook of 1936 recommends 'a khaki shirt and either short khaki trousers with stockings or puttees, or long trousers . . . and stout canvas boots' for 'field wear'. It adds that 'those whose work is of a more sedentary character usually wear a drill or linen two-piece suit, open at the neck, with collar and tie and white canvas or leather boots and shoes. The sun helmet is commonly worn by Europeans from 8.30 a.m. to 5 p.m., though some wear the felt double terai hat.' It took the Second World War to induce the European to abandon his *topi* — which was still regarded as inviting inevitable sunstroke in the 1930s. Ladies coming to Malaya were advised 'to bring out as large a supply as convenient of light washable dresses and underclothing'. This was better than having them made in Malaya — 'where the materials can be obtained cheaply enough, but the capabilities of the dressmakers vary'.

Among the Chinese and Indian middle class and — to a lesser degree — the urban working class there was some absorption of the superficial elements of European life style, especially clothing. As an example the report of the great Mariamman temple row of

1924 mentions that 'another youngster also in suit and boots entered into a word battle.' This was a reproach since presumably his elders wore a dhoti and sandals (or went barefoot). Ten years later the jibe would have lost its point. Clerks went to work at their offices in the same dress as the European bosses.

Yet — for all the veneer — Kuala Lumpur remained essentially a provincial town overshadowed by Singapore. Singapore was not yet the metropolis of Southeast Asia (a term invented by military strategists during the Second World War). But it was the centre of power in Malaya itself (and a key centre of trade with the Netherlands East Indies, Siam and Burma). In Singapore lived the Governor of the Straits Settlements who was also High Commissioner for the Malay States. The great British agency houses had their headquarters in Singapore; the office in Kuala Lumpur was just an upcountry branch. The most influential figures of the Chinese community were also to be found in Singapore. Among the Malays there was no real centre of a national movement since Malays owed loyalty to the Ruler of the individual state to which by birth they belonged.

In retrospect however one can discern how events in Kuala Lumpur planted the seeds of nationalism and of political activity which disconcerted the British when they resumed control, somewhat precariously, in 1945. In the mid 1920s there was a prolonged and bitter battle between the Governor (Guillemard) and the Chief Secretary FMS (the current title of the former Resident-General) who was Sir George Maxwell, son of the William Maxwell who was Resident of Selangor around 1890. Shorn of the personal antagonism it was about the amount of political power to be concentrated in Kuala Lumpur.

When the Federation Malay States were formed in 1896 the architect of the scheme had been Frank Swettenham who argued that there was need of more uniformity of government policy and practice throughout the Malay States then under British control.

The FMS also served to shore up Pahang, which was financially the weakest unit. Assurances were given that the individual states would retain all their previous independence of action within their own boundaries. In practice it was quite otherwise. The Resident-General (the first holder of the post was the masterful Swettenham) became the head of a growing bureaucracy which paid little regard to the powers and dignities of the states. The British Resident of Negri Sembilan around 1910 wrote a letter to the Malay ruler of the Seremban district. It was returned to him by the Seremban Post Office marked 'addressee unknown'.

The concentration of power in the hands of the Resident-General created friction between him and the Governor in Singapore who was still his superior. There were now two competing centres of power. As a by-product of this tension it was agreed in 1909 to create an FMS Federal Council. The Governor/High Commissioner would be president of the Council and the four Malay rulers would be members. The nominated unofficial members included Robson and Eu Tong Sen. The Resident-General became Chief Secretary FMS. In this way it was hoped to bring this overmighty bureaucrat under the control of those who should be his masters. In the event the new Council weakened the state governments still further by taking away from the State Councils all effective powers. The Malay rulers sat on a raised dais at meetings of the Federal Council but took no part in its proceedings since they did not have a fluent command of English, the language of the debate. Bureaucrats and businessmen happily debated financial and commercial matters of common concern.

In 1920 Sir Lawrence Guillemard became Governor and High Commissioner. He was a successful Whitehall mandarin, a clever man whose conceit (he called his memoirs 'Trivial Fond Records') led him to over-estimate his ability to resolve the unfamiliar problems of Malaya. His plan was to 'decentralise' i.e. to restore to the states the powers which they had lost. He and other

Governors after him hoped that in doing this they would make the reformed federation attractive to the five Unfederated Malay States, which would have nothing to do with it in its existing form. In this way the Malay states could be 'unified'. Guillemard's opponent, George Maxwell, had risen by long service to the most senior post in the Malay States. Although he recognized the case for decentralization he was reluctant to give up the full powers of the office to which his successful career had brought him. Maxwell was his father's son, able, confident and arrogant.

A bitter personal conflict ensued in which no issue was too trivial to escape controversy. As a minor example the Prince of Wales (later to be King Edward VIII and then Duke of Windsor) visited Kuala Lumpur in 1922. The inevitable formal functions were a trial for all concerned. Robson noted that 'some of the good ladies of Kuala Lumpur were a little anxious about their proficiency in the curtsying business.' Guillemard decreed that at the ceremonies the four Malay rulers as royalty should take precedence over the Chief Secretary. Maxwell protested and was supported by the unofficial members of the Federal Council who censured the Governor for 'belittling the status of the Chief Secretary'.

Guillemard and Maxwell battled on to a draw which left the fundamental problem unresolved. But one incidental result was a change of membership of the Council in 1927. The four Malay rulers withdrew from the Council though they still gave their formal assent to the laws which it enacted. The number of Malay unofficial members was increased from one to four.

The Federal Council now began to resemble a parliament rather than a chamber of commerce. The unofficial members, not least the Malays, began to ask some awkward questions and generally made their presence felt. Although they were appointed by the Governor they could — and did — criticize official policy. The weakness of their position was not that the Governor could remove

them — which in practice he never did — but that he could say, 'You speak for no one but yourselves.' There was a parallel situation in the Straits Settlements Legislative Council whose unofficial members were all nominated not elected. The eminent and eloquent Chinese leader, Tan Cheng Lock, withdrew from that Council in 1935, saying 'I vowed never again to become a member of any Malayan Legislative Council under any circumstances in future but instead to work among members of the public and to organise them into a strong political body.'

Before coming to the origins of political activity let us carry the decentralization controversy to its conclusion. While British officials slogged it out in public Malays seethed with discontent. In his last speech before he left the Federal Council in 1927 the Sultan of Perak (this was the man who earlier in his career had done so much to encourage Malay recruitment to the Police) said — 'I myself have sat in this Council for long and weary hours, as far as I can see without profit. The Malay objection to the centralized FMS bureaucracy was that it responded to commercial pressures. It suited the interests of, among others, the Chinese business community, but it denied to the Malays any real influence on the government of their country. Guillemard, followed by Clementi (1931–1935) could do no more than tinker with the problem. Malay rulers within the FMS were dissatisfied with it; those in the UMS would have nothing to do with it. The Colonial Office observing these disputes from a distance drew the wrong conclusions and made disastrous mistakes in its own attempt at unification by decree in 1946. But it was all to be solved in the end.

The businessmen who sat as unofficial members of the Federal Council were concerned to maintain the power of the federal government because it was easier to deal with than four separate state governments and — above all — because a strong federal government would resist pressure from Singapore.

As Tan Cheng Lock realized only a 'strong political body' could make government accountable to the governed. But at this period it was thought impossible to democratize the system. British administrators argued that the Malay states were by tradition autocratic and they had no mandate to alter the tradition. In 1930 a demand for election of members of a legislative council led the *Straits Times* to dismiss the notion as 'crass folly'.

Nonetheless the Malay community, disquieted at the weakness of their position, began to organize associations in the Malay states (and also in the Straits Settlements) so that their appointed spokesmen in the councils no longer 'spoke for no one but themselves'. As part of this movement, which took many forms, a Selangor Malay Association was formed in 1938. Its first president was a Malay lawyer in private practice in Kuala Lumpur and most of its leading members were drawn from the Selangor aristocracy. But even with so much blue blood to guarantee its moderation there was much apprehension. Raja Uda, a connection of the royal family and one of the most senior Malay members of the Malayan Civil Service and an appointed member of the Selangor State Council, attended the inaugural meeting. But he then withdrew from all connection with it — though he gave it his private blessing — because it was a 'political organisation'. Yet within ten years the same Raja Uda was to be appointed to high office in Selangor on the nomination of an avowedly political body, the United Malays National Organization. A lot of water went under the bridge by reason of the Japanese victory over the British and the ensuing occupation of Malaya. But it had its origins before that time.

Although most of the Malays who attended meetings of the Selangor Malay Association had been educated in English they conducted their debates in Malay. They met at the Sultan Sulaiman Club in Kampung Baharu, the recognized centre of Malay activities in Kuala Lumpur. Notice of the first meeting had

been given in the Malay newspapers and about four hundred people attended. In his opening address the president emphasized that loyalty to the Sultan and to the British flag were essential. He nonetheless anticipated disapproval — 'I warn you that this will be as nothing to the hail of troubles that will descend on us when we try in the future to further the interests of our people and our country.' The meeting elected a committee of 'reasonably well-to-do men in their thirties or forties, educated in English and respected as men of substance in the community from which they came.' No government servants were elected to the committee since political activity was not permitted to them. Local committees were formed in Malay suburbs around Kuala Lumpur.

In spite of deep misgivings about a 'political' body the Association concerned itself primarily with the promotion of Malay education and the development of Malay residential areas in Kuala Lumpur, i.e. the welfare of the Malay community rather than pressure on or worse still opposition to the government.

The first national congress of local Malay Associations was held in Kuala Lumpur in August 1939. Thus began the movement from which in 1946 in the white heat of Malay anger at British policy came the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) which has been the leading element of the government of Malaya and then Malaysia since 1957.

In the 1930s these tentative moves towards political activities were much too tame for some Malays of a more radical temper. At the Sultan Sulaiman Club there were gatherings of the Sahabat Pena ('Pen Friend' organization) at which young Malays argued vehemently about the future of their people. One of them was Ibrahim Yaacob, an instructor at the police depot, who later founded a declared opposition body (its Malay acronym was 'KMM') and led it into support of the Japanese during the war. Many of the KMM members were Malay schoolteachers and villagers, not aristocrats, who saw the problem in much starker

terms. From this movement came the left-wing or extreme nationalist elements of post-war Malay politics.

The Chinese community was preoccupied with its economic problems during the 1930s and also with the Japanese invasion of China. They had their grievances in Malaya but their political allegiance was still mainly to China. That attitude also was to change rapidly during the Japanese occupation period (1942-5). In the late 1930s the Chinese throughout Malaya mobilized considerable sums to support China in her resistance to Japan. Bodies such as the Anti Enemy Backing Up Society (AEBUS for short) were active in collecting subscriptions and organizing boycotts of Japanese goods. Again there were cross-currents. A few years before the Kuomintang government of China had attempted to develop its organization among the Malayan Chinese. But the British authorities had prohibited this — though individual membership of the KMT was permitted. In the rising tide of Chinese anger against Japan and of working class discontent in the hard times of the 1930s the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) had extended its hold on the Chinese community. It was a proscribed body but was able to expand its influence among the working-class Chinese.

The Indian community, like the Chinese, was deeply preoccupied with the situation in their homeland. This was the period when the Congress Party was coming near to power in India and into open conflict with the British. In the local politics of Selangor the Indian community was gratified to secure for the first time in 1928 the appointment of an Indian lawyer, S.N. Veerasamy, as an appointed member of the FMS Federal Council. It was a sore point however that the government insisted that the Indian and Ceylon (mainly Tamils from Ceylon) community should be accorded only one representative in the Council who might be drawn from either. There was often little love lost between them. The Indian member of the Council concerned

himself mainly with the grievances of his constituents — hospital charges, discrimination against Indians in favour of Malays in the government service and the like.

The Indians, like the other communities, felt the need of better organization. After much debate a Central Indian Association of Malaya (CIAM) was formed in 1936 as a federation of local Indian associations. But — like the Malay associations — there was much hesitation over the adoption of political aims and activities. Veerasamy, the Indian member of the Federal Council, became the first president of the CIAM. But he resigned when the members decided that the aims of the CIAM should be linked with those of the Congress party in India. As mentioned in a previous chapter the greatest achievement of the CIAM was to persuade the Government of India to prohibit further organized recruitment of labourers for employment in Malaya.

The political atmosphere had a harsher note because this was a period of economic hardship. Gradually the immigrant communities were settling in Malaya for good. In hard times there was unemployment rather than repatriation. Within each community the old fluid situation in which a labourer, a Yap Ah Loy or a Loke Yew, could hope to become a millionaire was hardening into a class structure of bosses and workers. The employers sought to reduce their costs by cutting wages (or in the rubber industry by demanding more hours of work for the same wage). Workers, especially in industrial or skilled jobs where organization was more easily effected, responded by forming associations to strengthen their bargaining position. Some of these associations came under the influence of the Malayan Communist Party and became involved in strikes which were — or were said to be — political. The government passed legislation to regulate trade unions, but in the face of opposition from employers, hesitated in bringing it into effect. That was still the position when the Japanese invasion brought the whole process to a halt.

The wave of strikes in the late 1930s occurred all over the country. In Kuala Lumpur itself there was no major trouble. But there was much alarm over a strike of the Batu Arang coal miners early in 1937. It came as the climax of several months of strikes elsewhere. The strike came to an end within two or three weeks. But it moved the police to report :-

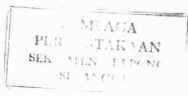
The Federated Malay States had passed through the most serious crisis of its history. It was within an ace of dissolving into temporary chaos as a result of communist intrigue. Had the organisation not been crushed. . . this country with its European women and children living in scattered bungalows on estates would have been in very serious danger of being overrun by angry and desperate Chinese mobs.

The panicky tone reveals clearly enough the rising tension and uncertainty of the time.

The unrest which erupted in strikes was part of a wider sense of dissatisfaction with the world as it was. The strikes on the estates around Klang came in 1941, after the end of the period covered in this book. But the origins can be traced back to 1939 when an Indian journalist formed or revived an Indian association, with a membership mainly of estate labourers on estates around Klang. The declared purpose of the association was social reform within the Indian community :- 'education, marriage reform, the abolition of toddy drinking, and the improvement of health'. Innocuous enough. But following a wage dispute it led to violence, the deaths of four labourers in clashes with troops, and demonstrations in which some 6,000 labourers were involved. As an example of the mixture of aims one of the leaders recalled that 'we were told to work for eight hours . . . to wear shoes before the European bosses . . . and to raise our standard of living to the

level of the staff.'

No one knew or could foresee what traumatic experiences awaited the people of Kuala Lumpur, as in the rest of Malaya, in the next few years. But we have come to another great divide in the history of the town and to within living memory. The postwar period needs another book. Let us close this one.



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My debt to previous writers is a result of my usage of short quotations which I have taken from their books. In listing them below I hope to make acknowledgement. Some of them are only marginally relevant to this book. As a guide to the reader who may wish to read books on Kuala Lumpur I have marked with an asterisk those which in my opinion are most useful to him.

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Abbreviations:-

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| JMBRAS | Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
Malaysian Branch |
| JSEAH | Journal of Southeast Asian History |
| JSEAS | Journal of Southeast Asian Studies |