

A HISTORICAL MONOGRAPH

IMMIGRANT
LABOUR AND THE
DEVELOPMENT
OF MALAYA

1786-1920

by

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(MALAYAN CIVIL SERVICE)

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FOREWORD

*By The Hon'ble Dato' Suleiman bin Dato' Abdul Rahman,
Minister of the Interior, Federation of Malaya.*

It is a pleasure to me both to authorise the publication of this book and to write the Foreword.

Since the days of Raffles and earlier, our civil servants have maintained a tradition of amateur interest in the history of the country, and this book is written in that tradition. It is commendable that the material should have been collected and the chapters written in such limited private time as is left to a busy Malayan Civil Service officer after his official duties (which are by no means confined to 'office hours'). The writer sought for his material from motives of disinterested curiosity and has set down the result in a straightforward non-controversial manner. The sources used were available to anyone with the inclination and patience to seek and study them, and were in no sense made accessible to the writer because of his official position.

The story in the following pages has not been told before with the same detail and perspective. It needed telling. And I am sure it may be read with profit by civil servants, historians interested in improving upon it, and others who feel that the past development of our country is a subject worthy of their attention.

DATO' SULEIMAN BIN DATO' ABDUL RAHMAN

November, 1960.

AUTHOR

Born 1920, Northumberland, England; Educated City of Leeds School and Jesus College Cambridge; Commissioned in R.E.M.E., 1942/46 serving in U.K., India, Burma, Ceylon and Malaya. Malayan Civil Service from 1947—Colonial Office, 1947-8; Assistant Registrar of Societies, Singapore, 1949; Studied Chinese in Macao, 1949-51; Secretary for Chinese Affairs, Negri Sembilan, 1951; Assistant Secretary for Chinese Affairs, Singapore, 1952; Deputy Commissioner for Labour, Malacca, 1953; Settlement Councillor, Malacca, 1953/5; Deputy Commissioner for Labour, Perak, 1956; Deputy Commissioner for Labour, Johore, 1957; Regional Commissioner for Labour (South Malaya), 1957; Deputy Secretary, Ministry of the Interior, 1959.

PREFACE

A few years ago, I grew eager to know more of the historical background of the situations with which my work in the Chinese Secretariat and the Labour Department had brought me into contact, but found that the available books whetted rather than satisfied the thirst. Stimulated particularly by Blythe's *Historical Sketch of Chinese Labour in Malaya*, I decided to look more closely at the sequence of events and conditions relating to Chinese labour, especially in the early days, and also to seek out the equivalent story of Indian labour. When this appetite was keenest, I was posted to Johore Bahru. The different weekly holiday set me free each Friday to visit the Raffles Library in Singapore and dip into its shelves and archives. These, supplemented by my personal library and the resources of friends, enabled me to go a long way towards picking out the story as it developed from the 'beginning'. This book is the fruit of that private quest undertaken during leisure hours to fill the gap in my knowledge. In it I have set down the result of the enquiry, to help to bridge what I found during my reading to be a surprisingly wide gap in the bookshelf of Malayan history.

In writing, I have done my best to stick to facts and to avoid making comments or judgments. I have used extensive quotations of the words of the contemporary sources, to try to let the authentic flavour of the times seep through. I have concentrated on the main stream of employment, which is in estate agriculture and tin mining, and have not dealt with the varieties of miscellaneous work found in the towns, or with the Malay agricultural subsistence economy, or with the labour employed by Government departments. Except for early mention of Singapore, I have restricted myself to the territory of the Federation of Malaya. And I have not dealt with the temporary dislocations caused by the First World War.

I stop at 1920. It would be cynical though not wholly untrue to say that this was because on reaching that point I was transferred away from Johore and the Raffles Library, to Kuala Lumpur. But the main reason was that I saw 1920, as far as any year can be a boundary, as the year by which the economy of

Malaya just about reached the size, shape and pattern that it has approximately retained since. The problems which appeared to arise after 1920 were different in kind from those I had been following, and had already been written about to such an extent that I frankly felt no urge to spend my spare time investigating them more fully.

Performance inevitably falls behind both desire and intention, and I am only too aware of the shortcomings of the pages that follow. But I offer them in the belief that they contain material of some use to those interested in the subject.

I am most grateful to the Hon'ble Dato' Suleiman bin Dato' Abdul Rahman, Minister of the Interior, whom I am at present privileged to serve, for authorising these chapters to be published and for very kindly writing the Foreword. Needless to say, the responsibility for the contents of the book rests on myself alone.

R. N. JACKSON

MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR,
Kuala Lumpur, 13th November, 1960.

GLOSSARY

<i>arrack</i>	- - -	rice (or coconut) spirit.
<i>attap</i>	- - -	palm-leaf thatch.
<i>bahara</i>	- - -	a measure of 800 lbs.
<i>bertam</i>	- - -	a material similar to wicker.
<i>cassava</i>	- - -	tapioca plant.
<i>chulliah (chooliah)</i>	-	South Indian (term now obsolete).
<i>dulang washer</i>	-	female panner for tin ore.
<i>kangany</i>	- - -	South Indian foreman-cum-recruiter.
<i>karang</i>	- - -	tin-bearing earth.
<i>kepala</i>	- - -	foreman.
<i>kheh thau</i>	- -	Chinese foreman.
<i>kling</i>	- - -	South Indian (term now obsolete).
<i>kongsi</i>	- - -	company, partnership; kongsi-house.
<i>kongsi-house</i>	- -	Chinese labourers' living accommodation.
<i>kongsi kong.</i>	- -	Chinese daily-rated mining labourer.
<i>lau kheh</i>	- - -	indentured Chinese labourer on second or subsequent contract.
<i>mandor</i>	- - -	South Indian foreman.
<i>nai chang</i>	- -	Chinese piece-rated mining labourer.
<i>pikul</i>	- - -	a measure of 133 lbs.
<i>samsu</i>	- - -	rice spirit.
<i>sinkay (sin kheh)</i>	-	newly-immigrant Chinese indentured labourer.
<i>tindal</i>	- - -	South Indian foreman.
<i>towkay</i>	- - -	Chinese proprietor or boss.
<i>ulu</i>	- - -	the interior of the country.

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Chapter I

THE BEGINNING OF MODERN DEVELOPMENT

Malaya in 1785

One hundred and seventy-five years ago, the Malay Peninsula was sparsely populated, politically disunited, and economically undeveloped. It was covered almost entirely by dense tropical jungle and the inhabitants, no more than a quarter of a million, were Malays who lived in small settlements along the coasts and rivers.

Although this population had its race, its language and its Muslim religion in common, nevertheless there was no unity. The political organisation was one of small river states of varying degrees of independence and isolation. The north, in particular Kedah and Kelantan, came under the vague and fitfully exercised suzerainty of Siam. In the south, the sultanate of Riau-Johore held a diminishing sway over what are now Johore and Pahang. The central part of the peninsula, west of the main mountain range, was occupied by the three independent (but by no means monolithic) states of Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan—the latter, as the name implies, being in itself a confederation of nine states, while of Selangor it has been said:

Most of its Malay population . . . lived along the coast at the river estuaries, of which there were five . . . Each river mouth was a natural centre of government and Selangor was five states in one.¹

The pattern was feudalistic. Anarchy, strife and insecurity were commonplace.

The people in the various pockets of settlement lived as self-supporting rice farmers and fishermen, their means of communication with the outside world and other settlements being usually by water. They collected jungle produce and in a primitive fashion mined tin to export in exchange for cloth, opium, salt, tobacco and even rice. Their economy was in no way characterised by specialisation. Isolation in small village communities made a large degree of all-roundness essential, and the fact that nature was bountiful and livelihood easy made specialisation unnecessary.

¹Gullick—*Yap Ah Loy*—p. 5.

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The pirate, the fisherman, the blacksmith, the carpenter, the weaver, the medicine man were also rice planters,³ and

Everyone was on occasion a cultivator, a fisherman, a miner, a collector of produce or a labourer.⁴

Every man could earn a living by working for himself and none need earn a wage.

Two institutions existed which appear to have satisfied such demand as arose for what would otherwise have been wage labour—slavery; and feudal service. The slaves were prisoners of war, captured pagan aborigines, negroes brought back from Mecca by wealthy pilgrims, or criminals who to escape punishment for their crimes surrendered themselves to their Raja as his slaves. There were also debt-bondsmen.

The ownership of a number of slaves and debt-bondsmen was a mark of a man of rank, wealth and influence . . . They served in his household, cultivated his fields and worked his mines.⁴

Feudal service (in effect a kind of forced labour) consisted in the obligation of a tenant to perform a certain amount of work for his overlord in return for being allowed tenancy of his land. This service was, at the order of the chief or Raja requiring it, organised by the village headmen. Under a just chief, there was no grumbling, but the exactions in Kedah and Patani at a slightly later date, for example, were severe enough to induce considerable numbers of Malays to abandon their land and migrate to the British-controlled areas of Penang and Province Wellesley.

In this Malay economy there was no middle class to perform the functions of distribution. Trade and marketing were, for large transactions, in the hands of the rulers and chiefs whose wealth (if they could be called wealthy) came from the monopoly exercised over whatever export trade there was and from tolls levied on the passage of goods. Francis Light in 1771 wrote from the 'kingdom' of Kedah to his principals in Madras:

The king is the only merchant and without his licence no one can buy.⁵

³Winstedt—*The Malays: A Cultural History*—p. 103.

³Gullick—*Negri Sembilan Economy*—p. 54.

⁴Winstedt—*Op. Cit.* p. 43.

⁵Winstedt—*Notes on History of Kedah*—p. 179.

Small trading was done 'by peasants trafficking in boats and by women selling foodstuffs in evening markets'.⁶

The islands of Penang and Singapore, before long to become flourishing and populous British trading centres, were as yet covered with jungle and had few or no inhabitants. They were of no greater significance than the many other forest-covered islands around the coast.

The only speck of contrast in this general picture of a disunited, undeveloped peninsula was the town of Malacca and its small hinterland, held by the Dutch but by this time no more than a palsied tentacle of the vast commercial empire that they had built up in the large islands to the south. Originally the centre of a flourishing Malay trading kingdom, Malacca had been captured in 1511 by the Portuguese, who developed the town and fort and built churches and substantial houses. In 1641 they lost it in battle to the Dutch. The Dutch developed the town still further, but by 1785 their power was so much on the wane that they had ceased to regard Malacca as important. They retained it largely to prevent others from having it and to preserve (though only at Malacca itself) the remnants of the monopoly, which they had earlier been fairly successful in enforcing along the west coast, of tin exports, cloth imports, and all dealings in pepper, cloves, opium, nutmegs and resin. The population of Malacca was only 7,216 (including, in contrast to the rest of the peninsula at this time, some 1,390 Chinese) and the town was a stagnant backwater—a place with a past rather than a future—in fact already the 'sleepy hollow' which it has resented being nicknamed up to this day.

Penang

Such was the peninsula when, on the 11th August 1786, Francis Light, with the concurrence of the Sultan of Kedah, took possession of the hilly island of Penang (15 miles long, 9 miles broad, and separated from the mainland by a 2-mile wide channel) on behalf of the English East India Company and established a settlement there. The founding of Penang was the first great event

⁶Winstedt—*The Malays: A Cultural History*—p. 114.

in the development of modern Malaya, and the event from which the story of Labour in Malaya may most appropriately be said to begin.

The East India Company had no strong interest in Malaya, its main commercial activity being the China trade which had grown up over the previous 25 years—a trade in the one direction of large cargoes of tea from Canton and in the other direction of supplies of opium from Bengal. This trade had expanded enormously in both directions since 1784 and the sea-route through the Straits of Malacca had become of vastly increased importance to Britain; a reliable port of call and supply was needed on the route—⁷ 'a good anchorage and place of victualling, watering and refitting'. Light explained:

Not only commanders of British vessels, but foreigners, continually complain of there being no place of safety east of the Bay of Bengal for ships to take shelter in and refit at.⁸

Penang was founded to meet this need. But it was realised that it would also be a useful trading station, 'a market for the produce of the neighbouring countries', to handle the transshipment trade; a place to which local produce would make its way, instead of to Dutch-controlled ports, to be made up into cargoes for Europe, and from which the reverse trade in supplying cloth and opium could be conducted. The Governor-General of India, in his letter of instruction to Light as the first Superintendent of Penang, wrote:

We must leave it to time and your good management to establish it as a port of commerce. If the situation is favourable the merchants will find their advantages in resorting with their goods to it.⁹

And there was a third consideration. A settlement like Penang could provide land on which to grow spices for shipment to Europe 'without the trouble and expense of importation', the only other sources of supply being under Dutch monopoly control in the islands of the archipelago.

To ensure success, Light wished to attract residents of all nationalities. He allowed newcomers—European and Asian alike—to

⁷Swettenham—*British Malaya*—p. 34.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Quoted by H. T. Sutton in 'Straits Times' 4-10-58.

occupy whatever land they could clear (almost all of it being covered by dense jungle) on promise of a future title. His policy achieved its object, for large parts of the eastern side of the island were rapidly cleared and occupied. To attract traders, he had been instructed 'to make the port free to all nations' and 'to refrain from levying any kind of duties or tax on goods landing or vessels importing'. This policy, a revolutionary innovation in the area, was also effective. There was a 'rapid influx of settlers', attracted by the order and safety of British rule, 'the delightful novelty of free trade' at a port with no duties and open to all-comers, the 'convenient position as a market for the produce of the neighbouring countries', and the cheapness of land and absence of formalities in acquiring it.

At the end of the first year, Light was able to report:

Our new town contains 200 houses, Chinese, Malabars and Malays. Besides these, we have small villages . . . A considerable number of fruit trees, coconuts and plantains have been planted lately . . .¹⁰

There were a few Europeans, who occupied the more favourable sites. The shops were mostly kept by Chinese, of whom there were more than sixty families living in the town, 'whither these industrious people daily continue to remove from the adjacent countries, where they had previously settled'.¹¹ And by 1788 more than 400 acres of land had been cleared and cultivated.

Trade and settlement increased. In 1794, Light reported that between one and two thousand Bugis traders now came every year and stayed from two to three months on shore—'the best merchants among the Eastern Islands . . . The great value of their cargoes whether in bullion or goods, make their arrival much wished for by all mercantile people'.¹² By 1795 at least 5,875 acres of land had been cleared in various parts of the island, mainly by Malays and Chinese but also by Europeans, Siamese, Burmese and Indians. A count of the inhabitants taken in 1797 showed a population (excluding Europeans and the garrison) of 6,937. By 1801 it had increased to 10,310—723 persons with landed property; wives, children, relations, friends and servants to the

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Leith—*A Short Account*—p. 7.

¹²Winstedt—*Notes on History of Kedah*—p. 180.

number of 8,375; and 1,222 persons who were their slaves. And this despite the fact that:

many of the settlers, European and Asiatics alike, were adventurers of a type not likely to settle down permanently on the island. Further, the island was unhealthy . . . The death rate was very high among all sections of the community . . . Many of the holders of land died or left the settlement and valuable lands were continually falling into the market . . . to be picked up cheaply.¹³

The value of imports and exports in Spanish dollars (the common currency of the area) *rose from Nil in 1786 to \$853,592 in 1789 and \$1,418,200 in 1804—goods from Britain and India (opium, cloth, steel, gunpowder, iron and chinaware) being sold in exchange for 'Straits Produce', i.e. the typical products of the archipelago (rice, tin, spices, rattans, gold dust, ivory, ebony and pepper.)

In 1800 a strip of the mainland opposite Penang was obtained by treaty from the Sultan of Kedah and named Province Wellesley—'that part of the sea-coast that is between Qualla Kreen and Qualla Mooda, and measuring inland from the sea side sixty orlongs'¹⁴—the aim being to gain complete control of the harbour and an assured food supply. Leith explained that the people

* Since the days of the Portuguese the coins most widely in use, most readily accepted by the natives, were the silver dollar (varying at different times from four shillings and six pence to three shillings and six pence) and the copper cent (roughly equivalent to a half penny) . . . Nominally the rupee was the only legal tender in the Straits Settlements and all Government accounts were kept in rupees. Apart from this, the rupee was practically ignored by the whole population of the Straits, and the dollar remained the most universal form of currency in the Archipelago.

L. A. Mills—*'British Malaya'*—p. 267.

The currency in which the merchants generally calculate commercial transactions is the Spanish dollar divided into cents. Its value varies from 100 to 120 pice.

Newbold—Vol. I, p. 24 (1839).

¹³Stevens—*History of Prince of Wales Island*—p. 381 and 5.

¹⁴Maxwell and Gibson—*Treaties and Engagements*.

of Penang were too busy trying to make money to grow their own food, which had to be imported:

No considerable supply of paddy or cattle can ever be expected from the Island, as the value of land is so high, and the price of labour so great, that no man will ever appropriate any part of his land to pasture or paddy fields, which can possibly be turned to any other purpose of a more profitable nature; very little paddy is cultivated, and no cattle reared on the Island. The former is merely for the use of slaves, who perform the labour.¹⁵

Early Immigrant Population

The commercial and labouring population of Penang was almost exclusively immigrant. It is true that a number of Malays moved across from the nearby mainland to settle, but the proportion was small and, as far as the new developments were concerned, they were said to do 'little else but cutting down trees, at which they are very expert. They are incapable of any labour beyond the cultivation of paddy'.¹⁶ The main immigrant communities were the Indians and the Chinese.

The Indian connection with Malaya dated back to the early centuries of our era and there was regular trading intercourse. Penang being an East India Company settlement, governed from Bengal, it was natural that there should be a considerable Indian element in the population. Before 1800 the settlement was made a penal station for convicts from Bengal, of whom there were 772 in 1805. The army garrison came from Madras and provided a direct link with South India, and the European entrepreneurs who brought their enterprise to Penang did so *via* India and trailed clouds of India after them. Some of the early settlers, too, were Indian merchants from Bombay. The regular traffic of ships to and through the Straits made the journey easy for traders, boatmen and 'coolies' alike.

As early as 1794, Light referred to the South Indian population as:

... the Chuliahs, or people from the several ports on the coast of Coromandel. The greater part of these have long been inhabitants of Quedah and some of them were born there. They are all shopkeepers or

¹⁵Leith—Op. Cit.—p. 20.

¹⁶Ibid—p. 50.

coolies. About one thousand are settled here, some with families. The vessels from the coast bring over annually 1,500 or 2,000 men, who by traffic and various kinds of labour obtain a few dollars with which they return to their homes and are succeeded by others.

These are rather a drain upon the stock of the island, but as they are subjects of the Company it ultimately tends to the general good.¹⁷

Leith, writing in 1804, says of them :

Many of them are merchants, fixed inhabitants, and possess property to a very large amount; the greatest proportion, however, of the Chuliahs reside on the island only for a few months; then having disposed of their goods, and purchased a fresh cargo, they return to the coast (i.e. to South India). The coolies and boatmen are Chuliahs; these two descriptions of people remain, one, two or three years, according to circumstances, and then return to the coast.¹⁸

The presence of so many Chinese immigrants requires more elucidation. The Chinese connection with South East Asia was, in fact, almost as longstanding as the Indian, and the pattern of Chinese activity in the area had been established long before Penang was founded. By 1720, for instance, there were eighty thousand Chinese in or near the Dutch settlement at Batavia, as merchants, shopkeepers, artisans, fishermen and coastal traders; many were employers or labourers in the sugar industry which was then expanding in Java, where in 1710 there were 130 sugar factories, mainly in Chinese hands. The Chinese worked tin mines on the Dutch-controlled island of Banka from about the same time. And in Brunei in 1776 'above the town were many pepper gardens belonging to the Chinese'.¹⁹ They were thus present in the archipelago in considerable numbers and there was a large and regular traffic of immigrants between China and the 'Southern Ocean'. 'At the Eastern Islands junks from China annually arrive in the favourable season and bring a great number of people to take up their residence in these quarters'.²⁰ A letter of 1805 states that :

Such immigrants pawn their persons to the owner or Captains of the junks for a passage and victuals to the amount of 20 Spanish dollars or £4 sterling, which they borrow on arriving at their destination from relations

¹⁷J.I.A. 1850, Vol. V, p. 9.

¹⁸Leith—Op. Cit.—p. 47.

¹⁹Purcell—*Chinese in South East Asia*—p. 457.

²⁰R. T. Farquhar, Writing in 1804—J.I.A. Vol. VI, p. 162.

or from cultivators whom they engage to work for, and repay by monthly deductions from their wages. This kind of negotiation is now grown into a regular system of trade to the extent of 10 or 12,000 men annually, and has at this day half peopled the islands of the great Archipelago.²¹

As early as 1794, Light wrote:

The Chinese constitute the most valuable part of our inhabitants; they are men, women and children about 3,000, they possess the different trades of carpenters, masons and smiths, are traders, shopkeepers and planters, they employ small vessels and prows and send adventures to the surrounding countries . . . They . . . send annually a part of their profits to their families. This is so general that a poor labourer will work with double labour to acquire two or three dollars to remit to China. As soon as they obtain a little money, they obtain a wife and go on in a regular domestic mode . . .²²

and Leith, writing in 1804, said:

They may be estimated to amount to between 5 and 6,000. The better sort of them possess valuable estates, in land and houses, and were the first Planters of pepper. The lower order exercise, different trades of carpenters, smiths, shoemakers, etc. etc. they are labourers and fishermen, and supply the markets with all sorts of vegetables. The wages they receive are certainly very high, but they are laboriously good workmen.²³

Pepper

In 1790 Light had introduced pepper plants from Sumatra and the cultivation of pepper began and became the chief planting interest. During the next few years, the East India Company established experimental pepper plantations in two areas; Light planted pepper on his land near his residence at 'Suffolk'; the other Europeans, in so far as they planted their estates, planted pepper; but, above all, 'the Chinese with their characteristic industry occupied and planted comparatively small holdings all over the island'²⁴—'indeed, without them, it would have little cultivation'.²⁵ By 1798, 533,230 pepper vines had been planted. Three years later there were 1,316,579.

Pepper is the dried fruit of a large woody climbing vine which produces flowering catkins $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in diameter and up to 6 inches

²¹J.I.A. Vol. VI, p. 167.

²²J.I.A. Vol. V, p. 9.

²³Leith—Op. Cit. p. 80.

²⁴Stevens—Op. Cit. p. 396.

²⁵Leith—Op. Cit.—p. 47.

long, each bearing about sixty peppercorns when mature. The vines grow on trees or posts about six feet apart; when they reach the top, they are pulled down again and wound round the base; pruning, weeding and manuring are done, with the object of covering the post with a mass of stems and fruiting branches. The vines are fully grown after four years but not fully bearing until about seven years; they give good crops for up to fifteen years, and may even remain profitable up to the thirtieth year. A mature vine gives 3 to 3½ lbs. of dry produce after the sixth year, the yield gradually increasing from about 2 ozs. in the first year to 1 lb. in the third year, and more thereafter. A plantation of 880 vines an acre will give an annual yield per acre of up to 3,000 lbs. of dry pepper. Cropping continues throughout the year, although the two main seasons are March and August.

Pepper became the first staple product of the settlement and for many years the pepper plantations were almost entirely owned and cultivated by the Chinese. The labourers were usually Chinese farmers who arrived from China with nothing but the clothes they stood in. When a plantation was formed, one labourer could tend two orlongs (just under three acres) of land. At first the plantation owners, whether European or Asian, would engage labourers on arrival from China, pay off the cost of their passages, and allow them two dollars a month and a suit of clothes a year. The cost of the labour of one man averaged three dollars a month. This system proved not wholly satisfactory, and the custom grew up for the capitalist (merchant or shopkeeper) to advance money to the labourer to build a house and buy tools, and to pay him two dollars a month for subsistence for three years. At the end of the three years, the plantation was divided equally between the capitalist and the labourer. The capitalist would then lease his half to the labourer for five years for a rent paid in produce at the rate of 30 pikuls a year, out of a total annual crop of about 56 pikuls.

The 'Period of Disillusion'

The trade of Penang increased year by year until 1810. The island then reached saturation point in respect of the area which it could reasonably serve—northern Sumatra, southern Burma

and western Malaya. Trade with the islands further east was very small—Penang was on the western edge of the archipelago, hundreds of miles from the centre, and:

native traders greatly appreciated its low duties and freedom from irksome restrictions, but for the great majority this attraction was not strong enough to induce them to sail several hundred miles out of their way through the pirate-infested waters of the Straits of Malacca when other, though from the point of customs duties less attractive, ports were close at hand.²⁶

The trade remained level from 1810 until 1821, but by then the two-year old settlement at Singapore began to attract some of it away, and by 1830 it was only about half of the 1821 figure.

Pepper production increased yearly until an annual figure of 4,000,000 lbs. was reached and maintained. But by 1810 it had dropped to 2,500,000 lbs., the price having fallen to between 3 and 3½ dollars a pikul. In 1818 only 1,480,265 vines remained in bearing, and by 1835 the annual output of pepper was no more than an insignificant 266,000 lbs.

The founders of Penang had wished to grow spices—notably nutmegs and cloves. A few plants were imported from the Dutch islands in 1795, and five thousand nutmeg plants and fifteen thousand clove plants were brought from Amboyna in 1800, and a larger number in 1802, by which time the Company had established a 130-acre spice garden. Leith wrote in 1804:

The spice plantations, in which there are many thousand clove and nutmeg trees, are so flourishing, that the Island may reasonably hope, in a few years, to be able to furnish a valuable cargo of cloves, nutmegs and mace²⁷

but in 1805 the garden was, for reasons of economy, sold in lots and its 5,100 nutmeg and 1,625 clove trees were transplanted to other parts of the island. Spice planting required heavy capital outlay and was left entirely to the Europeans. It made a slow start, because of ignorance of the correct method of cultivation; the nutmeg tree took ten or twelve years to come into bearing, and the clove tree as long as twenty before it gave a good crop, whereas properly cultivated they should have produced a crop in

²⁶Mills—*British Malaya*—p. 47.

²⁷Leith—*Op. Cit.* p. 80.

the seventh and fifth years respectively. In 1810 only a few hundred of the 13,000 nutmeg trees on the island were in bearing. Their tardy crop 'seems to have at length induced such an apathy regarding them that they ran the risk of speedy extinction'.²⁸ But by 1818, 6,900 trees had come into bearing. Only one planter (Brown of Glugor) had made a really serious attempt to continue the cultivation.

The immigrant population of the island continued to increase steadily if slowly, Indians and Chinese remaining approximately equal in numbers.

IMMIGRANT POPULATION OF PENANG ISLAND

	1812	1820	1830	1840
Chinese ..	7,558	8,595	8,963	8,715
Indians ..	7,113	8,536	8,858	9,681

But there was a more rapid expansion of population in Province Wellesley, where the Chinese quickly outnumbered the Indians.

IMMIGRANT POPULATION OF PROVINCE WELLESLEY

	1820	1833	1844
Chinese	325	2,259	4,107
Indians	338	1,087	1,805

The period however was one of growing political and economic disillusionment with Penang, especially in face of the extremely rapid growth and prosperity of Singapore after 1819; the outward and visible sign of this was in 1832, when the capital of the Straits Settlements (as Penang, Malacca and Singapore had come to be called) was moved from Penang to Singapore.

Penang and Province Wellesley—Sugar and Spice

The cessation of expansion in commerce and the increase in population gave rise to 'a considerable increase of late in agricultural activity and spirit',²⁹ despite the continued decline of pepper growing.

²⁸Low—*Dissertation on the Soil*—p. 15.

²⁹*ibid*—p. 1.

By 1833 Brown of Glugor had at last achieved unmistakable success in the cultivation of nutmegs and cloves, which had in fact been more extensively cultivated after 1818, and although Low rather cynically wrote in 1835:

He who would enter the arena as a spice planter should have the bump of perseverance myristicatically developed; he should be impervious to compunctious feelings on opening his purse; his temperament ought to be sanguine; and his trust in native operatives should be the reverse of overweening . . . ,³⁰

nevertheless Brown's example brought 'an immediate and marked increase in the number of plantations'. In 1835 there were more than thirty. Five had from 4,000 to 20,000 trees each, eight from 500 to 4,000, and there were seventeen smaller plantations with 50 or more trees—a total of some 80,000 trees, of which more than half were in bearing. The gross annual product was estimated at 130,000 lbs. and this was increasing from year to year as more young trees came into bearing.

Cloves are the dried unopened flowers of the clove tree, a conical tree about twenty feet high which, when properly cultivated, produces buds from about its fifth year. The cloves are gathered by hand from November to January, when a dull blood-red colour, and dried in direct sunlight. An acre containing one hundred trees will produce about 500 lbs. of dried cloves in a season.

The *nutmeg* tree, bushy and growing as high as forty feet, is planted at between 200 and 2,000 feet above sea level. Spacing between trees is thirty feet, and manuring is done once a year by means of a trench dug round the tree. The fruit takes nine months to ripen, the main crop being in July and August, although the tree fruits throughout the year. Inside the fruit, in a shell, is a dark brown seed—the nutmeg. Covering the shell is a layer of bright crimson material—mace. Both mace and nutmegs can yield an oil, but their main use was as a spice or flavouring agent.

The initial cost of a plantation of one hundred and thirty three acres was 4,000 Spanish dollars—2,000 dollars for the land, cleared and on a grant in perpetuity; 1,600 dollars for plants, planting, ditching, hedging and nursery; and 400 dollars for

³⁰*Ibid*—p. 28.

buildings, implements and cattle. Running expenses for seven years would amount to about 39,000 dollars. This would pay for one overseer, 50 Chinese labourers ('or 70 Chuliahs'), cattle or manure, carts, ploughs, quit-rent and compound interest on the outlay.

Spice growing prospered after 1833. Between 1832 and 1842 the export of nutmegs and mace trebled, and further extension of cultivation made an equal increase possible in the subsequent decade. By 1847 spices had become the staple product of Penang, even though between 1832 and 1842 the price of nutmegs fell from 10-12 dollars per thousand to 4-5 dollars per thousand, to remain steady at the latter figure for many years thereafter.³¹

Cane Sugar was exported as early as 1805, though Leith, writing in the previous year, said:

The sugar-cane grows with uncommon luxuriance; but as the price of labour is very high, the expense attending the making of sugar will prevent a very extensive cultivation of the cane.³²

The Chinese were said to have begun to grow the crop in the southern part of Province Wellesley before then, but the Chinese population of the Province even by 1820 was no more than 325, and it is clear that large-scale sugar cultivation must have been in its very infancy at that time. But by 1835 the position had changed. Low then wrote:

The sugar-cane is partially cultivated in Penang, but extensively in Province Wellesley, especially in the central and southern portions of it. To these last, the Chinese were allured by the richness of the soil, the facility of water communications and cheapness of firewood. The plantations there occupy about nine hundred acres of land, and very small portions of these are allowed to remain fallow . . .

. . . There are about 2,000 Chinese collected, as cultivators or otherwise, on these plantations. At present they may be considered as the sole sugar-makers at this settlement . . .

. . . and it is well known that numbers have returned from the sugar plantations to China with well filled purses.³³

³¹J.I.A. 1849 Vol. III, Ch. LIII, pp. iii-v.

³²Leith—Op. Cit.—p. 80.

³³Low—Op. Cit.—pp. 49 and 58.

The *sugar-cane* is a tall grass about eight to twelve feet high, and cane-sugar is obtained from its juice. It grows best on flat land near sea level, preferably near tidal rivers, both to assist drainage and to furnish an easy means of moving the cane to the factory. Before the cane is planted, the land needs to be carefully prepared—cleaned, weeded, tilled and made up into ridges. Cuttings, spaced two or three feet apart, are planted in the furrows. There used to be an average of 3,400 bunches to the orlong (1½ acres) with from 5 to 8 canes in a bunch. For six months the soil must be hoed and kept friable. The canes reach maturity in twelve to fourteen months. After flowering, they ripen and harden, are cut close to the ground (sugar content is greatest near the ground), tied in bundles and taken to the factory. The yield per acre is about 25 tons of cane, which gives about 2½ tons of raw sugar. After the land has borne its second crop, considerable manuring is necessary. Sugar-cane cultivation requires much labour—‘at least one unit of Indian labour’ per acre.

The expense of cultivating a plantation of 133 acres for fourteen months (while growing the first crop) was 2,000 dollars for the land and its clearing; 140 dollars for a Chinese overseer at ten dollars a month; 3,500 dollars for fifty Chinese labourers at five dollars each per month; 100 dollars for agricultural implements; 50 dollars for houses for the people; 75 dollars for quit rent; and 10 dollars for manure—a total of \$5,875. For the second season the expense would be only \$3,825.

At the factory the canes were put through rollers to crush out the juice, which was boiled and crystallised to obtain the sugar. The fibrous residue of the crushed cane was used for fuel at the factory. The daily expenses of running a sugar factory were 4 dollars, made up as follows: 1 foreman at 25 cts; 1 fire feeder at 20 cts; 1 mill feeder at 25 cts; 1 withdrawer of cane-trash, who also carried the cane juice to the boiling place, at 30 cts; 1 buffalo driver at 20 cts; hire of cane cutters and carriers of cane to the mill at \$1; and the balance made up to charges for firewood, lime, oil, claying pots and other things.³⁴

³⁴Ibid p. 49.

Labour and Wages

Wage conditions in Penang in 1835 are known in reasonable detail. 'The price of Chinese labour', Low said, 'has already fallen by one-fourth part below what it formerly was, owing partly to the diminished capital in circulation, but chiefly to the competition of Chuliahs and Malayan labour'. There had been a general fall in wages 'sufficient to give a stimulus to cultivation and encouragement to settlers'. Wages were higher than on the continent of India but lower than in the West Indies, and Low cheerfully summarised the position by saying:

If good wages be indicative of the prosperity of a country, then Penang and its dependancy must be flourishing.³⁵

The following particulars were given of actual rates:

Chinese labourers can scarcely be had for less than nine sicca rupees monthly—Chuliahs, from the Madras side of India, are now paid about six rupees and the same rate or even less is given to Malays. Malayan women receive for hoeing about six cents of a dollar daily and children from three to six.³⁶

The planters usually engaged labourers on monthly agreements but paid them only for the actual days on which they worked. The general attitude to the labour position is described as follows:

The labour of three able-bodied Chinese may be considered equivalent, under due superintendence, to that of five Chuliahs or Malays; but were the balance of hire to operate against the former, which it does not, still it would generally be found advantageous to employ them where very systematic work is to be done. It is, however, undoubtedly the interest of the agriculturalist to encourage all these classes; at the same time, especially guarding against the monopolizing spirit of the Chinese, and an increase beyond the present rate of daily labour, by affording to the Chuliahs such hire as may induce them to resort, as they have done, to the Island.³⁷

An interesting comparison made at the time gives some idea of the relative economic status and standard of living of the wage

³⁵*Ibid* p. 7.

³⁶*Ibid*.

³⁷*Ibid*.

labourers. The comparison assumed that a hypothetical European labourer came to work in Penang and considered how he would fare—

Were he to receive 40 cents a day, the highest wages given to journeyman Chinese carpenters, and which borders pretty close on the rate of day-labour in England, he would have a yearly surplus for clothing, lodging, etc., of about £6 sterling. A day labourer in England is able to earn about a peck of wheat, in good times, daily. An American help can earn two pecks. A common Chinese labourer here can easily enough earn one peck of rice . . . A Malay can earn nearly half a peck of rice daily. In China, it is understood, the agricultural labourer cannot earn above 12½ pecks of rice a month, by daily and uninterrupted labour . . . A reference to Europe prices will show that a peck of wheat there will probably always purchase one-third more of other commodities than a peck of rice will here.²⁸

A more direct indication of the purchasing power of the current wages may be seen from Low's estimate that 'a common Malay labourer' and his family (five persons in all) would need to spend Spanish dollars 27.02 annually for subsistence. The approximate amounts were \$22.57 for food; \$3.35 for clothing; \$1 for housing; and \$2 for 'extra luxuries such as durians, etc.' The food consisted of 56 lbs. rice, costing 60 cts.; 2½ cts. for salt; 30 cts. for fish; 15 cts. for chilli and other condiments; and 60 cts. for tobacco, sيره, areca, lime and gambier, each month. Clothing for the year was estimated for the man at 2 sarongs costing 60 cts., 1 bajoo or jacket costing 30 cts., 1 pair of pantaloons for 30 cts., and 1 kerchief for 20 cts.; and for the wife at 4 sarongs costing a total of \$1.20 and 2 bajoo for 70 cts. These figures were for the rural areas of Province Wellesley.

The spending habits of the different types of labourers varied. For example:

No class of men can here subsist on less than a Chuliah can; and it is this circumstance which makes him, excepting as a labourer, a useless subject, since his savings are rarely spent on the spot, but sent to his family in India while the Chinese and Malays spend theirs liberally enough, in whole or in part.²⁹

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid p. 160.

Penang island was dependant upon the supply of Chinese and Chuliah (Tamil) labour; Malay labourers from Province Wellesley were averse to going there 'because they have to leave their families behind'. The general future of the labour supply position was foreseen fairly accurately when Low wrote:

If the cultivation of sugar, indigo, coffee and other valuable exportable produce were to increase greatly or even moderately beyond the present extent, a constant demand for labour would arise, and the labour bear a higher natural price, unless affected by external circumstances . . .⁴⁰

If many more labourers were required for estate agriculture, they might be difficult to obtain. This was a problem that faced Malaya constantly during the period of its most rapid development.

⁴⁰Ibid p. 158.

Chapter II

THE EARLY STRAITS SETTLEMENTS

Malacca

While this development was proceeding at Penang, what was the position elsewhere in the Peninsula? Until 1819, Malacca was the only other place of settled and stable rule, and town and port of any size. It came under British occupation almost continuously from 1795 to 1818 (and in 1824 was finally ceded to Britain by the Dutch). The main changes effected by the earlier occupation were the removal of the Dutch restrictions on trade and agriculture. Although the commerce of Malacca had suffered considerably as a result of the founding of Penang, nevertheless:

... the Company was afraid that some day it might be returned to the Dutch ... In that case, it might be a serious rival to Penang, since it was 240 miles nearer to the centre of the Archipelago ... The Directors had determined to destroy the fortifications and divert the trade of Malacca to Penang. They hoped to reduce it to an uninhabited jungle, so that it would be useless to Holland should she ever recover it.¹

The East India Company therefore issued orders in 1805 that the fortress should be destroyed, the town evacuated, and the population removed to Penang. By 1807 the fortifications had been demolished, but the 15,000 inhabitants of the town, despite efforts to persuade them to move to Penang, 'obstinately refused to do so'. Raffles visited Malacca from Penang in 1808 and managed to persuade the Company to change its policy and maintain the settlement, which remained reasonably prosperous until 1819, when the founding of Singapore gave a serious blow to its trade.

Decline in Malacca's Trade²

1825—£318,426

1826—£200,000

1829—£133,067

¹Mills—*British Malaya*—p. 49.

²Ibid—p. 192.

From that day, its trade, apart from a very small direct trade with India and China, was confined to the neighbouring Malay States in the peninsula and Sumatra; it became a 'mere depôt where the produce of the adjacent countries was collected for transmission to Penang and above all to Singapore'. Its trade remained moribund until 1842, after which it began to revive a little.

There was at first no agricultural activity at Malacca, except for Malay subsistence farming. In 1824 only 5,000 acres of a possible 64,000 acres were cultivated in this way. Because of difficulties over land ownership and tenure, 'capitalists are unwilling to invest their money in the settlement and for many years, in spite of the richness of the soil, few plantations were formed for the growth of sugar, coconuts, etc.'³ There was no spice cultivation. Even in 1849, Baumgarten reported that 'no Europeans, or their descendants, appear to be inclined to invest capital in agricultural speculation' and suggested that planters might find it worthwhile, employing Chinese immigrant labour, to grow coconuts, betel nut, sago or the kabong palm, together with cattle-rearing, each plantation to have its own farmyard.⁴ But no particular development took place until about 1855, when tapioca-planting by Chinese began. Malacca, contrary to what might be expected, has little to contribute directly to the story of Labour in Malaya, except for its connection with early tin-mining, which is described in the next chapter.

Singapore

In 1819, Raffles, by agreement with the Johore authorities, on behalf of the East India Company established a settlement on the island of Singapore, the whole of which was shortly afterwards ceded to Britain. The prime purpose was to form a trading centre, and merchants were encouraged.

The settlement was an immediate and remarkable success. The population, originally 150, rapidly grew with the arrival of Malays, Chinese and Indians. Most of the prominent Chinese in the early days were from Malacca, but the first immigrants direct

³Ibid—p. 108.

⁴J.I.A. 1849 Vol. III, pp. 707-21.

from China arrived in 1821 by junk from Amoy. The population increased as follows:

Early Population of Singapore

	1819	1823	1833	1840	1850	1860
Malays.. ..	150	4,580	7,131	9,318	12,206	10,888
Chinese ..	—	3,317	8,517	17,704	27,988	50,043
Indians ..	—	756	2,324	3,375	6,284	12,971

The almost complete preponderance of Chinese from the early days is very noticeable—in contrast to Penang, where there was a very large Indian element.

At first the cost of living was high—most food had to be imported, mainly from Malacca. A duck cost one Spanish piastre, 12 fowls cost five piastres, and 4 loaves cost one florin. Workmen's and servants' wages were considered excessive—in 1823, labourers working for traders were paid 10 piastres a month and 'a grass cutter for a single horse gets 5 Spanish piastres a month'.⁶

The value of the trade of Singapore increased amazingly from year to year. A comparison with Penang illustrates this in a striking fashion:

Trade of Singapore and Penang⁷

	Singapore	Penang
1825 ..	£2.6 million	£1.1 million
1830 ..	£3.9 million	£0.7 million
1840 ..	£5.8 million	£1.4 million

But it was trade in which the Peninsula had little part. The secret of Singapore's success was its position as the natural centre of the area, combined with the policy of free trade and absence of restrictions—'merchants flocked to Singapore from every part of the Archipelago and the Far East'.

⁶From Del Tufo—*A Report on 1947 Census*, and Mills, *Op Cit.* p. 212.

⁷Quoted by Purcell—*Chinese in Malaya*—p. 90.

⁸Mills—*British Malaya*—p. 192.

Although trade was the dominating interest, agriculture was also tried. 'A few Europeans and many Chinese ventured to make settlements in the interior of the island'.⁸

Europeans were interested in growing nutmegs and cloves, and sugar. Nutmeg trees were introduced into Singapore almost immediately after the settlement was founded, and by 1843 there were estimated to be 43,544, of which 5,317 were in bearing. By 1848, they had increased to 55,925, of which 11,914 were in bearing. It was said in that year:

There are several extensive nutmeg estates owned by Europeans in the island in a very thriving condition, and more are yearly added. This spice grows best in the red soil of the hills . . . The nuts are large and of a much esteemed quality in the markets of the west . . . No success has attended repeated trials of cloves here . . .⁹

Singapore production, however, was less than one-tenth of that of Penang—in 1848, it was 25,200 lbs. of nutmegs and 8,400 lbs. of mace, compared with the Penang figures of 276,000 lbs. and 88,133 lbs.¹⁰ In 1849 cultivation was extending very rapidly.¹¹ The early success was short-lived, however, as the spice trees were destroyed by a blight and cultivation was abandoned in the 1860's.

Next to nutmegs, Europeans at Singapore were interested in growing coconuts, of which there were 'many extensive plantations in a very flourishing condition, holding out favourable prospects to the proprietors'.¹² Sugar cultivation was begun on the island about 1838, but the two plantations started then were still the only ones in existence ten years later—the failure to secure a reduction in the high rate of duty charged in Great Britain on Singapore-grown sugar discouraged further growing of this crop.

The Chinese established large plantations of pepper and gambier (of which they were the exclusive cultivators), planted in the ratio of three acres of pepper to thirty acres of gambier.

⁸J.I.A. 1848 Vol. II, pp. 139-151.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰J.I.A. 1851 Vol. V, p. 480.

¹¹J.I.A. 1849 Vol. III, Ch. LIII pp. iii-v.

¹²J.I.A. 1848 Vol. II, pp. 139-151 (Balestier).

Siah U Chin, writing in 1848,¹³ says:

In the gambier and pepper plantations there are generally 9 or 10 men employed, 12 or 13 are considered a full complement, and I have never heard of any plantation having as many as 20 men upon it . . . The amount of wages of labourers in the jungle differs. Generally speaking, each labourer gets about 3 dollars per month . . . they are paid more or less in proportion as the price of gambier rises or falls . . .

Balestier in the same year wrote:

The Chinese undertook the growth of gambier and pepper, and gradually have extended themselves over a considerable portion of the island. But they are evil doers rather than doers of good to the land, which after a few years cultivation they abandon, impoverished and overrun by lallang grass, and remove to a fresh clearing in the jungle, where the virgin soil becomes in its turn exhausted and a nuisance.¹⁴

He also explained how the cultivation tended to snowball:

The emigrants from China who yearly arrive are of the very lowest classes of labourers in their own country, and for the most part enter into engagements with their countrymen already established here to labour for one year, in consideration of the payment of their passage money hither. At the end of the year, if perchance they have not quietly emancipated themselves before, they are free to do as they please, and as they are mostly taken up by the gambier and pepper planters they usually bargain with a Chinese shopkeeper in Singapore for money and provisions to enable them to set up with, pledging the future plantation and its products on conditions highly favourable to the capitalist . . .¹⁵

Gambier (which was used in tanning leather, as a dye for silk, and as a masticatory adjunct to the chewing of betel) is the product of a large climbing shrub which grows without difficulty, propagated from seed in a nursery and transplanted at three to six months, with six to eight feet between plants. A crop may be gathered after fifteen months, and thereafter every four to six months for ten years or more. In a day, one labourer can collect the leaves from half an acre. One acre can produce 8 to 10 piculs of gambier a year, 10 piculs of leaves yielding one picul of gambier. The traditional gambier factory (a building of round timber with a steep roof of grass rising to 30 feet and with two of the four sides enclosed by plank walls) had a clay floor in which were

¹³J.I.A. 1848 Vol. II, p. 283.

¹⁴J.I.A. 1848 Vol. II, pp. 139-151.

¹⁵Ibid.

excavated furnaces, immediately above which, but still sunk in the floor, were iron cauldrons eighteen inches deep and four to five feet in diameter. Behind each cauldron and sloping towards it was a 20-foot long chute made of a hollowed-out tree trunk. The leaves and twigs of gambier were boiled in water in the cauldron for two or three hours, being constantly stirred by wooden five-pointed forks. The leaves and twigs were then scooped out of the cauldron on to the chute, and washed in cold water until the liquid draining off the chute into the cauldron was clear. The cauldron then boiled for three more hours until the liquid became brown, when it was sieved out into wooden tubs and stirred. After a quarter of an hour it became viscid and was poured into pans to cool and solidify. It was then cut into small cubes or larger blocks, which were dried for a day or two in the sun and then stacked on racks in the rafters above the furnace for further drying. When dry the gambier was ready for the market.

The pepper and gambier cultivation exhausted the land to such an extent that by 1840 there was no future for this kind of agriculture on Singapore island. From about 1835, therefore, the Chinese growers began to spread to the mainland of Johore and to cultivate there on the same system.

In 1849, there were Chinese-owned sago factories in Singapore, employing Chinese labourers:

From 20 to 30 men are employed in the large manufactories . . . Their wages are, for the roasters and the man at the trough, 4 dollars, and for the other men $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 dollars a month, and they receive their food besides . . . One of the principal share-holders lives in the manufactory, and the best workmen have small shares in the profits besides their wages.¹⁶

Singapore, although it rapidly assumed premier position of the three settlements, with its fast-increasing immigrant population, its expanding trade, and its early plantations, in fact displays few wholly new tendencies with regard to labour and development. Penang and Province Wellesley in this respect had stolen much of the thunder and had to a large extent set the pattern. In Singapore, the Chinese predominance was complete. In Penang the Indian

¹⁶J.I.A. 1849 Vol. III, p. 306 (J. R. Logan).

element and influence always remained strong. The employment of labour in agriculture became insignificant in Singapore from about the middle of the century. The centre of interest of our story, in fact, remains in the territory of the present Federation of Malaya.

Agricultural Development in Penang and Province Wellesley

The revival of agricultural activity in Penang, which began during the commercial doldrums of the 1830's, continued. By the mid-forties it had 'made George Town, so recently wearing the internal signs of decay, a bustling and flourishing mart'.¹⁷ Nutmeg, coconut, sugar and rice cultivation increased.

Coconuts had been grown in Penang from the earliest days. By 1804 there were said to be 32,306 trees. Low in 1836 gave an estimate of the cost of starting a 133-acre coconut plantation—a seven-year investment, since the trees take seven years to produce nuts—and said it would require one overseer at \$7 p.m. and ten labourers at \$3 p.m. (obviously Indian or Malay labourers). Earl considered that South Indian labourers were 'better suited than any other people for looking after coconut plantations, indeed for all kinds of field labour under European superintendence. . . .'¹⁸

One of the factors which had hitherto hampered the development of plantation agriculture was 'the very high pretensions of the Company for the occupation of waste lands',¹⁹ which had deterred enterprising Europeans from applying for them. An improvement made about this time in the terms on which land could be alienated removed this obstacle. This, and the prospect of a reduction in the duties on sugar, led to the establishment of considerable sugar-cane plantations under European management. From 1846, Penang and Province Wellesley (but not Singapore) were allowed to have their sugar and rum imported into the United Kingdom on payment of reduced duties. This gave an

¹⁷J.I.A. 1848 Vol. II, pp. 139-151 (Balestier).

¹⁸J.I.A. 1862 New Series Vol. IV.

¹⁹J.I.A. 1848 Vol. II, pp. 139-151 (Balestier).

immediate stimulus to sugar-growing, and production took a tremendous leap forward, as the figures show:

*Sugar and Rum Exports from Penang*²⁰

	Sugar		Rum	
1843	288 piculs	..	4,000 gallons	
2nd half of 1846 ..	13,000	„ ..	10,040	„
1st half of 1847 ..	28,500	„ ..	13,000	„
2nd half of 1847 ..	35,200	„ ..	59,000	„

Balestier wrote in 1848:

The cultivation of the cane is generally carried on by Chinese, who yearly emigrate in large numbers, from Amoy mainly, and who let themselves out for one year to European or Chinese cane growers, at from three to four Spanish dollars per month, they finding themselves in food, clothes, etc. . . .

Two and a half acres is the most that a Chinaman cultivates in a year, and even this little is only obtained by hard driving, if working on monthly wages for a European. The returns from which would be about forty piculs of dry sugar . . .

Many labourers come also from the Madras side of India, who let themselves out to the estates and are more prized for various kinds of plantation works than as cane cultivators.²¹

Sugar-cane remained a major plantation crop for the next sixty years and from this time, together with coconut cultivation, created a constant demand for labour which it rarely seemed possible to satisfy fully.

Spice-growing ceased to be a planting interest in the 1860's, when the trees were destroyed by a blight. In 1861/2, it was reported that 'in the island of Penang disease still continues its ravages amongst the Nutmeg plantations, and hardly one has remained unscathed, they are consequently giving way to plantations of coconut and other fruit trees', and by 1863/4 'several small estates in the interior of the Island have been abandoned'.²²

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²S.S. Annual Reports 1861/2 and 1863/4.

Tapioca had begun to be planted in Province Wellesley by 1860, and produced large crops. One estate (it was said at that time):

was opened a few years ago by Mr. Robert Wilson of Penang for the purpose of growing . . . cassava root . . . for the manufacture of tapioca and it has turned out a great success . . . Now there are nearly 700 acres under cultivation, producing a proportionate quantity of this highly prized substance. The labourers employed are nearly all Klings, Javanese and a few Malays, the former being in the proportion of about ten to one.²³

A large sugar estate at the same time began the experiment of growing tapioca as a rotation crop:

Here, as elsewhere in the Province, the land has to lie fallow for some time after having been cropped for several years in succession. An experiment is being made with planting the exhausted land with Cassava from which tapioca is made, instead of allowing it to be overrun with brushwood, and there is good promise of success.²⁴

Thompson, writing in 1875, explains that 'in addition to sugar-growing, the planters have brought many of the less fertile tracts of land under cultivation for tapioca—a hardy plant capable of growing in almost any soil, and requiring less trenching and manuring than sugar'.²⁵

Tapioca, grown from 6-inch long cuttings from the stem of a mature plant and planted quite shallowly in the soil, was harvested after 12 to 18 months, the only attention necessary in the interval being weeding and putting back plants which might have fallen down. Harvesting entailed collecting the roots, which were pulled out by hand after the stem had been cut off short. One acre would yield ten tons of roots, which were normally processed in a factory on or near the estate as soon as harvested. Processing consisted of washing the roots, rasping them to a pulp, straining out the free starch in suspension, and leaving the latter to settle for six hours, after which the resultant cream-coloured almost solid sediment was cut into blocks, which went through a week-long process of daily washing and drying and then were broken up and made into flour, pearl or flake, as desired, by sieving and

²³Earl—*Topography and Itinerary of Province Wellesley*—p. 25.

²⁴Ibid—p. 11.

²⁵Thompson—*Straits of Malacca, Indo-China and China*—Chapter II.

cooking. A factory needed large quantities of good-quality water. 10 tons of roots produced $1\frac{1}{2}$ tons of finished product (plus ten tons of refuse!) and a Chinese factory treating this amount daily employed about 20 persons.

There was a gradual change from Chinese to Indian labour on the European-owned sugar estates. An 1862 account of the immigrants from South India arriving at Penang says:

The greater number of these are engaged by the proprietors of sugar and coconut plantations in Province Wellesley, who advance to the owners of the vessels the cost of passage and maintenance during the voyage, on the emigrants entering into an agreement to serve the proprietor two to three years at rates varying from 9 to 13 cents of a dollar per diem (the average being three dollars a month) until their term is expired.²⁶

By 1861 there were 11 large European-owned sugar estates 'all supplied with excellent machinery, including 'centrifugals' for drying the sugar, and all modern improvements short of vacuum pans, which are only now being introduced.'²⁷ Most of them were clustered in the south of the Province, and they employed Tamil labour. There was one large Chinese-owned sugar and betel-nut estate. In 1861/2, 'the out-turn of some of the Sugar Estates closely approximates that of the plantations of the best West Indian Islands'.²⁸ By 1875 it was said that in Province Wellesley:

The sugar plantations of the Europeans are spread over a wide area; indeed they cover the major portion of the cultivated land of the Province. Each plantation occupies some square miles of tilled land, and in some part of the estate there is usually a steam crushing-mill, and a refinery, where an efficient staff of European engineers are kept constantly employed. The Chinese planters were the first who reared the cane . . . but . . . European capital has been invested to such an enormous extent in establishing plantations, as practically to shut out all but the most skilful and wealthy competitors.

The supplies of labour employed in tilling the fields, and in the various processes connected with the cultivation and manufacture of sugar, are chiefly obtained from the Coromandel coast in the Madras presidency, where agreements are usually drawn up whereby the men engage to serve on the estates for a certain term, at a fixed monthly wage. On the expiration of the original term of agreement, the coolies are at liberty

²⁶J.I.A. 1862 New Series Vol. IV (G. W. Earl).

²⁷Earl—*Topography and Itinerary of Province Wellesley*—p. 27.

²⁸S.S. Annual Report 1861/2.

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either to renew the contract or return to their native province. Many of them choose to remain upon the plantations—a fact which speaks well for the treatment they receive at the hands of their employers.

Chinese are also used by the planters, although more sparingly, as the gangs of coolies are imported by Chinese capitalists, and only to be hired through a headman, who contracts to do a certain amount of tillage at a price fixed according to area. The Chinese are stronger, healthier and better workmen, although they require better food and do not perhaps stand prolonged exposure to the hot sun so well as the natives of India, and the price of their labour is consequently too high to enable them to compete successfully with the Klings; and moreover, planters are not always in a position to have their work done by the piece, nor are the guild-ridden Chinese so easily dealt with as their darker brothers in the field.²⁹

The immigrant population of the Province itself was not yet very large, and varied as follows:

		1844	1851	1860
Chinese	.. ..	4,107	8,731	7,204
Indians	.. ..	1,805	1,913	3,514

²⁹Thompson—Op. Cit Chapter II.

Chapter III

TIN MINING BEFORE 1880

From the earliest times the Peninsula had been a source of tin, which traders strove to buy, and by the end of the eighteenth century the amount produced, although small by modern standards, was of considerable importance. The largest mines were in the Kinta district of Perak, but there was also mining in Pahang and in parts of what is now Negri Sembilan. The mining was *at that time* carried on mainly by Malays, whose methods were called 'lampan' mining:

The miners chose a narrow glen with the ground rising steeply on either side of a stream. The soil was pulled down with mattocks (*changkali*) into the stream. The water washed away the earth and the tin ore was recovered from the bed of the stream.¹

Up to the closing years of the eighteenth century, the monopoly of buying this Malay-produced tin was held by the Dutch, under treaties made with the Malay authorities in Perak, Selangor and Rembau; the agents of the Dutch East India Company collected it at the river mouths, to which it was brought down from the mines. As for the tin from Negri Sembilan, Mills says, 'Controlling as they did the sea-coast and the river mouths, they were able to enforce their monopoly pretty effectively'.² The annual output from Perak was about 170 tons (in 1787) and from Rembau about 120 tons.

With the British occupation of Malacca in 1795, the Dutch ceased to be able to enforce the monopoly, and a trade in tin grew up between Perak and Penang. The Perak output increased to 283 tons in 1800 and 510 tons in 1804; Low said in 1835 'the tin from the Patani and Perak mines is chiefly conveyed to the depôts on elephants'.³ On the other hand, the trade at Malacca dropped considerably; Raffles wrote in 1808 that:

The Palembang and Lingin vessels import about 1,500 piculs of tin annually, which, with what is brought from other quarters, may be estimated at from 2,000 to 3,000 piculs annually. Rumba, a Malay country in the

¹Gullick—JMBRAS Vol. XXIV, pt. 2, p. 9.

²Mills—*British Malaya*—p. 77.

³Low—Op. Cit.—p. 14.

interior of the Peninsula, at the back of Malacca, formerly under a contract with the Dutch Government, supplied of itself 2,000 piculs, but now only sends about 400 piculs annually, and this is obtained at some risk in advances. The remainder might, perhaps, be obtained in the same way, but, at present, it seems to take its course down the Pahang River on the other side of the Peninsula, from whence it is transported in small prows to Rhio, etc. . .⁴

When in 1818 Malacca was returned to the Dutch, they made half-hearted and unsuccessful attempts to re-establish their monopoly, until a new order was brought into being by the Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824 by which Britain and Holland divided the area into separate spheres of influence—the Dutch to control the archipelago, and the British the Peninsula. The British principle of free trade was applied to the Peninsula. Treaties concerning this had been made in 1818 with Perak, Selangor and Johore (there was already a treaty with Kedah) and in 1831 a treaty was made with Rembau. The result was that tin became easier to obtain and more profitable to deal in, and the Chinese took more interest—first in purchasing it and then, to obtain more regular supplies, in mining it.

The pattern of Chinese tin mining activity had already been set on the island of Banka, off southern Sumatra (in the Dutch sphere). Tin was discovered there in 1719 and by 1740 it was said to produce 3,870 tons a year. A detailed description of tin mining on Banka given by Crawford in 1820 shows that this pattern was well established before the Chinese tin miners spread to Malaya:

The process of mining is wonderfully simple, easy and cheap. A tin mine is nothing else than a large oblong pit, made by excavating the ground in a perpendicular direction, to a depth of from 15 to 25 feet, to remove the superincumbent strata of sand and clay, and get at the ore . . . The Chinese alone are engaged in working these, and the average number of hands employed in each mining operation is from 25 to 30. The whole of the labourers work on terms of equality; the older and more experienced directing, and the younger and more active performing the operative part, while all share equally in the profits. Fortunately it has been found impracticable to make the Chinese labour on any other terms . . .

The process of smelting is usually performed once a year or in a very productive season, twice . . .

⁴Quoted by Purcell—*Chinese in Malaya* p. 37 (footnote).

The outlay of capital, according to this mode of extracting tin, is extremely trifling . . .

Besides the immediate labourers in the mines, many others are connected with them, being engaged either in raising food and necessities, or in fabricating the tools and other materials required in the processes of mining, washing and smelting. Among these are blacksmiths, carpenters, charcoal burners, gardeners, etc. In the present state of population, the corn consumed by the workmen is more cheaply imported than grown. The simplicity of the various processes of mining industry is such, that little previous training is necessary. The only exception to this is the business of smelter, which is always a separate trade. The miners are almost all natives of China and, notwithstanding the difference of climate, and the severity of their occupations, enjoy good health.⁵

The beginning of sustained Chinese tin mining in the Malay States of the Peninsula dates from about 1824. Apart from some 400 Chinese said to be working in Perak (presumably in Kinta) as miners and traders, about whom little is known, the first important Chinese mining centres were at Lukut (5 miles inland from the present Port Dickson, 40 miles up the coast from Malacca) and Sungei Ujong (to the south of present-day Seremban). In 1824 there were 200 Chinese miners at Lukut and in 1828 almost a thousand in Sungei Ujong. There were communal disturbances at both places in 1834 and 1828 respectively, resulting in slaughter and plunder (the Sungei Ujong miners were reduced to 300 by 1830); this seriously interfered with the mining, which was financed by Chinese merchants from Malacca. The profits to be made, however, were substantial—'the cost of producing a cwt. of the metal in Sungei Ujong is estimated . . . as 23s . . . whereas the cost of producing the same quantity of Cornish tin amounts to 64s 7d,'⁶—and the miners persisted.

Tin mining was also carried out from about this time in the greater security of British-administered Malacca territory.

The Assistant Resident of Malacca, J. B. Westerhaut, wrote:

In 1833 I opened several tin mines at Pandoy, Tunngay Bulu, and Lendeck in Naning, till 1835 when I left off working. In 1840 I assisted a Chinaman who opened one at Durian Tungul. He made a great profit and was followed by many other of his countrymen.⁷

⁵Crawford—*History of the Indian Archipelago*, Vol. III, pp. 450-466.

⁶Newbold—*Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*, Vol. II, p. 100.

⁷Westerhaut—J.I.A. 1848, Vol. II, p. 172.

Newbold describes the system of mining in Sungei Ujong in 1839 as follows:

The mines are generally excavated on the swampy flats at the base of hills of primitive formation. They average from 6 to 20 feet in depth, following the streams of ore . . . These excavations are called *Lombongan* . . . The soil is carried away by the miners in baskets, suspended at the extremities of a stout elastic bamboo or *panaga*, which passes across the shoulders . . . The ore is thrown into a stream flowing through artificial channels . . . and is stirred about with an iron rake . . . The water carries off the sand, small pebbles and earth, leaving the ore and large stones at the bottom, which are afterwards separated by a riddle and the hand. The ore, thus cleared of extraneous substances, is deposited in the *koppas* to await the process of smelting . . . This process usually occurs at stated periods twice or thrice a year . . . within a rude furnace of clay.

The Malays and Chinese employed in the mines were liberally paid. The rate of their wages will in another instance exhibit the different prices set upon the services of the two classes; a Chinese being paid at the rate of five to eight dollars per mensem; and a Malay from three to five only.

From daybreak to 7 a.m. they are employed in emptying the mines of the water which accumulates during the night. From 7 to 8 they rest and breakfast. At 8, the process of digging out the earth and ore is commenced. At 11, they go to dinner, and return to work again about 1 p.m. At 5, their labours cease for the day. No work is done at the periods of new and full moon.*

The development of tin mining in the next few decades consisted in the expansion of the existing Malacca-backed communities at Lukut and Sungei Ujong and their extension into Selangor, and in the rapid and large development of the mines near Taiping (Larut) from bases in Penang.

Lukut increased in prosperity. In the early 1840's more tin-bearing land was discovered and the Malay Raja encouraged Chinese miners and prospectors to work it. By 1850 so much tin was being produced there that 'it took the Custom's clerk all his time to weigh the ingots before they were shipped in schooners and junks to Malacca'.

The position in Malacca territory itself in August 1847 was as follows:

The principal mine is at Kesang, at present worked by about 2,200 Chinese which was lately discovered. The quantity of tin brought from this mine is about 300 to 350 piculs monthly, which is readily sold at the

*Newbold—Op. Cit. Vol. II, pp. 96-100.

rate of \$16 per picul. More mines have been discovered towards Naning, Gapum, Duyong during this month, where they have commenced working . . . There are about 1,200 men working in the other mines at Durian Tungul, Naning and Ayer Panas. These mines are all divided into Kongsees or companies, each under its respective Towkay. They have each a share in the produce.*

Another contemporary estimate of the mines and miners in Malacca was:

*Number of Mines in Malacca*¹⁰

		<i>Kesang</i>		<i>Ayer Panas</i>		<i>Durian Tungul</i>		<i>Number of Labourers</i>
1848	..	24	..	10	..	13	..	2,000
1849	..	15	..	7	..	16	..	3,800
1850	..	12	..	5	..	20	..	4,000

A relative idea of the size and importance of each of the three centres of mining—Lukut, Sungei Ujong and Malacca ('Company's territory')—is given by the following account, dated 1847:

The quantity of tin exported from Malacca yearly is 16,277 piculs, of which 4,277 piculs is from Company's territory, 7,000 from Sungei Ujong, and 5,000 from Lukut. There are about 4,600 miners at Lukut and Sungei Ujong, and 3,400 in the Company's territory.¹¹

The great difference in productivity of the mines in the interior—2.6 piculs per miner compared with 1.25 piculs in Malacca territory—explains the attraction of the former, despite the dangers and difficulties.

What of the miners themselves? An account written in 1851 explains that:

In Malacca all the miners are paid by the month, but they are divided into three different classes, viz—*sinkays*, coolies and overseers. By '*sinkays*' are meant those who have newly arrived from China, who are always engaged for one year by the person who pays their passage money to the Captain of the junk and advances them some money for sending home, and also agrees to give them pocket money for tobacco and shaving . . .

A *sinkay* becomes a cooly after the expiration of his first year's service. He is then free to leave the mine work any month. His wages are now 3½, 4 to \$4½ per mensem and his food, which on an average is reckoned \$1 per month.

*Westerhaut—Op. Cit.

¹⁰Croockewit—J.I.A. 1854, Vol. VIII, p. 113.

¹¹Westerhaut—Op. Cit.

The overseers in different mines are paid differently according to the service they render.¹²

Seeing the success of Lukut, other Malay chiefs in Selangor decided to follow suit and to 'import Chinese tin miners'. Shortly after 1844, some small mines were begun in the Kanching foothills, the Chinese population increased, and Kanching (on a tributary of the Selangor River) became a thriving town. Then in 1857 two Malay chiefs, financed by two Malacca Chinese, transferred eighty-seven labourers from the Lukut mines to begin mining at what is now Ampang, on a tributary of the Klang River. Although within a month all but eighteen of them had died of fever, a further 150 in five boats were immediately recruited from Lukut to continue the work, and tin was soon being exported from the area. When it was clear that this venture was a success, some traders moved up from Lukut to deal in supplies—rice, opium, arrack, fowls, pigs and dry goods—in exchange for tin. The first two traders set up shop near the junction of two rivers and this was the beginning of the town of Kuala Lumpur. Population grew. By 1860, both Kanching and Ampang/Kuala Lumpur were thriving centres.

A third and larger spurt of mining activity occurred in the north. The Malay chief of Larut discovered a patch of tin-bearing land at Taiping between 1840 and 1850, and Chinese miners began to flock there from (or through) Penang. Shortly afterwards a further tin-field was discovered two or three miles north, at Kamunting, and a separate community of Chinese miners established itself there. By 1862, there were 19 mines at Kamunting and 8 at Taiping, and the number of Chinese miners in these two areas of Larut was 20-25,000.

This penetration of the Chinese tin miners into the Malay States of Perak, Selangor and Sungei Ujong, particularly on the scale which it had assumed by 1860, gave rise to many problems. The mining settlements were very closely knit, self-governing communities, homogeneous, united in aim if often mutually antagonistic, and, by virtue of their secret society organisation, with strong internal discipline and the ability to present a united front (not to say an impenetrable wall) to outsiders. In Selangor

¹²Croockewit—Op. Cit.

and Larut, they greatly outnumbered the settled local population. The Malay States possessed only rudimentary governmental organisation, which was completely unable to cope with the problems caused by the mining communities; they lacked both political stability and the means of enforcing law and order—for example, the Mentri of Larut had a force of only 40 men to preserve order, and had no effective control over the Chinese. There was competition between rival Malay chiefs for dynastic succession and for the revenue to be collected from the tin; and there was rivalry between different groups of miners and their secret societies, as their economic interests clashed.

In 1860 in Sungei Ujong, when two of the Malay chiefs fell into dispute over the tin produced, the Chinese miners split into two groups in support of the rival chiefs. Serious fighting ensued, in which four thousand Chinese are said to have been killed, and Yap Ah Loy, later famous as the 'Capitan China' in Kuala Lumpur, was wounded. In 1862 fighting occurred in Perak between the two groups of Chinese miners at Larut—the miners of Taiping (who were Hakkas and belonged to the *Hai San* secret society) attacked the miners of Kamunting (who were mostly Cantonese and belonged to the *Ghi Hin* secret society) and drove them out of Larut. British pressure resulted in the latter being allowed to return and there was an uneasy truce until 1872, when open war broke out between the groups. Of one campaign of this war it was said 'a thousand Chinese were killed in the first day's fighting and three thousand in all'¹³ and Swettenham describes how 'The villages and every isolated house had been burned down, almost every mine had stopped work'.¹⁴ There were only 4,000 Chinese left in Larut in early 1874, when the war was ended by British intervention. By then the mines were so blocked, choked and flooded that Speedy, who had just been appointed Assistant Resident, Larut, in his report of that year, wrote:

Several months were consequently occupied in clearing away the debris and pumping the water out of the mines, and the machinery by which they were worked having been entirely broken and destroyed, much time was lost before it could be replaced and operations commenced.¹⁵

¹³Gullick—JMBRAS, Vol. XXVI, Pt. 3, p. 30.

¹⁴Swettenham—*British Malaya*, p. 124.

¹⁵Quoted by Gullick, JMBRAS, Vol. XXVI, Pt. 3, p. 49.

Similarly, in Selangor, as the mining developed rapidly, the miners at Kanching (who were Hakkas of the *Ka Yeng Chew* clan and belonged to the *Ghee Hin* secret society) began to clash more and more with the miners at Kuala Lumpur (who were Hakkas of the *Fei Chew* clan and belonged to the *Hai San* secret society). Moreover in 1867 there was a civil war lasting five months between rival Malay claimants to decide who should be chief and thus have the right to collect the tin and other revenues at the Klang river mouth. Civil war broke out again amongst the Malays in 1869. Animosity increased between the two groups of Chinese and by 1870 they were fighting each other on a large scale. The war continued until 1873 and it was said that 'half the Chinese miners took up arms on one side or the other'.¹⁶ Davidson, the first British Resident in Selangor, wrote in 1875:

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.¹⁷

The result had been British intervention in Perak and Selangor and the appointment in 1874 of British Residents who took charge, for each Sultan, of the administration of each respective State and set about enforcing law and order and instituting sound administration, proper taxation and measures to facilitate the economic development of the State. A British Resident was also appointed to Sungei Ujong in the same year. After an initial setback in Perak in 1875 which involved the murder of the British Resident and the intervention of British troops, and various other teething troubles, the economic development of these States took a tremendous spurt forward. Mining was able to go ahead in much greater security, and it expanded greatly, the influx of Chinese labourers in the 1880's being very large, as the population figures show:

*Chinese Population of Perak and Selangor*¹⁸

			Perak		Selangor
1879	..	..	20,373	..	—
1884	..	..	—	..	28,236
1891	..	..	95,277	..	50,844

¹⁶Middlebrook—JMBRAS, Vol. XXIII, Pt. 2, p. 55.

¹⁷Quoted by Middlebrook—Op. Cit., p. 89.

¹⁸Figures from Del Tufo—Op. Cit.

Lukut, however (near Port Dickson), which 'was the chief tin-producing country between 1830-1860, having a similar position to that enjoyed by Larut', had ceased to be a mining centre by 1875:

Since Raja Jumahat's death in 1860 the place has been given up to disorder . . . The tin diggings which lie close to the village are now almost entirely abandoned . . . It was said that the old Chinese miners were quite satisfied with Sungei Ujong, where most of them have found their way, and would never return to these old washed-out water logged pits.¹⁸

In Larut after the war the Chinese population rose to 27,000 by the end of 1874—'four-fifths of them are miners; and the remainder tradesmen, i.e. blacksmiths, carpenters, gardeners and shopkeepers'. Thirty-three mines were being worked again, producing a monthly average of 70 pikuls of tin each, and ninety new mines had been opened and were expected to average 50 pikuls each per month. Production settled down to about 3,000 pikuls per month. Speedy wrote in his annual report for 1874:

The process of tin mining in Larut is very simple. The mine is simply an excavation in the form of a square, averaging an acre in extent—and penetrating perpendicularly to the strata containing the tin. This is generally found in the plains at a depth of from 20 to 50 feet, though at the foot of the hills it lies within six feet of the surface. With the exception of a simple but ingeniously contrived water-wheel no machinery is used in the mine.

The water-wheel which was used to pump water from the mine is described by him as follows:

A long wooden trough composed of three planks each a hundred feet in length is placed in an oblique position across the mine, one end resting on the edge of the bank and the other at the lowest part of the mine. A wooden chain with small oblong pieces of wood placed at right angles to the line is fitted accurately into the above-named trough. The wooden chain is endless and is passed round two wheels, a small one at the lower end of the trough and a larger one at the upper end. This latter is a Water-wheel, and is turned by a constant stream flowing over it. Round the axle of this wheel are cogs, each of which in turn as the wheel revolves draws up a joint of the endless chain through the trough, and as each joint fits accurately into the trough, they bring up a quantity of water which on reaching the mouth of the trough falls into the channel by which the water

¹⁸A Skinner—*Account of Visit to Malay States*—S.S. Gazette 1875, p. 314.

which turns the wheel is carried off, and is thus taken away out of the mine and conducted to the next, where the process is repeated.²⁰

In 1875, resentment at the introduction of 'farming' of the opium monopoly, the arrival of British troops in the area for the 'Perak War', and a sharp fall in the price of tin, caused the population to drop again—to 15,000 in 1876 and 9,000 in 1877. In 1879 the price of tin rose considerably and as a result the Chinese population in Larut increased to 17,000 and continued to rise.

A contemporary account published in 1879 gives details of mining in the area:

At present the extensive mining operations in Larut are carried on entirely by Chinese, which nationality also probably forms nine-tenths of the population . . . It is exceedingly difficult to determine the number even approximately; scattered as they are, and so irregularly distributed—14,000 may be taken as the limit, the mines affording occupation for full half this number.

The method of starting a mine in Larut is somewhat as follows: the 'undertaker', after obtaining a claim licence, is frequently unable to provide more than the kongsee and smelting houses, tools, and pumping machinery, besides, of course, collecting or importing the gang of coolies. In such cases he has to resort to an 'advancer' for the working expenses, including the food and necessities of his coolies. The conditions under which the advancer agrees to supply requirements vary very much, but are, in some form or other, embodied, in the following:

- (1) Obtaining a tenth of the gross proceeds of the mine, in addition to a certain fixed high rate of interest—frequently 36 per cent per annum—on the value of the goods supplied.
- (2) Receiving the privilege of taking over the output of the mine at \$2 per bhara, equivalent to about 4 per cent, below the ruling market rate, with an enhancement, corresponding to the interest mentioned in (1), on the bazaar rates of provisions and necessities.
- (3) Purchasing the speculator's claim, but keeping his interest alive in the working for a tenth of the yield, making his own arrangement with the coolies, and appropriating the residual balance if any . . .

There are 80 mines in operation in Larut, owned by 40 kongsis or firms, with an average of nearly 86 men per mine, distributed as follows:

	No. of Mines			No. of Men		
Assam-Kumbang	38	3,827
Kamunting	30	1,809
Topai	12	1,207

²⁰S.S. Gazette 1875 p. 277.

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To these might be added 96 'Lampan' workings on the hills, at various elevations, on which 355 men are engaged, either singly or in small gangs, ranging up to but seldom exceeding, six shares.

The four largest and richest mines in the Assam-Kumbang section belong to one firm, the Hap Seng Kongsee, which employs upwards of 600 coolies. But the largest mine of any in the country is owned by the Kong Loon Kongsee, in Kamunting, under the direction of an enterprising Chinese gentleman Captain Ah Quee, whose appreciation of European appliances is evinced by a centrifugal pump and engine, in supersession of the cumbrous, and comparatively useless Chinese water-wheel... There are 300 coolies employed on this mine, which is the highest number of all the workings.

All payments to the coolies go through the *hang kong*, or head cooly, who is the middle man. As might be expected, the coolies' wages are paid differently, according to circumstances; some by share in the results, others by petty contract or task, and some few by monthly wages. Individual earnings range from \$6 to \$8 per mensem, food and necessities costing \$3 to \$4, leaving apparently a comparatively large balance, but, from the objectionable custom of only adjusting accounts once a year, the unfortunate cooly is compelled to exist on supplies advanced at an enormous increase on the bazaar price, and as a consequence receives very little, if anything, at the final settlement. The miners' dietary is very simple, and generally consists of rice, with a little dried fish, and a small quantity of vegetables, with pork on feast days. This is the usual 'messing' provided for them at the *kongsees*...²¹

A retired civil servant who subsequently became an influential mine owner recorded the following recollections for inclusion in a Government report:

I came to Perak in the end of 1879. The mines were then nearly all in Larut and were almost without exception worked on the truck system, nine-tenths of the tin produced going to the coolies and one-tenth to the *towkay*, who supplied the coolies with their food and stores at mining prices—i.e. about double the market rates. The settlements were annual—at the Chinese New Year, when the books were made up, the coolies credited with nine-tenths of the amount of tin sold and debited with the amount of stores consumed, and received the balance, if any. If the coolies were in debt to the mine—they very often were—they went on and worked for another year, and still another if they did not get out of debt. The punishment for absconding was flogging. The communications were difficult and escape from a *kongsi* in many cases impossible and never easy. The hours of work were long, eight hours a day being the usual thing. There were few or no amusements. A few brothels in Taiping, but no theatres and very little gambling, except at the New Year, so there

²¹Doyle—*Tin Mining in Larut*—pp. 6-10.

was very little to distract the cooly from his work, and the few towkays, Ah Kwee and others, prospered exceedingly. There were not many *sin-kehs* at that time, and the few that there were employed on *kongsi-kong* work; as well as I recollect, eight hours was the day in the contracts.²²

In Selangor, after the civil war there, a large labour force needed to be recruited and maintained to re-open the mines. In early 1875, 2,000 miners came in *via* Klang and 600 from Sungei Ujong, and by the end of the year Yap Ah Loy (the main employer) had a total of 6,000 miners—compared with the 10,000 he had employed in 1870. From 1875 to 1878 development was held up by a trade recession, and the population of Kuala Lumpur remained static at 2,000 from 1875 to 1878.

At this time a labourer cost about \$80 to \$100 per annum in wages and food. A year's maintenance would have to be laid out before the employer recovered his money by the sale of tin. The labourer produced 2 baharas (800 lbs.) of tin-in-ore in a year. The ore had to be smelted; the cost of transport down river to Klang was nearly \$1 per bahara; export duty varied from \$7.50 to \$9.60 and royalty to the Malay landowner might be as much as \$4 per bahara. The cost of production up to the point of shipment from Klang was therefore \$50-60 per bahara. Until 1879 the market price of tin ranged between \$56 and \$66. But in assessing the profit margin, account must be taken of the unknown amount made by the mine-owner from the indulgence of his labourers in drink, opium, women and gambling provided by the employer. Even then it was something of a struggle to make mining pay between 1873 and 1879.²³

The Selangor Annual Report for 1879 summarised the current local position by saying:

In fact, our mining is a mere hand-to-mouth system; a small trader makes an advance at Kuala Lumpur, or elsewhere, and almost literally sits over the mine until its produce is realised, when he has to take what he can get.²⁴

Then the tin price rose sharply to over \$100 per bahara, the population of Kuala Lumpur increased by 30 per cent in twelve months, and mining boomed.

By 1880, the picture was one of increasingly flourishing and expanding Chinese communities in the three Protected States.

²²J. B. Massey Leech—letter dated 6th April, 1904, in F.M.S. Annual Report for 1903, p. 10.

²³Middlebrook—Op. Cit.—p. 90.

²⁴S.S. Gazette 1880 p. 502.

Chapter IV

EARLY CHINESE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

The Chinese Immigrants

The Chinese immigrants to Malaya almost all came from the provinces of Kwangtung and Fukien, embarking at Macao or Amoy (or, after it was founded in 1842, at Hong Kong), and were of several different 'tribes' or language-groups—Hokiens, Teochews, Cantonese, Hakka and, later, Hainanese. Hokiens come from the Amoy area; Teochews from the Swatow area; Cantonese from the area of Canton, Macao and Hong Kong; Hakkas from various parts of Kwangtung province; and Hainanese from Hainan Island. Their intention was not to settle permanently but to make money quickly and return to China. Their success varied. Siah U Chin, writing in 1848 of the Chinese in Singapore, said:

The labouring classes of people that emigrate to this Settlement are mostly very poor. Originally they come with the intention of returning to their native land after a sojourn of 3 or 4 years, but out of 10 only one to two individuals are able to return after that time, and when they do retire they do not take with them much wealth . . . The periods of return are various; there are a great many who remain here upwards of 10 and 20 years.¹

He attributed the failures largely to excessive opium smoking; a contributory vice was the passion for gambling.

Most of the immigrants were too poor to pay for their own passages from China—if they had possessed enough money to do so they would not have needed to emigrate; consequently they were 'recruited' and their passages were 'assisted'. They were drawn from 'the junior members of the impecunious farmer class'. The method of recruiting them for work in Penang in 1854 was as follows:

One or more of the Chinese merchants charter a vessel and leave Penang in April or May for Macao or Amoy. On arriving at the destined port, the charter, who usually proceeds in the vessel as super-cargo, sets a number of agents to work. These men go about the country and cajole the unsuspecting people, by promises of a speedy fortune and return to their native land, to accept the bounty money, which varies according

¹J.I.A. 1848, Vol. II, p. 283.

to the respectability of the victims. They are then huddled on board. The agents receive a dollar a head. The immigrants are usually overcrowded on shipboard, but treated well on the whole.²

In the early days the immigrant labourers came by sailing ship—'taken on board one of the unwieldy junks that annually roll, like great leviathans, with the monsoon down the coast of China among the islands of the Archipelago'³—a voyage of twenty, thirty, or sometimes forty days. Even when steam vessels made their appearance in the Straits in the 1840's and gradually took over the trade in merchandise, junks continued to carry immigrants. By 1876 the main means of conveyance was the steamers, which did the trip in six or seven days, but even so it was said, as late as 1881, that:

The junks too, from Hainan are allowed to carry a preposterous number of passengers for their tonnage: vessels of from 60 to 80 tons are crowded with from 150 to 250 passengers, and during the last three years one or two of them have foundered with all hands.⁴

The junks made one round trip each year with the monsoons, arriving in Malaya in January, February or March and leaving for China in April or May. In 1851 it was said 'it is reckoned that about 2,500 to 3,000 arrive annually with the junks at Malacca'⁵ and in 1854 'from 2,000 to 3,000 Chinese land annually at Penang and spread from thence to Province Wellesley and the Siamese and Malay territories'.⁶

The arrangements by which the immigrant was 'assisted' and by which he repaid the cost of the assistance varied little over the years. In 1805 (*see* Chapter I) it was recorded that 'such immigrants pawn their persons to the owner or Captains of the junks for a passage and victuals', the cost of which 'they borrow on arrival at their destination from relations or cultivators whom they engage to work for, and repay by monthly deductions from their wages'. Raffles wrote in 1823:

It frequently happens that free labourers and others are brought from China and elsewhere as passengers, who have not the means of paying

²*Notes on the Chinese of Penang*—J.I.A. 1854, Vol. VIII.

³Newbold—Op. Cit.—Vol. I, p. 15.

⁴Protector of Chinese, 1881 Report, in S.S. Gazette 1882, p. 317.

⁵J.I.A. 1854, Vol. VIII, p. 113.

⁶*Notes on the Chinese of Penang*—J.I.A. 1854, Vol. VIII.

their passage, and under the expectation that individuals resident in Singapore will advance the amount of it on condition of receiving the services of the parties for a limited period in compensation thereof.⁷

Newbold in 1839 wrote:

The passage money to the Straits Settlements is from 8 to 12 Spanish Dollars, a sum usually paid by the person hiring the services of the emigrant on landing. A certain number of labourers are often commissioned from China by some wealthy capitalist, who reimburses himself for the sum laid out on their passage money, food and clothes from the profits of their labours on first landing.⁸

In 1851, Croockewit said of Malacca:

Anyone who wants to take a *sinkoy* into his service to assist in a trade, or in the mines as a miner, or as a house servant, speaks to the Captain of the junk, and chooses for himself one or as many as he wants; if he agrees with the Captain about the passage money he then keeps the *sinkoy* in his service during that year for his food, clothes and some dollars.⁹

The arrangements at Penang in 1854 have been described in greater detail:

'The passenger (called *Sin-Kheh*) not having money to pay for his passage, enters into an agreement with the master of the junk to bind himself apprentice to some one at the port of arrival for one year, without wages, only receiving food, clothing, and a small sum for barber's expenses, tobacco and other little indispensable luxuries; the balance of consideration for the labour of the year is to be handed over to the master of the junk as payment of the passage money. The *Sin-Khehs* are kept on board the junks as security for the passage-money, till taken by an employer who, in consideration of obtaining his services for a year at a low rate, pays part of a year's wages in advance, with which advance the *Sin-Kheh* clears himself with the junk master. This is the principle of the operation, but as the business is conducted, not through each *Sin-Kheh*, but directly between the junk master and the intending employer, and as the amount for passage money varies with the demand for labour, it has a certain colouring of slave dealing which has prejudiced many again the system. The *Sin-Kheh* is not bound to go with any person who chooses him. If he pays his passage money, as he agreed to do when starting, at the same rate as the others, he is quite free to go wherever he pleases'.

'They arrive in the months of January, February and March. The anchor is scarcely cast when the resident Chinese flock on board to buy *Sin-Khehs* as they term it. The Charterer gets for a master workman, either tailor,

⁷Quoted in S.S. *Labour Commission Report* 1890.

⁸Newbold—Op. Cit.

⁹J.I.A. 1854, Vol. VIII, p. 113.

goldsmith or carpenter, 10 to 15 dollars, for a cooly 6 to 10, for a sickly man 3 to 4 or less. The *Sin-Kheh* then agrees to serve for a 12-month, receiving food, clothes and a few dollars for his service. Should he be an expert workman and fall in with a generous master, he may receive more than the sum agreed on. The *Sin-Kheh* costs two to four dollars per mensem for food and clothing. If not paid for they are detained on board ship (if convenient) or in a godown, until a purchaser turns up. Should the charterers be forced to the latter alternative, the *Sin-Khehs* are not well treated. Complaints have been lodged before the sitting Magistrate at different times on this ground, and the *Sin-Khehs* were set at large after signing a bond promising to pay the passage money. Their agreements are generally faithfully fulfilled; at the end of the 12th month the *Sin-Kheh* is at liberty to enter his master's service on a monthly stipend or to seek his livelihood elsewhere. He is also then admitted to the Kongsee of his tribe . . .¹⁰

Of the *sinkays* landed at Malacca in 1851 for work in the mines, it was said:

The passage money differs according to the number of passengers the Captain may have brought with him, the length of the voyage, and also according to the number of *sinkays* one takes from him. On an average it is about 10 or 11 dollars and a *sinkay* gets about \$3 to \$6 a year for the purpose of sending home to China, which he sometimes spends himself on gambling, opium smoking, etc., for in these things they are generally expert when they come from China, and about \$6 to \$10 more are needed to provide for his necessary wants. He further receiving the cost of a certain quantity of clothes which is reckoned to amount to about \$1½ to \$1¾ per mensem. A *sinkay* who does not know the work, or is not accustomed to it, and with whom one stands the risk of his getting sick, or of his dying, costs on an average about \$36 to \$40 per annum, or \$3 per mensem.

Those who are careful may save in their second year about \$40 or \$50 and they generally begin to trade . . . or they return with their treasures to China, where they can live for some years on this sum, or they continue to work in the mines until they have laid up more money. These belong to the exceptions.¹¹

As a comparison, Baumgarten, three years earlier, estimated that the cost of engaging and employing for one year labourers fresh from China for agricultural work in Malacca would be, per labourer: passage money \$7 (sometimes as little as \$4 or \$5); rice at 80 cts. per month; dried fish, etc., at 45 cts. per month;

¹⁰[*ibid*—Notes on the Chinese of Penang.

¹¹J.I.A. 1854, Vol. VIII, p. 113.

Chinese tobacco at 2½ cts. per month; shaving allowance at 8 cts. per month; and remittance to China at \$4 per man-year.¹²

The Chinese Labouring Communities

The Chinese mining and agricultural communities—and the other agglomerations of Chinese immigrants—were almost exclusively male. The vast majority were young adults who were either unmarried or had left their wives behind in China. Moreover, they arrived in Malaya as separate individuals rather than members of groups. They thus did not form balanced communities, and the traditional restraints of the village society from which they came were absent.

As Purcell points out, 'Chinese tribes were brought into a proximity unexampled in their native country' and 'tribes speaking different dialects regarded one another almost as foreigners'; 'for generations various districts had carried out bloody feuds. When natives of these districts came to Malaya they brought their feuds with them' . . . so that in Larut, for example, 'the fundamental cause of the fighting was the tribal hatred between the Cantonese and the Khehs'.¹³

The social organisation which existed in these Chinese communities arose from their economic ties and the all-prevalence of their secret societies. The general situation was that the capitalists in Singapore, Malacca and Penang financed the importation of labourers from China and the provision of food and supplies. These capitalists, it is believed, were the headmen of the various secret societies into which the newly arrived immigrants were inducted. Their partners or managers in the mining areas received the labourers and the supplies and handed them over to the men in charge of the various mines, from whom the labourers then received their food, took their orders and looked for protection, and for whom they fought in the common cause when called upon.

Membership of one of the secret societies appears to have been obligatory for immigrants from the earliest days. Abdullah, in his reminiscences 'Hikayat Abdullah', describes how he watched an

¹²J.I.A. 1849, Vol. III, p. 707 et seq.

¹³Purcell—*Chinese in Malaya*—pp. 79 and 85.

initiation ceremony of the *Thian Tai Huey* (Heaven and Earth Society) in the jungle behind Singapore about 1824. At that time the people in Singapore were 'very persistent in spreading rumours about the *Thian Tai Huey* men and in abusing them, so that men have to be forced into joining the Society'. This is not surprising if the following description by Abdullah of the composition and activities of the society is true:

There were many thousands of these men, not just a small number. Some of them owned plantations of pepper, gambier and other crops, but the majority lived by robbery, piracy and murder. Almost all of them smoked opium, to say nothing of their fondness for gambling. They all lived deep in the jungle which stretched almost all the way across to the other side of the island. At the head of the Society was the master; under him were four Captains, and under them the section leaders. Below the section leaders were scores of satellites who looked after the rank and file, and caught people, forcing them to join the Society by ordeals, by oath-taking and by the drinking of blood. People unwilling to join they tortured, impaled, or locked up in confinement and if still unwilling they at once put them to death.¹⁴

Newbold in 1841 quoted a report about the *Hai San* and *Ghee Hin* societies which said:

These two associations are scattered all over the settlements . . . Every stem and every branch has its headman who is designated senior brother. Emigrants from the hills of Tang (China) are called *Sin-kheh*. As soon as they arrive in any settlement the brotherhood send persons to invite them to join the confederacy. If they decline, they are forthwith persecuted . . .¹⁵

The secret societies enforced their own system of law and order throughout their membership, so that the labourer was both controlled and protected—he could not hope to survive without the protection of one of the societies. Blythe says:

The societies were large mutual benefit societies covering between them practically the whole of the Chinese population . . . the immediate government of the Chinese population was carried out by the societies. They settled disputes between members, whether over criminal or civil matters, by arbitration, and in any dispute between members of different societies the resources and the fighting braves of the societies

¹⁴Translated by A. H. Hill—JMBRAS, Vol. XXIII, Pt. 3, pp. 184 and 180.

¹⁵Quoted by Purcell—Op. Cit.—p. 158.

were there to back up the parties . . . Wherever the Chinese settled there was government by Triad societies, and wherever there were Triad societies there was trouble.¹⁶

Schlegel's book 'The Hung League', published in Batavia in 1866, lists the various oaths and punishments which provided the code of discipline and conduct. The following items from the Laws, Statutes and Regulations are sufficient to show how the secret societies usurped and set at defiance the normal functions of Government 'When brethren of the Hung League have serious or trifling dissensions, the council is there to decide upon them according to justice, but it shall not be allowed to bring the case before the magistrates. If anybody should not observe this law, the council will decide the case effectually and, besides, will punish the plaintiff with 108 blows If a brother has escaped the tax, smuggled or sold prohibited goods, it shall not be allowed to conspire with strangers in order to rob him, or to inform the authorities of it. For in that case the transgressor shall be punished according to law with the loss of one ear If a brother of the Hung League with an overseer of lands has the direction over the crop and agricultural implements and if they conspire then with other people to steal the implements from these lands and so injure a brother, they shall be punished with 108 heavy blows If a brother of the Hung League disputes with another brother about a young and fair boy or commits unnatural sin with a younger brother, he shall if detected be put to death If brethren of the Hung League have gone together to a brothel and dispute about a prostitute or catamite so that they become foes, and are railed at by others, they shall be punished each with 36 blows If a brother of the Hung League quarrels with another brother about money or accounts or about the boundaries of their respective lands or fields, houses or buildings, etc., and if he does not go to the court-room to bring the case before the President and Master but secretly calls the police and lets the brother be seized, he shall be punished with 36 heavy blows'.¹⁷

¹⁶Blythe—*Historical Sketch of Chinese Labour in Malaya*—JMBRAS, Vol. XX, Pt. 1, p. 107.

¹⁷Schlegel—*Thian Ti Hwui*—pp. 154-163.

The secret societies thus were an important factor in the Chinese labourer's life. They provide the institutional framework of the economic and social order within which he lived, and were the means by which, in the last resort, he was disciplined. This explains why the Chinese employers did not feel the need (which the European planters constantly felt) for Government legislation to enforce the terms of service under which their *sin-khehs* and other labourers worked.

The societies were at their strongest where Government was weakest—as, for example, in Perak and Selangor before the British intervention. They became a denial of real Government, and it was a danger to the fabric of the state when rival societies clashed and fought out their grievances in riots in the Straits Settlements and civil wars in the Malay States. The power and influence of the societies waned as strong government grew up and they were brought under control—first by registration, and then by being made illegal. Even when brought under control in the sense that they were not allowed to riot, they still held power over their members, and in fact provided a disciplining force within the Chinese community with which the western conception of the rule of law could not compete. Nonetheless, the social and economic 'closed shop' which they attempted to enforce by internal discipline in fact amounted to serious oppression. Their power waned gradually not only as Government control increased but also as economic development expanded so widely that the two main societies were unable to maintain their monopoly control.

The theory behind the way in which the British authorities handled the societies about this time was expounded by Pickering, who had been made the first Protector of Chinese for the Straits Settlements in 1877, in a paper read to the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society on the 11th June, 1879:

In my opinion it would be impossible to rule China by British law; much more so the three or four hundred thousand Chinese in our Colony who, (except a small proportion) the scum of the Empire and coming from different Provinces, Prefectures and Districts of their native land, speak dialects and sub-dialects unintelligible to each other; while all are ignorant of the language and motives of the governing nation.

The Chinese . . . is accustomed from infancy to lean upon or to dread some superior and ever present power, either in the shape of his Government, his clan or the village elders. I do not think any persons will say that they find anything of the sort in our complicated and, to the Chinaman (who comes here at a mature age with his prejudices confirmed), inexplicable course of Law . . . I can see no other way of ruling Chinese than by recognising the Secret Societies and by immediately commencing the training of a competent staff of officials, conversant with the Chinese language and mode of thought, to supervise and control them.¹⁸

In 1884 Powell, acting Protector of Chinese, wrote: 'The headmen in Larut and Selangor are appointed by the Societies in Penang, Malacca and Singapore, and are something after the fashion of District Headmen in the Straits, only that they have greater powers in respect of having a more independent command, and being the recipients of initiation fees and subscriptions' . . . 'In the face of the Government prohibition, there are of course no recognised *kongsi-houses* either in Perak or Selangor but if a meeting is required the house of one or other headman or member is made use of'. The Superintendent of Police, Selangor, wrote on the same topic at the same time: 'nearly all the Chinese in Selangor belong to Societies in the Straits Settlements. These men join the Societies before coming to Selangor'.¹⁹

The Malay rulers, before British intervention, dealt with the Chinese through their headmen, who were given the title of 'Capitan China' and were in effect held responsible for governing the Chinese in their states or districts. The basis of the authority of the 'Capitan China' in dealing with the Chinese was that he was the local head of the secret society which dominated the area. This was not entirely understood by the authorities at the time, so that after British intervention in the Malay States they were still used as channels of authority and were even appointed as members of the State Councils which were first set up in 1877. Their power diminished as the normal machinery of Government was built up and its tentacles gradually took their grip on most aspects of life.

The deliberate government of the Chinese commercial and labouring communities through their headmen was perhaps most

¹⁸JSBRAS, 1879, Vol. III, pp. 1-18.

¹⁹Quoted in JMBRAS, Vol. XXIII, Pt. 4, pp. 133-6.

evident and formalised not in the turbulent mining communities, but in the less troublesome agricultural settlements in Johore. When the land for growing pepper and gambier had become exhausted in Singapore in the eighteen thirties and forties, Chinese farmers spread to Johore. A Chinese capitalist would obtain from the Johore authorities a 'river document' authorising him to form a settlement for the cultivation of pepper and gambier up a particular river or tributary over an area stretching to the watersheds of the next two rivers. The first known 'river document' was issued in 1833, for the Scudai river. The capitalist known as the *Kangchu* ('owner of the river'), then opened up the land near the river with the help of his relations, followers and employees. He did not necessarily own all the land—anyone who planted land with his permission was regarded as having a freehold—but most of the inhabitants were his employees, or at least his economic dependants. He usually owned not only the junks which served the settlement up the river which provided the only line of communication but also the shop in Singapore from which all supplies were obtained. The village on the river-side which grew up as the focus of the settlement was called the *Kangkar* ('river foot'). The *Kangchu*, apart from being the main financier, also held monopoly rights for public gambling, pawn-broking, and the selling of spirits, port and opium; he was, in fact, a semi-feudal chief.

Brief reference deserves to be made to certain other aspects of the life of the Chinese mining and agricultural communities—a life characterised by lack of home comforts, severance from the family and the absence of any form of healthy relaxation. In particular, one of the most striking features of social life in China—the influence of the elder over the younger members of the family—was absent.

The sex-ratio was very unbalanced. The immigrant labourers were young adult males. Most were single and those who were married did not bring their wives with them. Thus even in the reasonably settled surroundings of Penang, there were in 1870-80 still as many as four to five Chinese males to every female, and in

Perak as late as 1891 there were 17 males to every female. The ratio in Selangor was similar. The result was the widespread existence of brothels, which were well patronised, and a consequent traffic in women and girls. In 1883 in Kuala Lumpur the 'Capitan China' was said to employ 300 prostitutes in the brothel area—official reports said 'the room for each is so small that it is only five feet by five feet and all the women are cramped up without ventilation'; 'the houses are so soddened with dirt and filth that they are past cleaning'; and 'the rooms in which the poor women live are much worse than pig-styes and so dark that lamps are in use all day'.²⁰ The town in 1892 had a population of about 25,000, of whom 829 were prostitutes (nearly all Chinese) living in 45 registered brothels.

The settlements in which the immigrants lived were often unsalubrious. The British Resident of Perak, after a visit to the Chinese fishing town of Kurau, wrote in his diary for the 12th May 1877:

At daylight went ashore and walked along the back of the town. Mr. Jementah says there are 40 houses, they are large and inhabited by from 10 to 12 persons each, Chinese fishermen, only 4 women amongst them and they belong to the Headman. Very large quantities of fish are caught and cured here . . . I tried to walk up the front of the houses but it was utterly impossible to pass on the lee side of them, the stench was utterly indescribable . . . The ducks appear to be a fine breed here . . .²¹

In the absence of the satisfactions resulting from the activities of normal family life, there was excessive indulgence in alternative forms of amusement. One of these indulgences was gambling, to which the labourers were very prone. In 1794 Light had written 'they are excessively fond of gambling, there is no restraining them from it', and this remained true, even despite legal restrictions on the pastime. Swettenham said: 'With miners living in the jungle, with no sources of amusement open to them and plenty of time on their hands, no power short of an incorruptible police constable, attached to each Chinese, could stop it'.²²

²⁰Selangor Annual Report for 1883.

²¹JMBRAS, Vol. XXVII, Pt. 4, p. 61.

²²Swettenham—Op. Cit.—p. 256.

The monopoly of public gambling was farmed out to tax farmers, in the States. Swettenham described the scene in Kuala Lumpur about 1880 where, between the market and the river, 'stands a huge Gambling Booth of jungle rollers roofed with attaps, in which literally all day and all night long gambling is pursued by a crowd of often excited Chinese and Malays'. And Miss I. L. Bird, writing in 1883 of her visit to Seremban, said:

In the middle of the village there is a large, covered, but open-sided building like a market, which is crowded all day—and all night too—by hundreds of these poor half-naked creatures standing round the gaming tables, silent, eager, excited, staking every cent they earn on the turn of the dice, living on the excitement of their gains—a truly sad spectacle.²³

The following description was written at the turn of the century:

The gambling shops are always thronged at night with Chinese of both sexes and of every class, from the wealthy *towns* who bet in hundreds of dollars to coolies staking cents and half cents. The vast majority of the players appear to be so inured to the excitement of play that their faces reveal nothing but stolid indifference to their gains or losses. The principal games played are poeh, fan-tan, and chap-ji-ki. Poeh, the most popular game, is played with a dice, each face of which is coloured half white and half red. This is placed in a brass cube, covered, and spun by any of the players until it fits exactly into a square in the centre of a circle divided into segments containing the numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4. The winning number is that which the red portion of the dice adjoins. Stakes are placed either on the numbers or on the line between two numbers. The bank usually pays 3 to 1, less 10 per cent on the money staked upon the winning numbers, and even money on stakes on a line between the winning number and the adjacent number. In fan-tan a handful of counters is taken haphazard and placed in a bowl, which is then upturned upon a table. The counters are counted out in fours, and bets are made as to whether one, two, three or four counters will be left at the end. In chap-ji-ki there are twelve characters and bets are made as to which one the banker will drop into a box.²⁴

Another indulgence was alcohol, in the form of '*samsu*', a spirit made from rice. Very few labourers seem to have become addicted to it, however, and its use (albeit often excessive on those occasions) was mainly as an accompaniment to heavy meals on festival days.

²³Bird—*The Golden Chersonese*—p. 169.

²⁴*Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya*—p. 161.

A major indulgence was opium, which appears to have been smoked by a majority of labourers, especially those working in harsh and unhealthy places or under strenuous conditions. On the whole, newly arrived immigrants did not smoke it—'the average agricultural labourer in China is not an opium smoker because he has not got the money'—but acquired the habit in Malaya, for one or more reasons. Some began to smoke 'for fun', as one of the few pleasures available in the hard life they led:

... probably out of ten men who have learned to smoke in the country, eight have learned the habit in the brothels. The explanation of this is that in many cases the surroundings for smoking are not comfortable for these men in their own houses, whilst everything is ready to hand in the brothels; and secondly the women in the brothels prepare the pipe and take all the necessary trouble with the preparation, and thirdly there are reasons which make the frequenters believe that the use of opium prolongs the enjoyment of the sexual act. The evil of houses of ill fame is made worse by the inducement to smoke opium...²⁵

Some smoked it as a medicine to cure aches and pains and to ward off disease. It was described as an indulgence 'which, both in its sedative effects and in the restful position in which it must be practised, appeals most strongly to the Chinese temperament', and was not regarded as particularly obnoxious. The most common method of taking opium was to smoke three times daily, after each meal; but many smokers smoked only twice, and a few smoked once daily (these almost invariably at night).

A European employer stated: 'I have had men working under me for many years who have always taken their pipe of opium and it does not seem to do them any harm'. Another, a contractor from Taiping who undertook road-making in unopened parts of the country, said:

When we have an extra dose of wet weather or anything like that, opium smokers will see their work through and get it finished; non-smokers nearly always have to abandon their work and go into hospitals.²⁶

A European miner and planter who was also a medical man, referring to the year 1904 or thereabouts when he was managing director of a large mine in Kinta, said: 'We had over two

²⁵S.S. and F.M.S. *Opium Commission Report 1908*—Question 10,023.

²⁶*Ibid*—Question 14,427.

thousand coolies there, and quite fifty per cent of them were opium smokers', and continued:

Some of our coolies developed malaria, but it did not touch the opium smokers. They put down their immunity to their pipe, and chaffed their friends for not taking opium. That was rather interesting to me, because I have found the same thing right up in the *ulu* where Chinese were prospecting for tin. I found those men right up in the interior all had opium pipes. *I do not think this country could have been opened up without the opium pipe.* They use it as a stimulant when tired, they can go without food for a longer period, they say it prevents diarrhoea and dysentery. That is the Chinese coolies' firm conviction, and they dare not go into the interior without the opium pipe.²⁷

A Chinese tin miner and planter of 28 years standing who was himself an opium smoker said in 1924:

The average mining coolie takes to opium smoking more for the sake of preserving his life than for playing with it. In the Federated Malay States there is primary jungle, primitive work and an unmodified climate. Seventy per cent of woodcutters are opium smokers. Without opium I doubt whether they could stand the conditions.²⁸

Opium, apart from providing relaxation and relief from pain, was also believed to have a beneficial effect upon tuberculosis of the lung ('The extraordinary number of healed lungs which are found in opium smokers lends colour to the belief that there may also be some curative agent in the smoke'); upon diabetes; and upon malaria, the latter because:

Every smoker, however poor, tries to possess himself of a curtain of sorts within which to have his smoke undisturbed. This acts as a bar and in addition, the atmosphere within the curtain is such as to warn off any mosquito and, lastly, the odour of an opium-smoking coolie's body offers no inducement to any self-respecting mosquito.²⁹

Nevertheless, opium-smoking was an evil—'a confirmed smoker may have to spend a greater part of his income on opium, no matter how high the price may be, at the expense of other necessities of life'—'in some cases there is no doubt that the man is physically incapable of work without opium'. In robust healthy, moderate smokers who tried to stop the habit, 'the

²⁷*British Malaya Opium Committee Report 1924*—C. 224.

²⁸*Ibid*—C. 194.

²⁹*Ibid*—B. 101.

immediate effect is to incapacitate the individual for a longer or shorter time. The symptoms do not appear until the hour approaches at which the individual has been accustomed to renew his dose The first symptom of withdrawal is one of anxiety The average smoker will leave you in no doubt as to his sufferings. Briefly, after 48 to 72 hours of misery, he is able to begin work It is very different with the smoker over middle age who is heavily addicted to the drug. His symptoms are those of shock. There is the grey, slightly livid, pinched face, slow feeble pulse, profuse sweating with cold extremities, salivation with mucous rales all over the chest, vomiting, abdominal pain, generally accompanied by diarrhoea. The respirations are slow and sighing'.³⁰

However, the general opinion amongst many of the Chinese in Malaya, even as late as 1924, was that of the old *towkay* who told the Opium Commission:

I put the four well-known evils in this order—womanising is the worst, gambling comes next, drinking next and, last of all, opium smoking. The womaniser's disease is visited upon his children and family; the gambler squanders his father's inheritance; the drunkard acts and behaves recklessly; on the other hand, the opium smoker is steady. He thinks carefully before he acts . . . The opium smoker is more law-abiding because he fears he will get no opium in the prison.³¹

³⁰Ibid—B. 100.

³¹Ibid—C. 194.

Chapter V

INDIAN IMMIGRATION TO 1884

Until 1867, the Straits Settlements of Singapore, Penang and Malacca were governed as part of British India, and Indian laws applied to them. It has already been described how Tamil labourers from South India (often referred to in those days as Chuliahs or Klings) came to Penang from the time the settlement was founded, to work for periods of one or two years before returning to India. Earl explained in 1862 that:

The Straits Settlements have been the favourite resort of Kling immigrants from the earliest period of their establishment, Ceylon although close at hand being an inferior field in their estimation. They arrive in the Straits in August and September in native vessels, queer looking brigs and barks, mostly from ports of Madras, as Cuddalore, Carrica, Nagore and Nagapatam, the southwest monsoon which prevails at this season carrying them across in six or seven days to Pinang, which is always the first port of call in the Straits. The emigrants are all deck passengers . . .¹

This spontaneous and voluntary movement 'was not assisted by any law neither was it impeded by any law till the year 1857'. The labourers were employed mainly in Penang and Province Wellesley, on European-owned sugar, tapioca and coconut estates.

Because of overcrowding in the ships carrying immigrants across the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Government in 1857 and 1859 passed laws regulating this passenger traffic, ruling that 'no vessel shall carry Native Passengers . . . in a proportion greater than one passenger to every four tons of burden of such vessel, without a licence,' and:

No vessel shall be licenced to carry passengers . . . in a proportion greater than one passenger to every ton of burden, nor unless the Vessel has space on a deck or platform under hatches reserved for the accommodation of the Passengers in the proportion of six superficial feet for every Passenger, with not less than five feet clear between the upper deck and the lower deck or platform . . .,²

¹Earl—J.I.A. (New Series) 1862, Vol. IV.

²S.S. Gazette 1859, p. 278.

and licensed vessels were 'to carry provisions according to an approved scale' and 'to supply passengers with prescribed allowances of food and water'. Earl states that:

In some cases the emigrants pay their own passage money, from eight to ten rupees, these being for the most part emigrants returning to the Straits after a visit to their friends at home; but the great bulk are very poor people who have been starved out at home, and are brought by the owners of the vessels on speculation . . .

When the passenger regulations were enforced:

The effect was to increase the expense of the voyage and lessen the number of emigrants, and to meet the change there sprang up a system of assisted emigration. The larger employers sent over agents to India to engage and advance money to persons willing to emigrate but too poor to pay the cost of the passage themselves, and it also became customary for shipowners, merchants and others to recruit and carry over labourers either on commission for employers or as a speculation, the expenses in such cases being defrayed either by the employer of the coolie or by the coolie himself from his wages.³

Because of the increased expense, the length of the contract to be served by the labourers, hitherto one year, was increased first to eighteen months and then two years, and the daily wage rose from 10 to 11 and then 12 cents. A 'joint and several' contract was customary; under this, all the labourers of a gang signed a contract rendering each of them liable for the default of any of the others—a system 'capable of very inhuman application, even to the making one man in a hundred work out the defaults of ninety-nine absconders'.⁴

These contracts could be enforced under Indian Act No. XIII of 1859⁵—*An Act to provide for the punishment of breaches of contract by Artificers, Workmen and Labourers in certain Cases*; if a workman should neglect to perform work on account of which he had received an advance of money, complaint could be made to a magistrate, who could order the workman to repay the advance or perform the contract, on penalty of three months hard labour.

³Letter dated 29-1-1883 from Secretary to Government of India to Secretary to Government of Madras, quoted in S.S. Labour Commission Report 1890, para. 228.

⁴S.S. Labour Commission Report 1890, para. 355.

⁵S.S. Gazette 1859, p. 196.

Earl gives details of the type of person who came across:

Some few of the emigrants bring their wives and children with them, but the greater number are single men. Comparatively few seem to have been field labourers in their own country, as it is generally some time before they become accustomed to the work they are put to. During the last few years at least a third of the emigrants have been weavers, this branch of industry being apparently on the decline in their own country. The hired labourers purchase their own food, but are generally supplied with rice by the planter at a price below prime cost . . .

It is the custom of these people to form themselves into messes at the houses of the married men, the wives cooking and receiving a small fee for the service.*

By Indian law it was illegal for Indian labourers to emigrate to places outside India except by special provision. The restriction automatically applied to the Straits Settlements when in 1867 they ceased to be part of British India and became a Crown Colony. When this was realised (which was not until 1870) emigration ceased for two years, until the Indian Government passed a law to allow it to resume in 1872 (to the Straits Settlements but not to the Malay States) on certain provisional conditions. These were that the planter's agent should bring the recruited labourer before a magistrate in India and declare the particulars about repayment of passage cost, money advances, diet during voyage, wages when at work, nature of work, length of contract, and return passage. The magistrate must make sure that the labourer was going willingly and understood the conditions, and was to send a copy of the declared particulars to the Straits Settlements for incorporation in the contract to be signed when the labourer landed.

Four years of discussion and argument followed, during which the Indian Government's concern to obtain the best treatment for its emigrants is exemplified by the following extract from one of its letters:

The wages received by immigrants under indenture* in the Straits Settlements are so much below the market rate as to make the customary

*The immigrant Indian labourers who signed contracts in this way are variously referred to as 'statute immigrants', 'contract labourers', 'Indentured labourers' or 'protected immigrants'. The terms are synonymous, and contrast with the man who paid his own passage and signed no contract—the 'free' labourer.

*Earl—J.I.A. (New Series) 1862, Vol. IV.

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two-year contract remunerative to the employers, and it would not be right to permit the term during which the immigrant is limited to those wages to exceed what is necessary to compensate the employer for the expense and risk incurred by him.⁷

In the meantime there were reports of some instances of poor treatment of Indian labourers on some sugar estates in Province Wellesley. A new Governor of the Straits Settlements, Sir Andrew Clarke, arrived in Singapore in November, 1873. The following account is given in his biography:

On the first December 1873, barely a month after his arrival in the colony, unpleasant news arrived from Colonel (afterwards General Sir) Archibald Anson, Lieutenant-Governor of Penang, who reported that on two or three of the estates in Province Wellesley many of the coolies had been shamefully neglected when sick, and had been sent to the Government hospital only in time to die. On one estate he suspected that coolies were forced into re-engagements and otherwise badly treated. Sir Andrew ordered an inquiry to be held, with the result that the manager of one estate and the agent for some others were brought to trial, which attracted public attention, and were noticed in English newspapers and in Parliament. Government supervision of coolie labour was made stricter, and regulations issued to ensure that the coolies should be better fed and protected. Writing to the Colonial Office in the following April, Sir Andrew was able to say: 'I am gradually getting all we want for the Indian coolies without making a fuss about it'; and two months later, after visiting those estates which had attained an unenviable notoriety, he reported officially:

I have just returned from a visit to the sugar estates in Province Wellesley, and have examined carefully into the treatment by the planters of their Indian coolies. From all I could gather, any ill usage must have been exceptional, and in all I saw there was every appearance of the coolies being well cared for and contented.⁸

The final arrangements were incorporated into legislation in both territories—Straits Settlements Ordinance No. 1 of 1876, and Indian Act No. V of 1877—and these two laws controlled Indian immigration to the Straits until 1884. The Indian law restricted emigration to specified ports in India, at each of which would be an Emigration Agent appointed by the Straits Settlements Government and a Protector of Emigrants appointed by the Government of Madras. The Agent was to establish depôts at each port, which

⁷S.S. *Labour Commission Report 1890*—Government of India letter No. 242 of 25-8-1876.

⁸Vetch—*Life of Sir Andrew Clarke*—p. 126.

would be subject to the Protector's inspection and approval. Recruiting was restricted to persons licensed by the Protector and to the districts specified in the licence. Each recruit must be taken before a magistrate, who would make sure the emigrant was going voluntarily, and a written contract specifying minimum wages (to be not less than 12 cents a day) and maximum term (to be not more than three years) was to be signed in India. There was to be a medical examination, and there were measures to ensure proper treatment on board ship.

The Straits Settlements Ordinance, called the *Indian Immigrants Protection Ordinance*, applied to persons arriving 'Under an engagement to labour in the Colony or to pay money to any person in the Colony or elsewhere in repayment of money advanced, in respect of passage provided to the Colony, in respect of subsistence during such passage'. The form of contract was prescribed—the immigrant undertook to labour on the estate for the agreed number of years and to 'repay to the said employer the sums advanced to him by the said employer'; the employer undertook to advance all necessary funds for the voyage, to pay him monthly wages calculated at 12 cents a day 'if working in the first class gang' and 10 cents 'if working in the second class gang', not to deduct more than one dollar in any one month in repayment of advances, and to supply rice and other prescribed items at the proper prices, deducting the cost from the wages.

No Indian immigrant was to work for more than six days a week, or more than ten hours a day, or more than six hours without a break. And if a man had worked for the previous six days, he must be paid for his weekly rest day. But:

The obligation to provide on holidays for the care of animals, the cleaning of machinery and such other attention to machinery as may be necessary for maintaining it in a condition for the resumption of work, the cleaning of premises for sanitary purposes, and of their own lines, and the necessities of life should not be considered as work under this Ordinance*.

The magistrate could cancel the contract, at the immigrant's request, if wages were in arrears for over four months, or if the employer was convicted of maltreatment or if ill-usage was proved.

*S.S. Ordinance No. 1 of 1876, Section 29—S.S. Gazette 1876.

On the other hand, an immigrant 'absenting himself or neglecting or refusing to labour' lost wages during his absence and forfeited fifty cents for each day absent, and if absent for more than seven days or for a second offence, he could at the employer's request be sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for fourteen days. For 'disobedience of orders', he could be fined fifty cents for a first offence and up to one month's rigorous imprisonment for a second offence. For desertion he could get one, two or three months rigorous imprisonment for the first, second and subsequent offences respectively. And conviction did not operate to release an immigrant from the terms of his contract. Any person enticing an immigrant away from his employer before the end of his contract could be fined.

The Governor of the Straits Settlements wrote to the Colonial Office on the 26th May, 1876, in his Despatch No. 204, that 'the provisions of the Immigration act have been cheerfully accepted by the Planters of Province Wellesley and the Public'. One of the European planters, Mr. J. Lamb, however, was not of this opinion. In a letter to the Protector of Immigrants on the 18th February, 1879, he complained:

In former times when immigration to the Straits was practically free, and men emigrated entirely of their own accord in search of employment, few did so except those who really meant to work. But since the many restrictions imposed by the Indian Government have rendered Agents and recruiters necessary in every case when a man cannot pay his passage money beforehand, a good deal seems to be done, in spite of frequent remonstrances from employers here, in the way of sweeping up the dregs of humanity from the highways and by-ways and bringing them forward as emigrants, if they can only pass muster physically, no attention being paid to their fitness in other respects.

And this evil is further aggravated by the diminution of our authority over our men resulting from Ordinance 1 of 1876, which makes it more difficult to enforce even measures intended solely for the men's own good than was formerly the case.¹⁰

A Government source provided some confirmation of this:

There was a large number of more newly arrived Immigrants on the Estate (Batu Kawan Estate) and they are men who before arriving here have, in nine cases out of ten, never had a changkol in their hands before. I have heard that an outside planter of experience well up in diagnosing

¹⁰S.S. Gazette 1879, p. 556.

these Indian Immigrants and who had seen them, confirms this statement and says they have been principally weavers before coming here—a very different occupation,

and even went on to say:

The Indian cooly who is engaged to work in the Province is, as a rule, a man of very inferior intellect.¹¹

Mr. Lamb was concerned to show the satisfactory position of labourers employed on the estates, and wrote:

... the pay of a new coolie here, working full time, amounts to \$3.60 for a month of thirty days. Of that sum \$1 is deducted for his passage money, leaving \$2.60 available for his living expenses. The quantity of rice consumed by an average working man costs, at present prices, which as yet have fallen little below the famine rates, \$1.20 a month (in ordinary times less than \$1) leaving him even now \$1.40 for extras, or about three times the average income of an inhabitant of India. Moreover, free house accommodation is provided for him, fuel he has in abundance for the gathering, whilst fresh vegetables, curry-stuff, salt, and every necessary of life are cheap and easily procurable everywhere, nor has he any taxes either direct or indirect to pay unless he chooses to drink arrack, which is not necessary. The result is that an industrious coolie not only feeds himself well, according to his tastes and habits, but begins to save money from the very first, and this is done by hundreds every year. Further, he is entitled to food and medicine gratis when sick, sickness does not injure his circumstances beyond stopping for the time being his power to save. How then can it be said that his condition is one of poverty, whether absolute or comparative?

... An immense improvement has been made in the condition of the coolies during the last 20 years in all such matters as house accommodation, water supply, sanitary conditions and Medical necessities ...

But the Principal Medical Officer of the Straits Settlements, who had visited the estates, reported a different picture to the Colonial Secretary, Singapore:

Mr. Lamb ... makes out very clearly that a cooly has at the end of the month \$1.40 to buy extras, which really are more than extras and are in my opinion essentials. This appears very well, and would be very well were it the case, but ... it is more likely the new cooly has nothing at all left from his pay at the end of the month and is probably in debt, with no surplus to buy anything with. He gets victimised right and left by the older hands on the Estate and by the Tindals, becomes entangled in debt and is beset with troubles on all sides, and any planter will tell you who sees to paying his coolies himself that as a matter of fact this

¹¹Ibid—p. 961.

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\$1.40, as a rule, is not in his possession for five minutes before it is pounced upon by his creditors, and openly so, before the very eyes of the paymaster himself. The managers of Estates should guard against these Tindals imposing upon the newly arrived coolies in the way they do. Drinking arrack among them, too, leads no doubt to a heap of misery and sickness, but I think if their food is better seen to, this practice will be less resorted to. It is their feeling of wretchedness which leads them to it.

The women on the Estates all look well and simply, I think, because they do not fall victims in the way the men do, and attend to their cooking better than the single men.

There was also another practice which was brought to our notice and that was cutting the coolies wages by 10 cents at a time for insufficient work or minor offences. This soon reduces the \$1.40 to nil, and is a practice which is unfair and should be stopped.¹²

He also described what happened when an estate owner, who was obliged to supply rice to his indentured labourers, discharged his obligation by giving them the whole month's supply at once:

To give him, who knows not how to take care of himself and who has no thought for the morrow, a month's supply of rice ahead is so utterly absurd that I cannot understand how the experiment should have gone on for so long without its being put a sudden and well-merited stop to. What happens as the result is this, that probably two-thirds of the recent arrivals have their monthly stock of rice finished before half of the month is over, having sold what they have not eaten for arrack, and thus starving, they eat all the rubbish they can lay their hands on, living the remainder of the time on unripe fruit, sugarcane, garbage and offal of all descriptions and if they do happen to get any rice their physical condition makes them too lazy to cook it, and they eat it in its raw state, soon bringing themselves into a condition of poverty which, if death does not supervene, requires months to recover from; added to which they lie skulking about among the canes in all weather, sleep in the ditches at night, get wet, lose all interest in life, contracting bowel complaints which soon terminate their existence.

Mr. Lamb, however, contended that the planters of Province Wellesley were performing a public service in importing Indian labour:

The Planters are the chief importers of labour into this country, and the immigration is in no way subsidised by Government as in most other Colonies importing Indian or Chinese labour. The Planter has thus not only all the risk and trouble of importation, but also that of passing the men through the critical climatising period, whilst ultimately only a

¹²Ibid—p. 961.

portion of the imported labour remains on estates, the rest being absorbed into the general labour supply to the benefit of the public at large.

From these extremes, it is welcome to read the more balanced opinion of the Straits Settlements Protector of Immigrants, in his annual report for 1881:

The wages given here are, I believe, considerably lower than in any other Colony, and the employer recovers a considerable sum from the coolie of the expenses incurred in bringing him here, which is not done elsewhere, so the employer has advantages here which he could not get in other Colonies, while the coolie is far less liberally treated. Are then desertions from the estates to be wondered at?

He added that:

There can be no doubt that the coolies, as a rule, are well treated and cared for, and where there has been any cause for complaint it is the Native subordinates who are to blame, though doubtless it would be better if some employers did not repose such implicit confidence in their Native assistants.¹³

The previous year he had written:

From what I have seen of the Indian natives who settle here and in the Native States I am convinced that they are able to earn a much better livelihood here than they could in India.

At that time there were 11 estates in Province Wellesley which employed South Indian labourers; these had 4,802 labourers, of whom 2,487 were protected immigrants (i.e. indentured or 'statute' labourers) and 2,315 'non-protected Indian coolies'. There was negligible immigration of Indian agricultural labourers into Singapore and Malacca, and their immigration into the Malay States was still not allowed by Indian law. The number of Indian immigrants arriving annually about this time was:

INDIAN IMMIGRANTS ARRIVING AT PENANG¹⁴

		Protected Immigrants		Other Passengers
1880	..	1,191	..	5,053
1881	..	879	..	6,807
1882	..	1,452	..	9,937
1883	..	1,450	..	10,605
1884	..	1,539	..	10,081

¹³Ibid 1882, p. 479.

¹⁴Ibid 1885, p. 350—Indian Immigration Dept. Report for 1884.

The Indian Immigration Department of the Straits Settlements in its report for 1880 stated that about one-third of the 'Other passengers' were in fact persons who ought legally to have entered into contracts as protected immigrants 'but they are so well tutored that it is impossible to obtain a conviction against the importers'.

Employers in Province Wellesley appear to have had difficulty in making many of their labourers complete their contracts. The number of employer-against-labourer cases taken to Court was large—106 in 1871; 124 in 1872; and 179 in 1873. 'The native (Chinese, Tamil and Malay) as well as the European employers avail themselves of Indian Act XIII of 1859 to enforce their labour contracts'.¹⁵ Even so, the employers repeatedly asked for a more comprehensive labour law, since the Indian act only applied to contracts under advances and ceased to apply as soon as the advances were repaid. As a result, *The Labour Contracts Ordinance* was passed in 1882. Under this, in the Straits Settlements *unwritten* (verbal) contracts to labour must not be for periods of longer than one month, and could be ended at any time by either party at a month's notice, or without notice if the party ending the contract paid one month's wages to the other. *Written* contracts to labour could be made, either with or without advances to the labourer, but they had to be signed before a magistrate or justice of the peace. There were legal provisions for the punishment of breaches of contract, absence from work and other offences, and provisions for the arrest of deserters, payment of wages within prescribed periods, and settlement of disputes arising out of the contracts. Written contracts could before completion only be terminated by mutual consent or the disablement of one party. One great benefit to the labourers was that the 'joint and several' system, by which 'a number of persons render themselves liable for the default of any of them', was made completely illegal.

In 1878 the Indian authorities were asked to permit labourers to emigrate to the Malay States. In 1880 desertions of indentured

¹⁵*Ibid* 1875, p. 148.

Indian labourers from estates in Province Wellesley totalled 319, equivalent to 11.29%. The Protector of Immigrants wrote:

I fear this cause of annoyance and considerable loss to employers will continue so long as the demand for labour so greatly exceeds the supply as it does at present, but should emigration to the Native States, as already recommended by me, be sanctioned, we may shortly look for an improvement in this direction.¹⁶

In the following year his tale was similar:

The high wages given by the Perak Government are a lively cause of desertion and a heavy drain on the cooly population of the Settlement. Most coolies on discharge state their intention to proceed to Perak. This will doubtless continue till emigration to Perak is sanctioned.¹⁷

The desertions increased to 567 in 1883 and 586 in 1884. 'The great demand for labour in Perak, where wages rising to 35 cts. a day for an ordinary cooly, as against 12 cts. given in Province Wellesley, continues to entice large numbers of contract coolies from the estates'.¹⁸ In 1883 the Indian Government agreed to allow immigration into the protected Malay States. But even so, the Penang Police Report for the year 1888 stated that, of the prisoners committed during that year, 1,191, or nearly one-third, were 'coolies from the sugar and tapioca estates in Province Wellesley, punished for offences against the labour law'.¹⁹

There were, from time to time, allegations that Indian immigrants were badly treated on estates in Province Wellesley, and when in 1868 the Government of India raised the point with the Straits Government, the Governor himself, as described earlier in this chapter, made personal enquiries throughout Province Wellesley and found the labourers properly looked after and said the alleged grievances were probably exaggerated. In 1872 an article in a Madras newspaper 'reflecting seriously on the treatment of Indian coolies in Penang', occasioned further correspondence between the two governments, who concluded 'that there had been cases of ill-treatment but that they were isolated and not a general practice'. In 1881 a Commission was set up to inquire into similar allegations and reported that 'generally speaking,

¹⁶Ibid 1881, p. 327—*Indian Immigration Dept. Report for 1880.*

¹⁷Ibid 1883, p. 669.

¹⁸Ibid 1884, p. 498—*Indian Immigration Dept. Report for 1883.*

¹⁹Ibid 1889, p. 1229.

the estates in Province Wellesley are well regulated and the condition of the Indian immigrants is such as to leave no reasonable grounds for complaint'. At least the immigrants, whatever their true circumstances, could not complain of lack of official attention.

By 1881 the Indian Government had become convinced that it would be in the interests of both countries to abolish all restrictions on the emigration of indentured labourers to the Straits, and to leave their welfare to the Straits Settlements Government. After consultations (made necessary largely because the *Madras* Government was in favour of retaining the restrictions) a new Straits Settlements law—the *Indian Immigration Ordinance*—was agreed upon and passed in 1884, to replace the 1876 law. The Indian Government thereupon repealed its 1877 law, concerning indentured labourers, and three years later removed all restrictions on the emigration of non-indentured labourers to Malaya.

Under the *Indian Immigration Ordinance* the labourer signed no contract until he arrived in the Straits Settlements. The law applied to agricultural labourers under indenture, whether newly arrived or not, whereas the 1876 law had only applied to new arrivals. The working of the Ordinance, 'both in the Colony and Native States, is under the general supervision of the Indian Immigration Agent . . . His office is at Penang . . . (with) an Assistant who shares the duty of inspecting the Province Wellesley Estates, which is ordered to be carried out once in three months'.²⁰ The law required employers to provide, for indentured immigrants, 'sufficient and proper house accommodation . . . such as shall be considered sufficient and proper by the Indian Immigration Agent'. This was the only regulation at the time governing the house accommodation to be provided for estate labourers.

The contract which the labourer signed under the new law bound him to do 36 months work. But in practice it was liable to be extended for an indefinite period. For one thing, 'the average man does not, and will not, do more than twenty days

²⁰S.S. *Labour Commission Report 1890*, para. 273.

work in a month'.²¹ For another, the labourer had to make up lost time for days spent in prison or attending court, for days on which absent from work without reasonable excuse, and days away sick in excess of thirty per year, and he was also under the obligation to continue to work until any sums due to the employer in repayment of advances were paid. Only a small minority of the labourers were in fact released at the end of three years.

Advances, however, were limited to payments for maintenance in India, cost of travel to port of embarkation, clothes and cash given in India, passage money, maintenance on board ship and on arrival in the Straits, and cash advanced in the Straits Settlements. The total amount recoverable from the immigrant could not legally exceed \$12, and it could only be deducted from wages in instalments of not more than one dollar monthly.

The labourer could not be compelled to work more than six days a week or nine hours a day. He must be paid 12 cents a day for each day worked, and 12 cents for the weekly rest day if he had worked for the six previous days. After one year's service, if the advances had been paid off, his pay was to increase to 14 cents a day.

As each immigrant ship arrived at Penang, it was boarded by an officer of the Indian Immigration Department, who saw that all the deck passengers were landed and moved to the Government dépôt. The 'free' men were at once discharged, but the indentured labourers were detained until they had signed their contracts and could be handed over to the representatives of their employers for transit to their places of employment. Each indentured labourer signed his own separate contract—one copy was sent to the employer, a copy in Tamil was retained by the labourer, and a record of the contract was kept by the Indian Immigration Department. Immigrants for Selangor and Johore did not sign contracts in Penang, but were sent on to those states, where they signed contracts on arrival.

²¹Ibid, para. 363.

Chapter VI

FIRST ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL CHINESE LABOUR

Chinese immigration into Malaya was for long under no Government supervision or control. It is true that, as early as 1823, Raffles had issued an Ordinance at Singapore designed to control the engagement of *sinkhehs* under promises to work to pay off their passage debts; he ruled:

Such arrangements are not deemed objectionable provided the parties are landed as free persons, but in all cases the amount of passage money or otherwise is limited to twenty dollars, and the period of service by an adult in compensation thereof shall in no case exceed two years, and every engagement shall be entered into with the free consent of the parties in presence of a Magistrate and duly registered.¹

But this law was never enforced—most probably because it was 'ultra vires'. Certainly, in respect of Raffles' land laws, the Recorder of Singapore ruled in 1835 that they were 'illegal because they were not a law for imposing taxes, the only purpose for which the Straits Government could legislate',² the legislative power in other matters resting in British India, of which the Straits Settlements were at that time still a part. Crawford, Raffles' successor, had successfully challenged the legality of other laws and regulations made by Raffles.

It was not until the Straits Settlements were separated from India that Chinese immigration became a matter of official concern. Serious abuses had by then arisen in connection with it. Newly arrived labourers would disappear, as a petition to the Governor from the Chinese merchants and citizens of Singapore complained in 1871:

Nowadays we hear of ill-disposed people (vagabonds) that often make it their trade of the *Sin-Khehs* or newcomers who, on their first landing here, not being acquainted with anyone in the place, are by these vagabonds invariably deceived or cheated, or these vagabonds at times board the fresh arrivals and clandestinely trade in these *Sin-Khehs*, with whom to enrich themselves. When the bargain is secured the *Sin-Khehs* disappear, often times never to be traced, and neither is it possible for the living or the dead to divine. Such practices, besides being detrimental to the

¹Quoted in *S.S. Labour Commission Report 1890*.

²Mills—*British Malaya*, p. 107.

place, are a lamentable deterrent to the *Sin-Khehs*, unless means be devised to inform them of the place where to lodge their complaints.³

A Commission enquiring into riots which occurred in Singapore in 1872 described that:

... two steamers within a week or two of one another landed in the Settlement 3,200 Chinese coolies... Of such and their movements neither the Government nor the Police have any knowledge, nor have they any control over them, they land and know of no governing authority but that of the Secret Societies, to whom they are soon affiliated, or of those employers of labour who make their own terms with them and draft them off to their plantations.⁴

A petition in 1873 alleged that there was 'disgraceful kidnapping of *Sin-Khehs*', and the petitioners asked for legislation to forbid this and for depôts to be set up in which the immigrants could be lodged until properly disposed of. Secret Societies, which were still legal entities in the Straits Settlements, exploited the traffic. An immigration law was passed in 1873, but because of opposition from business interests was not brought into force. A Commission was appointed in 1876 to look into the question and concluded that on the whole there was very little wrong with the system '*in the case of immigrants remaining in the Settlements*'. But it is clear that the 'coolie traffic' had become big business, and the Commission's description of the current method of recruiting and disposing of the immigrants itself showed that abuses existed. Its report stated:

The method of recruiting the immigrants is as follows: The steamer is usually chartered by a Chinese supercargo for a lump sum, the maximum number of immigrants she may carry being regulated by her official measurement. Some three weeks before the date of her projected departure, notice is given in the adjoining villages that a ship is going to leave for Singapore, when bands of men are formed under the leadership of a *Kheh-Thau*—or, as he is usually called Headman—who is generally, but not always, a returned emigrant from the Straits; the *Kheh-Thau* takes his band to a lodging-house at the port of embarkation and their departure is arranged for through the agents of the ship...

The rate of passage-money when paid in advance is about \$7 to \$8 (say 30s.), and in the case of immigrants from Amoy and Hong Kong the money is almost always paid down. From Hainan the passage is often on credit, but oftener paid or arranged in advance. From Swatow about

³*S.S. Labour Commission Report 1890.*

⁴*Ibid.*

half the Techius—as the people from this district, who are mostly agricultural labourers, are called—pay in advance, the other half get credit, the rate of passage on credit being about \$12 (say 45s.), and the *Kheh-Thau* being responsible for it to the supercargo as regards the band of from 10 to 20 people under his charge. It is to be noted, as showing the purely voluntary nature of the immigration, that no advances are made (except for trifling expenses) to induce the parties to leave China, that while waiting to embark they are under no restriction of any kind, and that the ships are visited and carefully inspected by Officials, both European and Chinese, before their departure . . .

Each immigrant has a ticket which specifies the port of destination, whether his passage-money has or has not been paid, etc., and on arrival in Singapore harbour, those who have paid their passages land and go where they like, or it would perhaps be more correct to say, wherever their *Kheh-Thau* likes to take them. The charter of the ship usually allows for three or four days of detention, and during those days of grace the immigrants who owe for their passages are detained on board, the *Kheh-Thau* being allowed to land and find employers for their hands who will settle for their passage-money. If there is a demand for coolies, the *Kheh-Thau* makes a large profit, getting perhaps \$20 per head for his band, whereas they will probably have cost him \$13 to \$14. The usual price paid by the employers is from \$17 to \$20, and the margin between this and the passage rate constitutes the *Kheh-Thau*'s profit.

When the steamer's days of grace are up, if there are still immigrants on board whose passage-money has not been paid, they are either landed in Singapore and shut up in houses, or are sent on to Penang, if the steamer goes there, whether their passages are taken for there or not. In most immigrant ships there are immigrants regularly engaged for Penang, who are taken on in the ship if she is going there, or in one of the local steamers if she is not; but if there be a demand for labour in Penang and none in Singapore, it is believed that the supercargo and the *Kheh-Thaus* are not very particular as to landing the immigrants at the particular port for which they embarked.⁴

As a result of the Commission's recommendations, two laws were passed in the Straits Settlements in 1877. The first was *The Chinese Immigrants Ordinance*, which provided 'for the appointment of a Protector of Chinese Immigrants, for the establishment and regulation of Depôts for the reception of Immigrants on arrival; for written engagements between employers and employed; and for the levying of a small fee . . .'. Immigrants could be landed or transhipped only at the three main ports; the

⁴Ibid.

arrival of every immigrant ship had to be reported to the Protector, who was bound to go on board immediately and examine each immigrant to see whether he was in debt for his passage-money—those whose passage-money had been paid (or was paid immediately on arrival) were to be landed at once and sent to a depôt where, after the terms of any contract to labour that they had entered into had been explained to them by the Protector, so that they understood clearly what they had committed themselves to, they were allowed to leave. Those whose passage-money had not been paid within twenty-four hours of arrival were to be landed and kept under the care of the Protector for up to ten days until arrangements had been made for payment of the passage-money and engagement to labour. All contracts to labour signed by immigrants had to be registered 'in such form and with such particulars as the Governor may from time to time direct', and breaches of contract were to be punishable as if they had been made under *The Indian Immigrants Ordinance*.

The second law was the *Crimping Ordinance*, designed to deal with 'the abuses now perpetuated in kidnapping coolies for service in the Dutch settlements and other places'—there had been reports of gangs of coolies being driven aboard sailing ships by armed men for shipment to Sumatra—and 'to meet the representations of the planters of Province Wellesley to the effect that the Immigration Ordinance of 1876 deals solely with the crimping of . . . Indian Immigrants . . . while it leaves unpunished person enticing away all other descriptions of labourers, and that serious abuses go unpunished in consequence'. It was now made an offence to induce a man to enter into a contract for service as a labourer outside the Colony 'by force or fraud or deceit or intimidation, or by means of intoxication, or by means of ill-treatment or wilful neglect'. It was an offence to recruit emigrants or to procure engagements for them to work at places outside the Colony, without a licence from the Protector. The Government could lay down the rules of conduct and duties for these recruiters, prescribe the charges they could make for their services, and could set up depôts to house emigrants. Contracts for service outside the Colony must be in writing, signed by the labourer and the employer or his agent in the presence of the

Protector or a Magistrate, and 'any person making or attempting to make an agreement with an emigrant other than herein prescribed' committed an offence. No emigrant entering into an agreement must be confined in any place without his own express consent, which could only be given before the Protector. In return for this protection, an emigrant who took an advance of money against his contract or for whom his prospective employer had incurred any legitimate expense could be fined or imprisoned if he did not leave the Colony in accordance with his contract (unless, of course, he paid back the money advanced or spent on him). Employers were also given protection against crimps who tried to steal their labourers: 'any person who shall . . . attempt to seduce or take . . . from his service or employment any labourer bound by any contract of service, such period being for a period of not less than one month, to serve any other person, whether within or without the Colony' committed an offence punishable by fine or imprisonment or both, as did any person 'who shall knowingly take any labourer while so bound into his service or employment'.

To carry out these laws, a Protector of Chinese was appointed in Singapore and an Assistant Protector in Penang, the new Government Department which they headed being called the Chinese Protectorate. Licences were issued to recruiters of emigrants and 'depôts for the reception of Chinese under Government supervision were established without difficulty'—this is not to say, however, that the Government built and ran depôts; what happened was that 'the Chief Chinese firms engaged in the importation of Coolies spontaneously applied for licences for Depôts'. The Protector, reviewing his work for 1877, stated that the new laws were intended to bring the newly-arrived Chinese into direct contact with the Government and make them feel that there was a power both to protect them and to keep them in order. He described how this was done:

On the arrival of a vessel with immigrants from China, she is boarded by an officer of the Department and handbills are distributed among the passengers to the effect that although each Immigrant ought to pay a reasonable amount for his passage money, no restraint or confinement

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will be allowed, and that in the case of any grievance the sufferer should report it to the boarding officer, and that the Government will protect him against any oppression.

On arriving at a *Dépôt* on shore, the Immigrants are visited by the Protector or Assistant Protector, and enquiries are made as to whether any of the new arrivals have relations or friends in Singapore, expecting them; if so, the names of the relations or friends are taken down and every exertion is made to find them.

On engagements for labour being made, or in the event of their passage-money being paid by their relations or friends, the Immigrants are brought before the Protector in his office, and informed that there is no necessity to join any Secret Society for the sake of protection, but that the Government is ready at all times to listen to them and to protect them in any lawful employment.

Each labourer and employer receives a copy of Contract numbered according to the Registration Books kept in the office; the terms of the Contract are explained to the Immigrant, and he is told that while the employer will not be allowed to defraud or ill-treat him in any way, he himself will be punished according to law for any breaches of the engagement.*

The size of the problem dealt with by the Chinese Protectorate in the first fourteen years of its existence is shown in the following table, which gives the number of arrivals at the two main ports who had to be checked, and the number of those who were 'unpaid passengers'—indebted to some person for the cost of their passage—who had to be given protection until they had signed their contracts:

CHINESE IMMIGRANTS 1877-1890[†]

		Total Arrivals		Number of these who were 'unpaid passengers'.	
		At Singapore	At Penang	At Singapore	At Penang
1877	.. ..	9,776	—	2,653	—
1878	.. ..	34,088	—	6,405	—
1879	.. ..	35,272	21,523	4,527	—
1880	.. ..	46,744	30,886	8,631	13,484
1881	.. ..	47,747	42,056	11,522	20,794
1882	.. ..	55,887	45,122	11,404	17,011

*S.S. Gazette 1878, p. 8.

[†]Compiled from appendices of Labour Commission Report 1890.

IMMIGRANT LABOUR AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MALAYA

		Total Arrivals		Number of these who were 'unpaid passengers'	
		At Singapore	At Penang	At Singapore	At Penang
1883	.. ..	61,206	47,930	.. 10,249	16,197
1884	.. ..	68,517	38,231	.. 9,690	15,181
1885	.. ..	69,414	42,142	.. 9,359	17,034
1886	.. ..	87,331	57,186	.. 15,733	23,459
1887	.. ..	101,094	65,348	.. 19,496	22,904
1888	.. ..	103,541	78,175	.. 18,421	16,186
1889	.. ..	102,429	44,441	.. 11,962	9,251
1890	.. ..	96,230	36,044	.. 8,152	6,813

Not all these immigrants came to work in Malaya. Many went on to other places—Borneo, Siam, the Indonesian islands and elsewhere—and are no part of our story. The following table gives the numbers of the 'unpaid passengers' who signed contracts to work as *sinkhehs* in various parts of Malaya until their debts were paid:

CHINESE LABOUR CONTRACTS SIGNED IN THE STRAITS SETTLEMENTS FOR SERVICE IN THE FOLLOWING PLACES IN MALAYA*

Year	Singapore	Malacca	Selangor and Johore	Penang Island	Province Wellesley	Perak
1878	1,246	66	2,079	—	—	—
1879	1,197	184	2,070	—	—	—
1880	1,876	250	2,973	—	—	—
1881	2,376	593	6,300	1,601	5,283	2,670
1882	2,701	522	6,060	2,465	6,534	3,342
1883	2,085	296	5,468	2,193	5,447	3,625
1884	2,241	255	5,141	1,426	4,192	1,554
1885	1,932	290	4,466	1,676	3,714	2,239
1886	2,527	278	11,314	1,866	4,346	5,250
1887	2,322	187	13,725	1,814	3,601	7,419
1888	768	115	11,701	1,039	1,422	4,530
1889	1,392	65	5,350	752	2,255	1,716
1890	605	47	3,655	670	1,210	1,432

*Ibid.

In Penang in 1879 eight depôts had been licensed and 15 recruiters. The number of depôts varied with the amount of immigrant traffic. In 1887 in Singapore there were 29 depôts with licences and 172 recruiters, and in Penang 10 depôts and 33 recruiters. The number of depôts with licences in the six following years varied as follows:

LICENSED DEPOTS FOR CHINESE IMMIGRANTS AND
EMIGRANTS*

Year			Singapore		Penang
1888	..	..	41	..	9
1889	..	..	45	..	9
1890	..	..	30	..	13
1891	..	..	26	..	10
1892	..	..	18	..	14
1893	..	..	28	..	12

By 1890, the system of recruiting labourers from China for service in Malaya was that:

The recruiter or agent pays the passage and expenses of the intending immigrant, in some cases giving him a small advance as well, on condition that the cooly ultimately works off by his labour the expenses so incurred. Usually the China agent recovers his outlay, plus a profit, from an agent or broker in Singapore or Penang, to whom the cooly is consigned and who remits the necessary sum to China on receipt of the cooly. This second agent then disposes of his cooly to the employer or his agent, making the best terms he can, according to the state of the market, to recoup his outlay and secure himself a profit.¹⁰

This supervision and protection of the immigrant at the point of entry into and departure from the Straits Settlements was a creditable beginning to the attempt to control and eliminate the abuses in the trade of selling 'little pigs' (as the traffic in *sinkhehs* or credit-ticket immigrants was commonly referred to by the Chinese). But even so, all was not perfect:

Scenes of disorder, amounting almost to riot, sometimes occur on the arrival of cooly-ships, rowdies from the shore assaulting the Boarding Officers, boatmen, and depôt-keepers, snatching ear-rings and bangles

*Compiled from Annual Reports of Chinese Protectorate, 1887-1893.

¹⁰S.S. *Labour Commission Report* 1890.

from the women passengers, and endeavouring to persuade 'unpaid' passengers to run away.¹¹

The Government had established no examination depôts of its own, in 1890 'the examination of the men being carried on in a rough and ready manner on board ship or at the wharves to which the vessels go, while the women with some trouble are sent to the Protectorate in gharries'.¹² After examination by the Protector:

the coolies are next marched to the various depôts, guarded by employees of the depôt-keepers. Once in the depôt they are confined until selected by the agent of the employer, and it is this detention which forms one of the chief blots on the whole system . . .¹³

The labourers tended to be in practice completely under the thumb of the depôt-keeper and obliged, whether they liked it or not, to make the contracts which the depôt-keeper found most profitable instead of freely choosing the place of work and kind of work they might have preferred. It was, however, considered that 'the abuses of the depôt system were more sentimental than real', and in fact the main gap in the system of protection of the indebted immigrant was that:

Up to the date on which he signs his contract he is looked after and cared for, and much has been done for him, but from this point, so far as the Protectorate is concerned, he disappears. His name remains on the register, but that is all. *With the carrying out of the contract terms or his release on expiration the Protectorate does not concern itself.*¹⁴

Often even, in the case of contracts made in Singapore and Penang for service in the Malay States,

when the *sinkbeh* signs the contract he is not, as a rule, aware who his employer . . . will be, and the contract is entered into with his *khehtau*, i.e., the man who brought him down from China and who on arrival in the State distributes his coolies amongst such employers as require their services.¹⁵

Nevertheless, a beginning had been made at official supervision of Chinese immigrant labour.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*

Chapter VII

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF TIN MINING

The 1880's saw a great increase in Chinese tin mining—partly because the more settled political conditions that resulted from British intervention in Perak, Selangor and Sungei Ujong were conducive to commercial expansion, and partly because of the 'boom' price of tin. From \$20 a pikul in the mid-seventies, the price rose above \$30 in 1879 and remained at that level until 1890 (apart from a brief drop in 1884/5).

It is true that the earlier mining areas—Malacca and Lukut—had ceased to be of importance. Their deposits, compared with Selangor and Perak, were small and neither so easy to work nor so productive. A similar fate befell Sungei Ujong during the eighties; the Resident, describing the position there in 1882, said 'the Chinese . . . are contented and industrious but have slightly decreased in numbers, some coolies having gone over to Selangor, where they are more certain of permanent employment than they are here. The mining industry in this State has never been largely developed. Even the principal advancers to mines are men in quite a small way of business, who only get credit from Malacca traders to the amount of tin they send them'.¹

In contrast, however, the mines in Larut and around Kuala Lumpur were rehabilitated and their production increased by leaps and bounds. In Selangor, for example, the figures were:

Year					Tin-Ore Output in Pikuls ²
1878	..	..	..	..	42,293
1880	..	..	..	..	50,514
1882	..	..	..	..	56,970
1884	..	..	..	..	76,629
1886	..	..	..	..	99,073
1888	..	..	..	..	135,735
1890	..	..	..	..	174,538

¹S.S. Gazette 1883, p. 1180.

²Quoted by Gullick—JMBRAS Vol. XXVIII, Pt. 4, p. 57.

New mining areas were developed in the State in an outward movement from Kuala Lumpur (which in these years grew from a village into a flourishing town and commercial capital) and by 1887 it had 103 large tin mines (each 200 to 250 feet square) on which some 5,000 miners worked, and innumerable small mines (some as little as 20 feet square) on which worked a further 3,000 men. Steam engines (introduced in Larut in 1879) were first used in Selangor in 1881—there were 2 in 1884, 15 in 1885 and 99 in 1888. They were used for pumping and enabled mining to be done much deeper without danger of flooding. There was a 'great influx of Chinese immigrants'.

The expansion in Perak was even more spectacular. The number of miners there had fallen as low as 9,000 in 1877, but five years later there were 50,000 and 'they are still arriving in crowds . . . having been imported directly from the inland districts of China' wrote the British Resident in his annual report for 1882.

They were imported as '*Sinkays*' or new men, under a bond to work for one year in discharge of the \$22 to \$25 which had been paid in Penang for the expenses connected with their importation. They were fed and housed at the importer's expense, and a small gratuity at the end of the twelve months was paid to them; they were also allowed to work overtime on their own account, by which it was possible for an industrious and healthy man to gain about \$2 a month.²

Up to this time, Chinese mining in Larut and Selangor had been carried on under the direction of a small number of Chinese capitalists, 'working with their own imported and indentured labourers'. The life of the labourers was dominated by the fact that they were bound by contract to labour for their employers for a long period, had no choice but to live in a social and economic order completely dominated by the employer or his backer, and were bound by debts contracted of necessity because of the truck system; in fact, it was a life verging closely on slavery.

Miss Bird graphically describes a visit to a tin mine in Taiping in 1883:

We went first to a very large tin mine belonging to a rich and very pleasant-looking Chinaman, who received us and took us over it. The mine is like a large quarry, with a number of small excavations which fill with

²S.S. Gazette 1883, p. 1091.

water and are pumped by most ingenious Chinese pumps worked by an endless chain, but there are two powerful steam pumps at work also. About four hundred lean leathery-looking men were working, swarming out of the holes like ants in double columns, each man carrying a small bamboo tray holding about three pounds of stanniferous earth, which is deposited in a sluice, and a great rush of water washes away the sand, leaving the tin behind, looking very much like 'giant' blasting powder. The Chinese are as much wedded to these bamboo baskets as to their pigtailed, but they involve great waste of labour. A common hoe is the other implement used. The coolies are paid by piece-work and are earning just now about one shilling and sixpence per day. Road making and other labour is performed by Klings, who get one shilling a day.⁴

With the opening up of the district of Kinta, which before long became the main tin-mining area in the country, this state of affairs gradually changed. In 1879 there were only 900 Chinese in the area, but when it proved to contain very extensive and abundant tin deposits it soon became a 'Rich and developing district'. The Chinese mining population of Kinta increased rapidly:

1884	..	..	..	..	5,242
1885	..	..	..	..	9,154
1886	..	..	..	..	16,000
1887	..	..	..	..	25,000 ⁵

In 1888 there were (apart from small Malay ancestral workings) 478 mines in Kinta and 273 in Larut. In 1889 the Chinese population of Kinta had risen to 44,790, almost as great as that of Larut, which was then 46,711. By 1888 the production of Kinta nearly equalled that of Larut and in the next year considerably exceeded it. From then on, Kinta stayed in the lead.

The workings in Kinta, it should be noted, were not under the direct domination or control of the large capitalists. There was a great number of independent employers, who were able to attract labourers away from Larut despite attempts to prevent this:

The Larut coolies ran away in hundreds and began to work in smaller *longgis* in Kinta under new *towkays*, at first under very similar conditions

⁴Bird—*The Golden Chersonese*—p. 289.

⁵S.S. *Gazette* 1888—p. 1157.

to Larut but, as roads and bridle-paths were opened up and facilities for absconding became greater, under much easier circumstances than heretofore. At this time (i.e. 1884) Schultz was appointed Protector of Chinese, and mainly in the interests of the Larut *towkays* the registration system was introduced. It was an imitation of the French 'livret' system, which has been tried in Europe in various countries and has always broken down and nowhere succeeded, except probably in the Dutch colonies.

Under it every cooly signed a contract for a year, and on leaving at the end of the year had to receive a discharge ticket from his *towkay*, without which he could not leave the *kongsi* house, nor could he re-engage in another mine unless he produced a ticket from his last *towkay*. There were to be a half-yearly settlements in the presence of the Protector or a member of his staff, and quarterly musters of the coolies in each *kongsi* by the police, who were to enquire into any case of ill-treatment of coolies, etc., and any cooly found on the road without a discharge ticket was liable to arrest by the police, and there were a number of other elaborate rules and regulations. The system was doomed to failure from the day it started . . . and was after some time abolished.*

The Perak Protector of Chinese reported in 1888 that 'the discharge ticket system is working satisfactorily in Larut but, owing to the deficient staff, is not so successful in Kinta . . . The failure is, in a great measure, due to the too great facilities given for procuring discharge ticket books . . . The Coolies are also reported as being exceedingly dexterous in forging the necessary entries and imitate the chop of a *kongsi* by carving it on a piece of sweet potato from which impressions are taken'.⁷

When the discharge-ticket system proved ineffective, the general system of employing labour in the mines was changed to take account of the new situation:

The wealthy *towkays* who worked deep mines had to give up the regular 10 per cent truck system*, which was in fact little better than slavery, and adopt the *nai-chang* and *kongsi-kong* system. That is, they let the stripping of open-cast mines out on contract at so much the *chang* to *nai-chang* coolies, while the *karang* was lifted by *kongsi-kong* coolies, generally wage coolies and often *sinkhehs*, but sometimes also contract coolies under the 'big basket' system.⁸

* See Chapter III.

⁷F.M.S. Annual Report for 1903—quoting letter by J. B. Massy Leech.

⁸S.S. Gazette 1889—p. 1023.

⁹Letter by Leech in F.M.S. Annual Report for 1903.

Many of the newly-arrived labourers from China who worked as *nai-chang* (or later, tribute labourers—see below) were not indebted to their employer for their passage money—‘the great majority are men who have come on their own account to friends and fellow-clansmen, with money sent them by people here’. But Massey Leech, an influential European mine owner in Perak who had earlier been a Government servant connected in some way with employment, looking back on his earlier years, wrote in 1904 saying:

You ask whether the *nai-chang* coolies can be considered ‘indentured’ coolies? I would say yes to this, as they are all under advance to the *towkay* and there is generally a time-limit on their agreements, and the settlements are generally every six months and not when the job is finished only, and I think the *towkays* therefore have a legal right to insist on their working a reasonable number of hours.⁹

By 1889 it was said that in Selangor:

The whole system of Chinese mining rests on a basis of credit. The actual workers are supported during the preliminary period, which has to elapse between breaking ground and getting out the tin-ore, upon advances in money and kind made by an investor; to him the tin, when won, has to be sold at a comparatively low price. *He* risks his money; *they* risk their time and labour. If the work is successful, the advancer makes a large profit, both from the goods supplied (charged at the highest price which the miners will pay) and the profit on the re-sale of the tin, and the miners clear off their debt, and are left a balance to the good.¹⁰

In 1889 the Chinese Protectorate reported ‘a large falling off in the number of coolies required for tin mining in the Protected Native States’. The number of *sinkhehs* signing contracts for work in Perak and Selangor dropped rapidly from 16,714 in 1886 to 5,459 in 1889 and 3,934 in 1890. In 1890 the tin price fell to \$24 a pikul and mining entered something of a depression.

A variation of the discharge-ticket system was instituted in Selangor about this time, in conjunction with a residential depôt at Kuala Lumpur with accommodation for 1,200 men, which was built at the expense of the Chinese employers, and managed by a representative committee of them under the chairmanship of the (Capitan China). The system was designed to prevent absconding

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰S.S. Gazette 1890—p. 1505.

and crimping, which was a serious problem, the Selangor Police report for the year stating that 'of the prisoners committed in Kuala Lumpur in 1889, 424 were mining and agricultural coolies punished for breach of contract'.¹¹

With a view to the protection of employers of Chinese labour in the tin mining industry, an important step has been taken to carry out the Rules passed in June, 1888. A Central coolie depôt has been opened and its working has, so far, given satisfaction . . .

All newly imported coolies must pass through this depôt where they are registered, and where they remain at the expense of their broker until work is found for them. *Lau-khehs* or labourers of a year's standing and upwards can also gain admittance to the depôt on payment of a small fixed charge, and can remain there at their own expense until they find work. The number that passed through the depôt in 1890 was 3,221 namely, 1,739 *sinkhehs* and 1,472 *lau-khehs*. Employers in need of labour apply to the depôt manager (a Malacca Chinese) who communicates with the brokers. If coolies are engaged, agreements are made out in duplicate and the particulars are registered in the depôt. In the agreement are set out the sum received in advance, the term of service, the names of the employer and the coolie, the place of work, the scale of remuneration, the hours of work and the nature of the food and clothing to be provided. On the expiration of the *sinkheh's* year of service he has to procure from his employer a certificate stating that his agreement has been fulfilled. This he presents to the depôt, and is thenceforth a *lau-kheh* and is free to take service wherever he chooses, as long as he holds a certificate to the effect that he has completed the term of his last engagement and has repaid all his advances. Employers who engage labourers without such a certificate are liable to a fine of \$200.¹²

By 1896 the number of labourers who passed through the depôt in the year was 8,002, of whom 4,754 were *sinkhehs*. But *sinkheh* labour was becoming less and less popular in the mines, 'the employers naturally preferring to re-engage old hands, amongst whom there are fewer cases of desertion'. It was said in that year that 'the provisions for the registration of contracts and definitions of their terms have practically remained a dead letter in Selangor It would appear that the Chinese miners—whether employers or labourers—dislike written contracts of every description and prefer to work in accordance with local mining customs, which vary from time to time, according to the

¹¹S.S. Gazette 1890.

¹²S.S. Gazette 1891—Selangor Annual Report for 1890.

exigencies of the situation'.¹³ In 1897 in Perak 'comparatively few *sinkhehs* (indentured immigrants) are being imported by mine owners, partly owing to want of funds and partly to the fear of absconding, while on the other hand a general decrease in immigration has been accompanied by an increased competition for Chinese labourers, in connection with the construction of roads and railways and the development of agricultural estates'.¹⁴

And in all the mining areas a method of working known as the 'tribute system' gained popularity and became a common method of operating medium-sized workings.

A small shop-keeper hears of or sees a piece of mining land which he fancies. If it is in private hands he goes to the owner and offers so much per cent of his output for permission to work; if it is Government land, he usually dispenses with this preliminary.

He then builds a *kongsi* house and collects a number of his own friends and clansmen whom he knows he can trust, and starts them with a small advance each, and they then work on the 10 per cent system; but as the returns are immediate, or at least come in a short time, they very soon find out whether the ground will pay or not, and if it does not, they stop work and go elsewhere. These coolies can in no sense be called indentured. They are the bulk of the labour of the country, and never give the Government any trouble, as they settle their differences among themselves. They are also the worst miners, as they go about the country picking out the rich patches . . .¹⁵

The mining labourers were provided with accommodation by the employer or advancer. It invariably took the form of a *kongsi* house, where living was communal. The following extracts from a description of a *kongsi*, written in 1895, give an idea of the life and environment of the labourers. This type of accommodation has remained the customary housing on many Chinese tin mines even to the present.

Externally the *kongsi* presents the appearance of a huge thatched roof rising from the ground to a height of about 30 feet to the top and covering an area of 150 feet by 40 feet. This ungainly looking mass of thatch, and the covered area walled in with timber or split bamboo, constitutes the *kongsi*. There are three divisions in the building: the centre, which is subdivided into the hall and store-room, and the two wings, which are used

¹³F.M.S. Annual Report for 1896, p. 45.

¹⁴F.M.S. Annual Report for 1897.

¹⁵Letter by Leech in F.M.S. Annual Report for 1903.

as dormitories. A verandah runs along the front of the kongsi, and a door leading from the verandah to the hall gives general access to every part of the house. In the hall are to be seen the '*Kong pai*' (check roll) hung up in a conspicuous place, the clock which regulates the working hours, and a small table or altar on which are placed incense, joss sticks and all the paraphernalia of heathen worship; while little rude tables here and there shew that the hall is also the dining room. The store-room, which is connected with the hall by a small door, is the sanctum of the *choy foo* (clerk) . . . The manager, head overseer and the clerk have each their bed in this room, which is also reserved as a dining place for these three officials and the assistant overseer . . . The verandah may be said to be the busiest part of the kongsi, affording a rendezvous for the cake-seller, pork-vendor, hawker and the rest of the pedlar fraternity who meet here at all hours of the day to tempt the coolies with their wares. But its usefulness does not end there, as the basket-maker, whether mending old baskets or making new ones, always works in the verandah, the overseer beats the wooded drum and calls his coolies to work there, and lastly but not leastly it is the happy meeting-ground of the idlers, the coolies who sulk from work and generally the good-for-nothing who congregate here to loaf, gossip or quarrel.

The dormitories are divided into rectangular blocks with a main passage running through the centre and the beds are placed in the cross passages branching off, on either side, from the main thoroughfare. Four posts driven into the ground with a plank or bamboo floor on them and a mat to cover the floor from the bed of the coolie. But the bed of the coolie is his sanctuary. Here he keeps his belongings and furniture—his box, which also serves as pillow, occupies a corner, and his tea-pot and opium pipe and lamp are neatly arranged on a tray in the middle, whilst over them is the universal mosquito-curtain which the coolie can never do without however poor his circumstances. Here he retires after the day's work, entertains his friends, sips his tea, and writes 'clubbed packet' letters to his family in China. A bamboo partition separates the beds of the *pongshoo* (petty overseers), who generally keep themselves separate from those of commoner clay.

In small mines cooking is done in the kongsi house itself, but in large ones, owing to the greater number of men and the risk of fire, a separate kitchen house is provided within convenient distance from the main building. It is generally about 40 ft. by 20 ft., is walled on three sides and entirely open to the front or side nearest the kongsi house. The cooking range with the large rice-pan permanently imbedded in it, the kitchen dresser, chopper, saucepans and other culinary apparatus are kept scrupulously clean, though so much cannot be said of the drainage and outside surroundings . . .¹⁸

¹⁸Selangor Journal 1895, Vol. IV, pp. 17-19.

Tin production continued to expand. The output of Malaya in 1889 was about 26,000 tons. In 1900, a new mining boom having begun in 1898 when the price rose sharply, production was 43,111 tons (54% of the world output). By 1905 it had risen to 50,991 tons, the level at which, very roughly, production in Malaya has remained ever since.

The boom caused a sharp rise in wages. Daily-rates jumped from 30 cents in 1896 to 45 cents in 1898 and 70-80 cents in 1899. The higher wages stimulated the immigration of Chinese labourers, and it is estimated that 100,000 Chinese entered the Malay States in 1899-1900.

It is convenient to pause at the turn of the century and survey the whole field of Chinese mining labour. In the year 1903¹⁷ it was reckoned that in the Federated Malay States (Perak, Selangor, Pahang and Negri Sembilan) there were 223,600 Chinese engaged in the tin mining industry. This figure included labourers employed in cutting timber and firewood, crushing stone, washing tin, smelting and various other trades connected with the industry. Those who actually worked in the mines numbered 186,337 divided as follows:

Open-cast mines	.. ..	143,028
Underground mines	.. ..	20,918
Hydraulic mines and 'lampan' mines	.. ..	22,391

These miners could be subdivided according to their method of employment as follows:

Working under Contract	.. ..	65,656
Working for Wages	.. ..	29,015
Working on Tribute	.. ..	91,666

The labourers working under contract were indentured labourers who had been given monetary advances for one reason or another and had signed (or ought to have signed) contracts by which they undertook to labour under specified conditions until the advances were repaid. They fell into two categories. First were the *sinkhehs*, immigrants fresh from China, recruited by a Chinese recruiter who made a small profit on the operation of bringing the

¹⁷F.M.S. Annual Report for 1903, pp. 6-10.

sinkheh to his place of work in Malaya. The expenses which the recruiter would pay, and which therefore constituted the 'advances', would in a typical case be:

	\$	c.
Cash advance paid to the recruit in China..	5	00
Travelling expenses from home to Hong Kong	5	00
Maintenance while awaiting shipment in depôt in Hong Kong	3	00
Passage from Hong Kong to Singapore ..	12	00
Maintenance in dépôt in Singapore while awaiting onward transit	2	00
Steamer and/or railway fare from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur	2	50
Maintenance in dépôt in Kuala Lumpur until taken over by employer	2	50
TOTAL ..	32	00

The recruiter on handing the labourer over to the employer would charge from \$35 to \$45, depending upon supply and demand. The *sinkheh* would enter into a contract to work for one year (twelve calendar months or 360 days of actual work). The number of such contracts made about this time averaged 5,300 a year, most of them being signed in Singapore or Penang.

*Chinese Sinkheh contracts signed for Mining in the F.M.S.*¹⁸

	Signed in Straits Settlements	Signed in the Malay States	Total
1901 ..	5,297	934 ..	6,231
1902 ..	3,485	784 ..	4,269
1903 ..	4,004	1,595 ..	5,599

When a *sinkheh* completed his contract he was at liberty to do what he wished, but a passage back to his own country was not provided. The *sinkhehs* lived together in barracks on the mines,

¹⁸ibid.

but were not very strictly confined and it was easy to abscond. *Sinkheh* labour was therefore not very popular with employers.

The second class of indentured labourer was the *lau-kheh* or 'old hand'. Some of these were *ex-sinkhehs* who had completed their original indentures and signed on for a further period. Others were labourers who were engaged in the Straits Settlements and were paid a monetary advance or had the cost of transport and subsistence from place of recruitment to place of employment advanced to them. The contracts were signed in the Chinese Protectorate. The wage was about \$5 a month, from which was deducted by instalments the cash advanced and expenses incurred in transit.

The vast majority of the labourers, however, were either *ex-sinkhehs* or *ex-laukhehs* who worked on short-term written or oral agreements. They were usually paid their dues after each six-monthly smelting of the tin-ore. First in numbers were the *tribute labourers*, working on the tribute system. They had no fixed wages, but either received the value of all the tin which they produced (less an agreed percentage which went to the mine owner or lessee) or sold all the tin to the owner or lessee at a fixed price. The proportion or amount of the proceeds credited or paid to each labourer was decided beforehand in accordance with mining custom. They bound themselves to take advances of money, food or supplies only from the owner or lessee, the value of the tin which they hoped to produce being the security for these debts.

Secondly, there were labourers paid time-wages (called *kongsi-kung* labourers), who were considered to be skilled workers. They were provided with free food by the employer, and worked a 7-hour day, for which they were paid every six months at the rate of \$6 to \$8 a month. They could work overtime if they wished, and for this they received six or eight cents per hour. Overtime earnings were paid every three months. They usually bought their clothing, opium and luxuries from the mine owner or advancer, but were not bound to do so.

Thirdly, there were labourers paid at piece-rates (called *nai-chiang* labourers), who were considered to be the unskilled labour. They were usually employed in removing over-burden,

helping the time-wage labourers, carrying the earth containing the ore, and repairing water-courses. For removing over-burden they were paid at so much per *chiang*, one *chiang* being 30' by 30' by 1½', and for other work as agreed. They were expected to work for 22 days of 7 hours each month. The mining advancer provided them with rice, and they were obliged to buy their requirements of opium, tobacco and oil from him. Other supplies they bought for themselves wherever they liked. Cash advances were made to them each month so that they could purchase fish, vegetables and other necessities.

Within a few years, the pattern of tin mining was to change again, with consequent new effects upon the labour in the mines. This is described in a later chapter.

Chapter VIII

EARLY PLANTATION AGRICULTURE IN THE MALAY STATES

With the appointment of British Residents in Perak, Selangor and Sungei Ujong in 1874, more settled conditions soon followed. Law and order were enforced, taxation was regularised, proper systems of land alienation were introduced, and a policy of official encouragement to economic development was adopted. Not only did Chinese tin-mining expand rapidly in the newly-found stability, as described in the previous chapter; capitalised plantation agriculture began in these States and grew into a major feature of their economy.

Two separate forces provided the impetus to set up large plantations ('estates')—the one Chinese; the other European.

The Chinese impetus came through Penang and Malacca, where there was already a certain amount of Chinese estate agriculture. In Malacca, tapioca had been grown fairly widely since about 1855, and by 1862 it was said 'tapioca has been extensively planted, the average yield from one hundred square yards being about nine pikuls, producing one pikul of pure tapioca, of which the market price is at present 2 dollars'.¹ By 1879 'the attention of Chinese capitalists has, to a considerable extent, been given to the cultivation of tapioca and similar products'.² This activity spread into Sungei Ujong, of which in the same year it was said 'several tapioca plantations are in progress; that of Mr. Wee Bon Tiong, together with his manufactory, is one of the finest in the Peninsula...'.³ By 1888 more than 4,000 acres in Negri Sembilan had been alienated for tapioca growing, mainly in the Gemencheh, Tampin and Rembau areas, near Malacca territory. In 1887 there were 9 steam-powered tapioca factories in the State, each of which could deal with the product of 5,000 acres, cropped by rotation. In 1888 there were 18 factories; in 1889 there were 25. By 1896 in the Tampin district alone there were 19 factories, which produced over 150,000 pikuls of tapioca; the

¹S.S. Annual Report 1861/2—p. 30.

²S.S. Gazette 1880—p. 804.

³Ibid—p. 507.

estates in the district 'exported over 4,000 pigs fed on tapioca refuse, were the chief consumers of 36 chests of opium, and the chief users of 350 bullock carts'. Both the growing and the processing of tapioca were carried out mainly by Chinese labour, many of whom were *sinkhehs*—mostly Hainanese, who arrived by junk at Malacca.

In Penang and Province Wellesley, sugar was already being grown on a large scale. In the 'pathless swampy jungles' of the Krian plain—the part of Perak immediately south of Province Wellesley—Chinese-owned sugar estates began to be opened in 1878 and sugar was first exported from them in 1883. The Perak annual report for 1882 mentions that:

about 11,059 acres . . . had been taken up by the enterprising Chinese merchants of Penang, on which 4,114 coolies were employed in sugar planting, and the enterprise having proved profitable a European company from Shanghai is opening a large estate in the southern part of the district.⁴

The writer of the State's 1883 report said: 'it affords me great pleasure for the first time to include an export of 93,102 piculs of sugar of the value of \$307,236.60 from the Krian District', where the 'industrious Chinese from Penang . . . have erected and are extending manufactories for the production of this article'.⁵ The labourers on the Chinese sugar estates were mainly Teochews, recruited from the Swatow area of China.

Both of these forms of agriculture continued until displaced by rubber in the early years of the next century.

European enterprise, in contrast, was slower to start plantations in the States. In 1874 some Province Wellesley planters visited Krian but decided against planting there. In 1878 several English planters from Ceylon (where the extensive coffee plantations were being ruined by disease) visited Perak and applied for 100,000 acres, but withdrew their applications because of the unsatisfactory terms for alienating land. But in 1879 Ceylon planters opened two estates in Negri Sembilan—one at Rantau, for coffee and cocoa, and the other at Pantai, for coffee and cinchona. The Sungei Ujong report for 1882 describes how:

The estates opened by European enterprise on the Pantai ranges and at Rantau still continued to thrive . . . Nothing is wanted but Tamil labour.

⁴S.S. Gazette 1883—p. 1091.

⁵S.S. Gazette 1884—p. 301.

EARLY PLANTATION AGRICULTURE IN THE MALAY STATES

A great deal has been done by the planters here towards utilising Malay labour, and large numbers of coolies come from the adjacent small estates to procure work both at Pantai and Rantau. But this labour is too expensive, and is very uncertain, as frequently at a time when the planter wants as much labour as he can get, he finds himself without a man to do the necessary work on the estate, the whole of his labour force having gone off to squander their small savings in their own country. As soon as this end has been accomplished, the men will return again, but in the meantime the mischief has been done . . .⁶

In 1881 European planting was started in Selangor, the first plantation being Weld Hill Estate at Kuala Lumpur, which began as 194 acres on which coffee, tea and pepper were grown. In 1887 it was said:

The Weld Hill estate . . . looks specially flourishing . . . The other established estates under European management, though small in extent, are reported to be doing well, and there is no doubt whatever that Liberian coffee, pepper, gambier and tea can, with Indian labour at the present rates, be grown to a profit.⁷

By 1892, however, there were still less than a dozen European-owned plantations in the State—those near Kuala Lumpur totalled 7,000 acres, of which only 1,500 acres had been cleared and planted, mainly with coffee. It was not until 1893 that 'the real boom started' and the number of European-owned estates in Selangor increased from 16 (with a cultivated area of 1,089 acres) in that year to 72 (with a cultivated area of 10,835 acres) in 1896, the labourers employed being:

		<i>Malays</i>		<i>Chinese</i>		<i>Indians</i>
1893	..	88	..	48	..	465
1894	..	254	..	181	..	938
1895	..	917	..	290	..	1,406
1896	..	969	..	533	..	2,462

5,395 cwt. of coffee was exported from Selangor in 1895, and 8,388 cwt. in 1896.

As for Perak, Miss I. L. Bird, who paid a visit there, recorded in her book published in 1883:

I have been interrupted by a visit from two disconsolate-looking Ceylon planters who have come 'prospecting' for coffee. An enterprising son of an Edinburgh 'Bailee' has been trying coffee-planting beyond the Perak, but has got into difficulties with his labourers and is 'Getting

⁶S.S. Gazette 1883—p. 1180.

⁷S.S. Gazette 1888—p. 1175.

out of it'. This difficulty about labour will possibly have to be solved by the introduction of coolies from India, for the Malays won't work except for themselves, and the Chinese prefer the excitement of mining and the evening hubbub of the mining towns, but in lonely places they are not always very manageable by people unused to them.

Even for clearing the jungle foreign labour must be employed. Perak is a healthy and splendid State, and while the low grounds are suited for sugar, tapioca and tobacco, the slopes of the hills will produce coffee, cinchona, vanilla, tea, cloves and nutmegs. It is a land of promise, but at present of promise only! I understand that to start a plantation a capital of £2,500 to £3,500 would be required. Jungle is cleared at the rate of 25s. per acre. The wages of Javanese coolies are 1s. a day and a hut which will hold fifty of them can be put up for £5. Land can be had for three years free of charge. It is then granted in perpetuity for a dollar an acre, and there is a tax of 2½ per cent on exported produce. These arrangements are not regarded as altogether satisfactory and will probably be improved upon . . .⁸

In 1884, Low wrote 'British capitalists have, with the exception of the enterprising merchants from Shanghai, as yet done little or nothing in Perak'.⁹ The British merchants from Shanghai had opened a sugar estate in Krian and by 1887 'it is now in a high state of cultivation, employs about 1,000 contract Indian coolies, is being annually extended'.¹⁰ Heslop-Hill opened two estates in 1889, for coffee, cinchona and pepper. But even in 1895 Swettenham felt able to say that 'up to the present time, planting in Perak has been confined with very few exceptions to small native cultivators'.¹¹ Nevertheless in 1896 the European coffee estates opened or being opened in Perak totalled 35,242 acres—6,405 acres of which had been alienated during the year—and in 1897 there were as many as 75 estates of over 100 acres in the State, totalling 63,188 acres, held by Chinese and Europeans. Apart from the sugar estates in Krian, there were coffee and coconut plantations in the other districts.

To obtain labour for the newly opening estates in Perak was a problem similar to that in Sungei Ujong. Malays were not interested in working on the estates. The Perak annual report for

⁸Bird—*The Golden Chersonese*—p. 357.

⁹Quoted by Swettenham—*British Malaya*—p. 262.

¹⁰S.S. Gazette 1888—p. 1143.

¹¹Swettenham—*British Malaya*—p. 298.

1889 explained that a Malay 'absolutely refuses to hire himself out as a labourer on any terms that a planter could accept. The mines absorb the attention of the Chinese, who prefer failure there to steady work and wages on an estate, and the planter's only chance of a labour force on which he can rely depends upon the natives of Southern India, whom he must import into the State on certain conditions for a term of months'.¹²

The main crop in which the European planters were interested at this time, in all the three protected States, was *Liberian coffee*. The Liberian coffee plant is a bush which begins to produce fruit about three years after planting, reaches full bearing by the sixth year, and continues to produce for 25 or 30 years. The bushes were planted about twelve feet apart, giving 300 per acre, and the annual yield of one acre was 5 to 6 pikuls of beans. The berries ripen throughout the year, but there are two main seasons, during which one labourer could pick 130-140 lbs. of berries daily. The work on an estate consisted of weeding, pruning and harvesting. After the ripe berries were collected, the coffee beans were extracted from them by a process involving pulping, fermenting and washing, and were sun-dried, sieved and winnowed, and graded for export.

The general situation was summarised in the Federated Malay States annual report for 1896, which said:

'... the number of large estate now being opened in Malaya increases so rapidly that the scarcity of labour is likely to be increasingly felt.'

'With the extension of planting operations, the labour question has become one of such importance that, if the Government of the Malay States really meant to encourage planters, it was evident that something must be done to supply them with labour. It is not a new question ...'

The European estates, unable to obtain either Malay or Chinese labourers sufficient to meet their requirements, were the source of a constant demand for South Indian labourers. The chapter that follows describes some of the difficulties in the earlier days in the way of satisfying this demand, and some of the methods which were tried to overcome them. The scale of the demand for South Indian labourers was beginning to enlarge, aggravating these difficulties.

¹²S.S. Gazette 1890—p. 1474.

INDIAN IMMIGRANT LABOUR, 1884-1904.

Until 1890 commercial agriculture was, as has been described, 'mainly of sugar, tapioca, gambier and pepper', the great development of large estate planting in the Malay States, first of coffee and later of rubber, not yet being under way. Even so, there already existed a powerful and insatiable demand for agricultural labour, especially by European employers for Tamils. Their difficulty was first to obtain enough suitable immigrants from India and then to retain them once they had been brought over. Scarcity made crimping and desertions a serious scourge.

An employer wishing to recruit immigrants would engage one of the labour-recruiting firms in Negapatam or Madras to collect labourers for him and arrange their embarkation for Penang. The firms employed sub-agents who, in their turn, employed recruiters who, apart from having to obtain a recruiting licence from a magistrate, worked under no supervision. The labourers so obtained passed through private depôts run by the firms at the port of embarkation.

The number of immigrants recruited under this system was always insufficient, their quality as labourers was often poor, and the cost of recruiting and importing them was heavy. The demand for labour increased constantly as development progressed, but the supply of indentured labourers seemed woefully limited, and there was no likelihood of finding sufficient unindentured labour. The indentured immigrants landed at Penang amounted to:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of Indentured Indian Immigrants</i>		
1881	879
1882	1,452
1883	1,450
1884	1,539
1885	1,642
1886	2,748

There was an increase to 4,736 and 4,684 in 1887 and 1888 due to a special effort to obtain more, but their quality was much

inferior to that in previous years. In 1889 and 1890 the numbers dropped back to 2,747 and 2,960. An official report in 1890 said:

The testimony on the subject of scarcity, with its attendant evils of irregularity, crimping and desertion is almost unanimous. A few employers have stated that they have just now as many coolies as they want, but . . . even of these witnesses some have stated that . . . they are debarred from extending their cultivation by the difficulty of obtaining, and still more of retaining, the necessary labourers.¹

Other countries, particularly Burma and Ceylon, were competing for Indian labourers and would offer cheaper passages, higher wages and more attractive conditions. The figures of deck passengers to the three places tell their own story:

Deck Passengers Emigrating from South India²

		<i>To Ceylon</i>	<i>To Burma</i>	<i>To Malaya</i>
1886	..	39,907	7,616	17,316
1887	..	72,660	24,642	12,156
1888	..	81,710	38,956	15,812
1889	..	64,459	38,014	15,285

A second cause of scarcity was that recruiting for Malaya had become monopolised by a few private firms, who stuck to a limited recruiting area and made no attempt to try districts further afield from which larger numbers could have been obtained. They advertised in an unsatisfactory and unscrupulous way—the example below shows the attempt of one agent to forward his own interests at the expense of others; the terms of employment promised were those of the few very best employers and did not represent general conditions, and the advertisement spoke detractingly of the Malay States:

Wanted, Coolies.³

Many coolies are wanted for Province Wellesley, near Penang, to work on coffee, tapioca and sugar plantations.

I. As soon as they arrive in Penang they must enter into a written agreement to work for three years. After the three years they can either come away or remain to work on the estate.

¹S.S. Labour Commission Report 1890, para. 281.

²Ibid, paras. 281-7.

³Ibid, para. 288.

II. Those who work on an estate will receive for the first year, males, about \$3.60 (i.e. about Rs. 8—ans.) a month. Women will receive \$2.40 (i.e., about Rs. 5 ans.) a month. If they do extra work they will receive higher wages at the above rates.

Houses, fuel and land for gardens will be given free. All expenses incurred in going to the estates, such as trainage, feeding expenses, passage money, and a cloth will be given free. Besides this, as soon as they arrive on an estate they will be presented with one month's provisions and \$1. There are shops and a good supply of water. There are doctors, who speak Tamil. Rice is sold at market price. Fish, fowl, sheep, vegetables, etc., can be got at cheap rates. Cloths, etc., are taken from here and sold at cost price. The country is quite similar to our own places, and comfortable. Many of our countrymen are working on each estate.

III. There is a Protector, and under him Assistants, who are appointed by the Government to enquire into the welfare of coolies and see that they are well treated.

IV. Fortnightly steamers run to Penang; they are comfortable and good food in board is given. They carry doctors and inspectors to look after the coolies.

V. Province Wellesley, which is adjacent to Penang, is much healthier than Perak, Sungei Ujong, etc. We hear that the water supply in Perak, Sungei Ujong, etc., is not as good as in Province Wellesley; moreover, fish is not obtainable and everything is dear: fowl which costs $\frac{1}{2}$ rupee or 5 annas in Penang will cost R. 1 or R. $1\frac{1}{2}$, and rice which in Penang can be bought for R. 1 will cost Rs. 1-12 in those places. As these countries have been newly opened, the climate does not agree with the people, and causes fever and dysentery.

We think that on account of these difficulties they offer better wages and a shorter term of contract. But if both wages and expenses and comforts are compared, Penang seems a better place for coolies.

NEGAPATAM,
16th December, 1890.

(Signed).....
Agents for Planters, Penang.

Attempts by planters to send their own men to India to recruit for them were unsuccessful because of the obstruction and opposition of the professional recruiters. The long contract (3 years) was a deterrent; it was longer than in either Burma or Ceylon, and in practice it was often much longer than three years before the labourer was able to free himself from it. Moreover, emigrants were misled about their prospects and about what they were binding themselves to; . . .

The absence of full and correct information regarding the term of contract engenders dissatisfaction, the existence of which is quickly known in

India, and contributes to the paucity of immigrants from which we suffer. It also must have a share in bringing about the excessive desertion which now takes place and which the scarcity of labour renders easy and profitable.⁴

The immigrants who came were often of poor quality, both in physique and in ability to do outdoor work, and were thus unsuitable recruits. Some of them were recruited through misrepresentation:

... in most cases when weavers, dhobies, cooks and other men break down, it is because they have been deceived by their recruiters, who tell them they will only be required to practise their own trades. Then when they are required to use the *changkol*, and do hard work, they lose heart and strength, deteriorated into 'hospital birds' and swell the death rate.⁵

The expense of obtaining recruits was heavy. The recruiters formed a close ring, held a monopoly, and could charge what they wished. The cost to the employer of a labourer arriving in Province Wellesley was about \$20. Those items which, under the law, could be recovered from the labourer's subsequent wages came only to about \$8. The remaining \$12 was the agent's charge for expenses and commission, for which a reasonable and fair amount would have been about \$4!

Following on the Indian Immigration Ordinance of 1884, the Straits Settlements Government took two steps designed to avoid some of these difficulties. The first was to grant a subsidy to the line of steamers which plied from Negapatam. This was done from the 1st June, 1887. The purpose was to let cheaper passages provide a stimulus to emigration and to enable the Government to exercise better supervision and control over the steamers, which were at the time very insanitary and in need of improvement. The Secretary of State for the Colonies, writing to approve of the arrangement, said:

I am unable to regard favourably the policy of assisting the immigration of Indian labourers at the public expense for the purpose of diminishing the cost of labour in the Colony, or rendering the employers less dependent on Chinese labour, but looking to the benefits which will be derived by the Indians from this arrangement, and the advantage to the Colony by

⁴*Ibid*, para. 294.

⁵*Ibid*, para. 299.

being protected from the influx of sick immigrants, whose treatment in hospital might impose a heavy burden on the revenues, I will not withhold my approval of the agreement.⁶

The subsidised ships, owned by the British India Steam Navigation Company, by 1890 were said to be well-appointed vessels with good accommodation, carrying Government inspectors to see to the welfare of the labourers during the voyage.

The second measure was the opening in March, 1890 of a *dépôt* at Negapatam, with a medical officer as Superintendent. The *dépôt* was under the control of the Straits Settlements Indian Immigration Department, which had its headquarters at Penang. The use of private *dépôts* was forbidden, and every labourer recruited under monetary advances had to be brought to the new *dépôt*, to which, if he was found medically fit and otherwise suitable to labour in Malaya, he was admitted. He then came under the protection (but not restraint) of the Straits Settlements Government until he embarked. The *dépôt* could accommodate 200 men. The result was that 'the establishment of a searching medical examination at Negapatam, bringing about the rejection of many coolies who would formerly have been sent, has reduced the numbers of statute coolies emigrating, although it has improved the quality'.

There were, by 1890, considerable numbers of 'free' (unindentured) Tamil labourers employed both in the Straits Settlements and in the protected Malay States. Most of them had originally come to Malaya as statute immigrants and had stayed on after completing their contracts, but some (an increasing number) were local-born. The 'free' labourers were not recruited, but applied of their own accord for work at estates requiring labourers. The Labour Commission of 1890 reported that:

The free Tamil coolie is, as a rule, well able to take care of himself, and there is no reason to suppose that he is other than well treated.⁷

Such labourers were generally paid 20 cents per day for work in Penang and Province Wellesley, and 25-30 cents (occasionally as much as 35 cts.) in the Malay States, according to the inaccessibility of the locality. On the *estates* in Province Wellesley they were paid less—16 to 18 cents a day—because they enjoyed

⁶Ibid, para. 260.

⁷Ibid, para. 315.

amenities such as free quarters, medical attention and land for gardening or grazing, and received inducements such as extra pay for Sunday work or for regular turn-out during the month.

Most employers preferred 'free' labourers to indentured labourers and, if they could have been sure of keeping them, would have employed no one else—they were more contented, better and harder workers, and of better physique. They were, however, at liberty to leave at short notice, and the scarcity of labour placed considerable inducement before them to do so. Therefore, to avoid the danger of suddenly being left without labour, employers felt compelled to employ a fair proportion of men under contract. The supply of labour was greatly below demand and indentured immigrants were considered indispensable:

Desirable as it may be to render emigration absolutely free and spontaneous, we see no way of at present accomplishing this end, and it appears to us necessary to sanction a contract of specified length, so as to enable the employer to recover by the labour of the cooly the sum advanced for the expenses of his importation.*

It was therefore not thought practicable in 1890 to adopt what some people then advocated:

... a system of free emigration similar to that of Ceylon, where no contract is made and so far as the planter is concerned his coolies are only under a verbal monthly agreement.

An employer requiring labour sends a *Tyndal* or *Kangani* to India, giving him an advance to pay expenses, and the man returns with the coolies and in due course repays the advances. By what agreement the coolies are bound to the *kangani*, who has to recover their passage money from them, is not known, the employer refraining from any interference in details.*

It was feared that the labourers and *kanganies* would keep moving on from employer to employer, leaving the importing employer in the lurch. In any case, the system placed the labourer far too much in the hands of the *kangany*.

The Labour Commission set up by the Straits Settlements Government in 1890 to inquire into 'the state of labour in the Straits Settlements and the Protected Malay States, with a view to

*Ibid, para. 368.

*Ibid.

devising a scheme for encouraging Immigration and thereby supplying the demand for labour', decided that the defects of the current system were:

First. Want of a proper agency in India, in consequence of which the recruiting area is limited, emigrants are misled as to their prospects, prices are exorbitant, and to some extent also unsuitable men are recruited . . .

Second. Insufficient attractions, as compared with other countries, and those attractions advertised too little.¹⁰

It concluded that:

Broadly, two main remedies present themselves: first, to set the machinery of recruiting in India on a footing satisfactory in every respect; and then to render the condition of service in the Straits so attractive as to compete successfully with other countries . . .¹¹

The standard of living that the indentured Tamil labourer was able to enjoy in 1890 was described by the Commission as follows:

We find that the cost of living of a cooly in Province Wellesley is from 7 to 8 cents a day, and under normal circumstances therefore the average worker should not receive less than this sum, or say \$2.40 a month. This would be a bare minimum, just sufficient to procure daily food and necessities, and makes no provision for other occasional unavoidable expenses.

The pay lists of a large number of men on three important estates have been analysed, and from the results it appears that during the first six months of a cooly's service his average number of days worked per month is 18, and during his second six months is nearly 19, or say 18.5 days per month for the first year. In addition to the pay received for these days, averages varying from 1.1 to 2.8 days pay per month were also earned for Sundays on which no work was done, so that in all these coolies earned about 20.5 days pay in the month, representing at the Province Wellesley rate of 12 cents, \$2.46 per month, or 6 cents more than the minimum we have found necessary. From this sum, however, contract advances averaging for Prye and Batu Kawan Estates 55 cents per month were deducted, so that the actual average received by the coolies was only \$1.91.

In the second year . . . about 22½ days pay at the increased rate of 14 cents, or a total of \$3.15, may be earned. The contract advances recovered average 15 cents from Prye and Batu Kawan, so that about \$3 would be the usual earnings, a sum sufficient to support the cooly.¹²

¹⁰*Ibid.*, para. 377.

¹¹*Ibid.*, para. 378.

¹²*Ibid.*, paras. 372-3.

The only regulations regarding accommodation to be provided by employers were for indentured labourers, the 1884 Ordinance obliging the employer to supply 'sufficient and proper house accommodation such as shall be considered sufficient and proper by the Indian Immigration Agent'.¹³ In practice it was found that:

The quarters provided are of every conceivable description, from the substantial well-kept buildings on some of the Province Wellesley estates to the squalid hovel we saw at (an estate in Malacca). Occasionally the lines are of bricks or other permanent materials, but as a rule they are more or less temporary structures of *attap* and *bertam*, or with mud walls. Sometimes they are partitioned into rooms of varying sizes, at other times left as open barracks. As a rule, they have verandahs from three to 10 feet in width. In some cases cooking is done inside the quarters, and in others on the verandah outside. They are never raised above the ground on posts or pillars, but the earth forms the floor, dried by a drain round the building, and in a few cases concreted. They are invariably constructed as one-story buildings, though in a few cases they are made to afford increased accommodation by temporary floors overhead either inside the rooms or in the verandah.

On the majority of estates visited the coolies' quarters were not unclean and were in fair repair.

In many cases the quarters were much overcrowded. On one estate the building is divided into a number of rooms about 10 feet square, in which six people are usually put. Other rooms in the same building are 21 feet by 14 feet, and in one of these eighteen people were living, men and women indiscriminately. Sometimes three married couples are together in one small room; in other cases one or two couples, as well as single men.¹⁴

The Commission said:

We think that a minimum floor space and a minimum cubic space per adult should be insisted on, and that a separate room should be available for every married couple.

It is interesting to compare the findings in this official report with the contemporary point of view of the European planters. Two articles in the 'Selangor Journal', written by planters, give interesting details and illustrate the standards of the time. Extracts describing working hours, wages and indebtedness, and standards of accommodation for labourers in 1894 are given below:

. . . The working hours of the different estates vary considerably, some estates working 9 hours and some 10 hours. But on most estates the

¹³S.S. Indian Immigration Ordinance 1884, Section 52.

¹⁴S.S. Labour Commission Report 1890.

working hours are from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m.—8 hours. This is by far the most convenient to the planter and that's why most of them adopt it, it leaves them free to enjoy themselves in the afternoon to go and play tennis and football. The coolies, too, prefer it to any other system; they may sit down during working hours and take their meals, and if found sitting under the shade of a coffee tree you may take it for granted that they are at just that moment taking their food.

The usual pay is 25 to 30 cents a day for a man and 20 cents for a woman. Six days work in the week entitles them to seven days pay—that is, they get their Sunday paid too. Overseers and mandors get from \$10 to \$15 a month; on some estates they get a commission for every man who turns out to work. Many planters give some money to the mandor or kangany and he again gives his advances to the coolies (in fact a cooly is nearly always in debt). This saves the planter a lot of trouble but I strongly condemn this system. The overseer should be an entirely disinterested party, and if any advances are given, you should give them yourself; but it will always be safer not to give any, neither to your kangany nor to your coolies. If your kangany advances the money to the coolies, he has all the influence over them and you are entirely in his hands.

To secure your independence work with Javanese and Tamils and, if you have sufficient experience, also with Malays and Chinese; you can then always play the one against the other . . . In case of a strike, you will never be left without labour, and the coolies of one nationality will think twice before they make their terms, if they know that you are in a position that you can do without them.¹⁵

Coolies lines, each room 12' by 12', with *jelutong* plank walls, door, and sleeping platform 12' by 6' and *atap* roof, can be built for \$25 to \$30 a room. Double lines—i.e. lines two rooms broad each facing on to a 6ft. verandah—will be found much more economical than the long single lines, besides being dearer to the heart of the gregarious cooly. Not more than six coolies should be put into each room, but the planter need have no apprehensions on the subject of mixing the sexes, as the Tamil cooly is most philosophical in this respect, a young unmarried woman not objecting in the least to reside with a family or even to sharing her quarters, if necessary, with quite a number of the opposite sex.¹⁶

The high demand for South Indian labourers (both indentured and 'free') persisted. It was not only the private employers who were guilty of poaching. The Federated Malay States Annual Report for 1896 confessed that:

The Government, either departmentally or through contractors, has taken advantage not only of the free labour that came into the country,

¹⁵Selangor Journal 1895, Vol. IV, p. 438.

¹⁶Selangor Journal 1894, No. 6—p.90.

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but, I fear, to a considerable extent, of the labour introduced by planters in the Colony and the Malay States.¹⁷

The need was not only to recruit the labourers in the first place, but also to maintain the supply. Only a small proportion of the Tamil labourers who came to Malaya stayed for long periods. Every estate had to be continually replenishing its labour force to make up for those returning to India 'or leaving for other reasons'. But the supply did not increase appreciably. The number of indentured Tamil labourers arriving annually at Penang (the port of entry) remained approximately the same for two decades:

1886	..	..	..	..	2,748
1890	..	..	..	..	2,960
1897	..	..	..	..	2,599
1898	..	..	..	..	2,989
1904	..	..	..	..	2,654

The number of South Indian deck passengers (which can be considered proportionate to the number of 'free' immigrant labourers becoming available for work) was also fairly constant:

1886	..	..	..	..	17,316
1890	..	..	..	..	18,301
1897	..	..	..	..	18,000
1898	..	..	..	..	15,825
1903	..	..	..	..	18,447

As a result of the recommendations of a Commission which sat in 1896, some restrictions were removed from the import of 'free' labourers, the length of contract of indentured labourers was reduced to two years and the wages were raised, and arrangements were made to station an agent at Negapatam and to grant assisted passages to intending immigrants.

The planters in Perak, especially as they took to sugar-growing, which expanded from Krian into Lower Perak about this time, employed a good deal of indentured labour. But in Selangor, the tendency was to employ 'free' labourers, whom the planters began to recruit in India on their own account. The problem of the European planters of Selangor is shown in the following

¹⁷F.M.S. Annual Report for 1896—p. 7.

extract from the 'Selangor Journal' of 1894, in an article written by a planter for the information of would-be planters:

The labourers available in this country are, as everyone knows, Tamils or Klings, Malays, Javanese and Chinese. To take Tamils first: as general all-round estate coolies I believe the people of this nationality, as imported direct from India, to be second to none in the world and I should advise the intending planter to secure as many of them as he can possibly find work for. Quiet, amenable to discipline, very quick to pick up and adapt themselves to any kind of work, they are when they come in from their country, or their coast as they call it, the best of servants to a just master, and they will often settle down on an estate and remain there content with considerably lower wages than they might procure elsewhere, if they are treated with fairness and consideration. A Tamil *likes* a hard master; they even have a saying that 'the master who never gets angry doesn't give good pay'; but he is worse than useless if treated unjustly.

There are three ways of obtaining these coolies over here: (1) to import them direct from India; (2) to get them over under indentures through the Government; (3) to recruit locally. The first of these methods is the only one to be recommended; but unfortunately it is such a difficult matter to get Tamils, or a sufficiency of any sort of labour in this country, that the planter often has to take on local gangs or even get indentured immigrants through the Government. It is of necessity a very risky business sending over agents in the shape of recruiting mandors or kanganies to India for coolies, the temptation to abscond with the money entrusted to them, knowing that they are practically safe from arrest in India, is very great; and, moreover, the Immigration Agents at every port not only advise all coolies that all contracts not entered into under Government auspices are null and void, but the kanganies themselves are liable to imprisonment for crimping in India. However, the man who is not prepared to run every kind of risk had better go home; this is not country for him.

The cost of coolies so imported is about \$15 per head, and they are cheap at it, for they are the best labour procurable and in course of time pay off all their advances, their wages being from 23 to 30 cents a day, according to the locality... The only thing to be said about trying to procure coolies under indenture through the Government is that the Immigration Agent himself in a recent report characterised the whole system as a gigantic failure. It would take too long to go into the question of immigrants here but speaking for myself, before I would have one such labourer on my own estate, I would rather offer 50 cents a head, if necessary, to free men of any nationality. Scarcely less desirable is the local recruit. He arrives here a humble-minded, quiet, almost naked savage, and in a few months time you see him walking around with a cheerot in his mouth, attired in a gaudy costume with a hat at one end and a pair of shoes at the other, looking in at every liquor shop he passes, and indulging

in such amusements as pulling the patient Chinaman's pigtail, or driving a pair of bullocks as hard as he can urge his poor brutes on through the busiest part of the town . . .¹⁸

The Ceylon system of kangany recruitment, considered impracticable in 1890 and desirable but difficult in 1894, was by 1898 being used considerably; the report of that year states:

The system of importing free coolies passage paid has been fairly started among the planters in the Native States, as many as 435 of this class of men arriving and passing through Penang during the year.

These coolies are collected in India by *tindals* sent over by the planters. The *tindals* take all the men to the depôt at Negapatam where the Superintendent notes their descriptions and where they obtain tickets at a reduced rate. On arrival in Penang they pass through the depôt like all other immigrants, but are not detained there and do not sign contracts, proceeding to their destinations nominally free men at liberty to leave their employer if they like.¹⁹

But the supply of labour barely kept pace with demand.

There was a change in the economic climate about this time. Because of the great fall in the market price of coffee caused by over-production in Brazil, and because, partly as a result, the planters were beginning to turn their minds towards rubber, the planting of new estate coffee ceased in 1898. The output of coffee in Malaya reached a peak in 1905 (when the Federated Malay States exported 107,218 pikuls) but fell very rapidly after that, and coffee ceased to be an important crop.

There was a rapid change in the scale of plantation operations when rubber came on the scene. It was in 1896 that some estates began to interplant with rubber; in 1897 there were 345 acres under rubber; by 1900 the number of trees was still small and the crop had been systematically planted on only one or two estates. However, by the end of 1905 the planted area had jumped to 40,000 acres and by 1906 to over 85,000 acres. The export of dry rubber was 130 tons in 1905 and 385 tons in 1906.

The *cultivation of rubber* was carried out as follows. Once the land was cleared, trees were planted as seedlings at between 100 and 200 to the acre and were subsequently thinned out to 100 or less per acre. After six years or so, during which they needed to be

¹⁸Selangor Journal, Vol. III, No. 3—pp. 44-6.

¹⁹S.S. Annual Report for 1898, paras. 53 and 54.

kept weeded and drained and free from pests, the trees came into bearing, the crop consisting of 'latex', a whitish milk which oozes from the tree when the bark is cut. The trees were 'tapped' daily or every other day, tapping meaning to make a cut around half of the circumference of the tree, sloping slightly downwards, so that the latex flowed down the cut and collected in a cup at the bottom of the cut. At each tapping about one-twentieth of an inch of bark was pared away, to set the latex flowing. The latex flows for about three hours, after which it is collected from the cups and taken back to a central point on the estate to be coagulated, by adding chemicals, to become rubber. The coagulation is done in pans or tanks, to produce sheets about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick, which are then passed through rollers to reduce them to $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick and hung up to drip-dry for a few hours before being placed in a smokehouse for a few days to be fully smoked (to prevent the formation of mould) and dried. The finished product, called 'smoked sheet', was then exported. Alternative methods, introduced later, produced crepe rubber (and, much later still, some estates began to add a preservative instead of a coagulant, and exported the liquid latex). The bulk of the work on a rubber estate, apart from the weeding, consisted of tapping the trees and collecting the latex. Each labourer ('tapper') was given a 'task' of 250 to 300 trees, which he tapped between dawn and 9.30 a.m.; he then collected the latex from his trees, completing this by about noon.

The price of rubber boomed in 1906 and again in 1910-1912, each boom stimulating planting tremendously, and from 1905 to 1920 the story of rubber is one of high prices, expanding markets and increasing acreages. The snowballing increase in the establishment of rubber estates caused a rapid rise in the demand for labour. New and drastic measures proved necessary to meet it. These are described in the next chapter.

Chapter X

THE INDIAN IMMIGRATION FUND AND THE SUPPLY OF INDIAN LABOURERS

Various measures were tried during the first few years of the century to increase and improve the supply of South Indian labourers.

In 1903, the Straits Settlements authorities introduced a system for licensing recruiters of statute immigrants and took over the recruitment of this type of labour and its allocation to employers. The result was a drop from Rs. 51 to Rs. 38 in the cost of recruiting an indentured labourer and bringing him to Penang. A new Indian Immigration Ordinance, passed in 1904, substituted a definite term of 600 days labour for the previous two-year contract, fixed wages of indentured immigrants on a rupee basis (to avoid fluctuations due to variations in the value of the Straits dollar) at 7 annas for males and 5 annas for females per day worked, gave the power to prohibit the employment of statute immigrants at places where conditions were unsatisfactory, and made it obligatory for estates to have hospitals.

In 1904, a system of providing a limited quantity of free tickets from Madras and Negapatam to Penang and Port Swettenham was introduced. The aim was to attract a greater number of 'free' labourers, the cost of whose passage had hitherto been included in the 'advances' which their employers were entitled to deduct from their wages. 4,600 and 1,330 free tickets respectively were allocated annually for three years to the United Planters Association and the Malay Peninsula Agricultural Association. The Public Works Department adopted a similar system of tickets—'they are issued to labourers or mandors here; and these mandors or labourers send them to their relations or friends in their villages in India, advising them that these tickets are exchangeable in Madras or Negapatam for a free passage to the place of employment on this side'. These were all included within the arrangement by which the F.M.S. Government had guaranteed the annual purchase of 8,000 tickets from Negapatam to Penang at the reduced rate of Rs. 11, compared with the ordinary rate of Rs. 15.

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The recruitment of so-called 'free' labourers by kanganies expanded, the numbers increasing as follows:

1898	..	..	..	..	435
1903	..	..	..	..	2,064
1904	..	..	..	..	3,527
1905	..	..	..	..	7,543

'These coolies are recruited by kanganies or recruiters licensed by Government to collect labour for a particular employer. Properly speaking, a kangany should recruit from his own village in India, and so long as he does so and only brings over coolies who are personally known to him, the system is an excellent one. There are, however, reasons for thinking that some kanganies prefer to stay in Negapatam or Madras and pick up coolies who have been rejected as physically unfit to emigrate under indenture'.¹

At this time, the indentured Indian labourers were in demand mainly for the sugar and tapioca plantations of Province Wellesley and Perak. The coffee and rubber estates of Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan employed kangani-recruited 'free' labour. Arguments about the comparative merits of indentured and unindentured labour arose—especially as some estates in unhealthy areas found it difficult to obtain and retain 'free' labourers and were inclined to fall back on indentured labour. The Superintendent of Immigrants said in his annual report for 1906:

The question of the relative advantages of indentured and unindentured labour has, of late, been brought somewhat prominently before the public. While there is no doubt that the employment of indentured labour at places where there is no efficient inspection by Government officers is liable to give rise to irregularities, yet when there is proper inspection and the estate is fairly healthy, I do not think that the condition of an indentured cooly is any worse than that of an unindentured one. An indentured cooly who works out his time is not called upon to repay any portion of the cost of recruiting or of importation. Further, in comparing the respective statistics as to deaths, desertions, etc., of indentured immigrants it should be remembered that every indentured immigrant has to be accounted for in some way or other; while in the case of unindentured immigrants the figures given are never strictly accurate, as the coolies are free to leave at any time on a month's notice. At the same time, it must be admitted that where an estate that has

¹Indian Immigration Department Annual Report for 1905.

previously employed only unindentured labour desires to engage indentured immigrants, the reason is generally that, for some cause or other, the estate has become unpopular with immigrants.

There were, however, other opinions about indentured labour. Mr. A. Huttenbach, a prominent Penang unofficial and business man, wrote in 1902:

As long as this odious system lasts, the Straits will never get the good name and prove the attraction they deserve. Instead of trying to bolster it up, statute immigration should in the interests of immigration generally, and also as a matter of justice to the coolie, be abolished forthwith.¹

The Commission of 1910 appointed by the F.M.S. Government to enquire into the conditions of indentured labourers came to the conclusion that the wages paid to them were lower than necessary. Moreover, they were generally employed on task work (i.e. were made to do a certain fixed amount of work in order to earn their day's pay) and this led to abuses—for instance, on one estate:

From an examination of the books and information given by the conductor, it appears that when a cooly completes his day's task in a day he is credited with 25 cents; when he does not complete it, 'P' is entered to show that he was present at work and performed a portion but not the whole of his task; no wages are entered against his name on that day, but he is credited with 25 cents on the succeeding day when he has completed the already partly performed task. An examination of the books disclosed no single instance in which such a cooly was credited with a sum larger than 25 cents for a day succeeding one on which a 'P' was recorded—that is to say, that whenever a cooly performed only part of his task on one day, on the succeeding day he never did more than complete the remaining portion of the previous day's task, unless indeed the tasks continued to overlap the days, and every day saw the completion of some task until the recurrence of another 'P' in the account.

... I took a sample of the work performed by a gang of 27 male statute immigrants (the oldest on the estate; seasoned coolies) for the fortnight ending 31st August, 1909; they were recorded as doing 269 days work and earning \$67.25=9.9 days work done and \$2.49 wages earned, per man, per fortnight. There were, however, 68 days in the fortnight under which 'P' was entered; if these days be added to the 269 it gives an average outturn to work of 12.4 days in the fortnight. Moreover, none of these 68 days were credited towards the completion of the coolies' contracts. In considering this task work, it is not easy to decide whether the system is being fairly worked or not.

¹Quoted in S.S. Labour Department Report for 1922.

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The same report recorded that the house accommodation for indentured Indian labourers was not always satisfactory, that pressure was often put on the labourer to work on Sundays even though he might already have worked six days in the week and could not under his contract be compelled to work more, and that instances of actual cruelty, although uncommon, were not unknown. There was a tremendous difference between the death-rates of indentured and unindentured labourers. This was in spite of the rigorous medical check carried out at the depôts at Negapatam and Madras, which resulted in the rejection of a considerable proportion of the intending indentured immigrants brought to the depôts by the licensed recruiters—the following figures are an example:

			<i>Brought to the Depôts in India</i>		<i>Rejected</i>
1905	..	..	7,944	..	2,624
1906	..	..	6,467	..	2,395
1907	..	..	9,871	..	3,386

The figures of deaths and hospital admissions of indentured Indian labourers in the F.M.S. were:

		<i>Average population of indentured labourers</i>		<i>Deaths</i>		<i>Admissions to Government and estate hospitals</i>
1902	..	4,008	..	351	..	6,569
1904	..	1,184	..	58	..	4,127
1906	..	3,515	..	289	..	7,262
1908	..	4,983	..	423	..	6,058
1910	..	3,041	..	115	..	3,037
1912	..	238	..	2	..	48

The 1910 Commission's report said:

On several estates where free labourers are employed and have been comparatively healthy, indentured labourers have had a very high death-rate, even though the unindentured men continued to suffer little, and in such cases where the general conditions of water supply, house accommodation and sanitary arrangements are obviously not at fault I agree

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with Mr. Haynes in attributing the high death-rates to a combination of the following reasons:

- (1) The indentured labourer is generally disgusted with his lot, as he thinks he has been deceived. He finds that he gets only 25 cents a day and is bound down to work for 600 days, whereas he might have come over as a free cooly at a higher wage, and he sees free labourers working by his side and earning anything up to 50 cents a day, but upon him is the stigma of indenture;
- (2) His freedom is restricted by watchmen and others whose duty it is to see that he does not leave the estate;
- (3) As a rule, his work is harder and his hours are longer than those of the free coolies;
- (4) He is compelled to turn out to work every day, whether he feels inclined to do so or not. His so-called 'laziness' may often be indisposition possible due to malaria or ankylostomiasis. These conditions engender a state of mind which renders many indentured Indian labourers careless as to whether they live or die and lessens their power of resisting disease.
- (5) I also think that the higher death-rate is partly due to the desertion of numbers of the strongest and healthiest labourers, the weaker sicklier ones lacking the energy to abscond.²

A fair proportion of the indentured Indian labourers deserted their employers. Under the law they could be apprehended and compelled to work out the period of their contracts. The figures for desertions and recaptures were:

		<i>Average population of indentured labourers</i>		<i>Desertions</i>		<i>Recaptures</i>	
1902	..	4,008	..	387	..	91	
1904	..	1,184	..	244	..	61	
1906	..	3,515	..	444	..	63	
1908	..	4,983	..	788	..	189	
1910	..	3,041	..	351	..	43	

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that attempts to meet the new demand for labour by recruiting large numbers of labourers under indenture were out of the question.

Kangany-recruited labourers were themselves not, under the existing conditions, completely satisfactory or treated completely

²F.M.S. Labour Commission Report 1910.

satisfactorily. Perhaps in order to discourage them from absconding, some employers persistently paid wages late.

Payment by the system of one or two months in arrear is wrong in principle, though it may appear to be in the interests of the employers; it is not so. Labourers again and again express the wish that their accounts be settled monthly as, they say, they do not remember, if payment is made after two or three months, how many days they have worked during the month for which such payment is made. This creates want of confidence which is so essential for the maintenance of a labour force on an estate.⁴

These labourers, recruited under advances, tended to be very much in the hands of the kanganies:

The recovery of passage money and advances from free labourers is left by some estate managers to their *mandors*. It is the seed of an evil system. The *mandors*, more often men recruited from the coolie ranks, keep accounts and recover money from the labourers on the pay day. They charge interest. The *mandors* are made responsible to the manager for whatever money has been spent upon the labourers. This is a vicious system. The *mandors* generally do not keep the labourers under them informed of the state of their accounts. When these accounts are kept by the Manager direct with the cooly, the man is content. If payment is regular and monthly, I am sure there will be no need to make advances to the labourers for their provisions, as they will be able to finance themselves without buying from shop men at credit prices.⁵

The Indian Immigration Department annual report for 1908 summaries the position as follows:

The recovery from unindentured coolies by employers of advances and expenses incurred before importation is forbidden by the Labour Enactment, but the law on this point has been fairly generally disregarded . . . with the result that in many cases sums have been debited to coolies on the strength of kanganies' accounts which they certainly never received and were not expended on their behalf. There has also been a tendency to detain unindentured coolies against their will on estates until the sums debited against them have been paid off.⁶

It is clear that considerable improvement was necessary before it could be hoped to attract the desired substantial increase in the flow of unindentured labourers.

More drastic measures than those described earlier in this chapter were necessary to overcome the shortage of labourers,

⁴Indian Immigration Department Annual Report for 1904.

⁵Ibid 1904.

⁶Ibid 1908.

the difficulty of recruiting them, the expense of importing them, and the problem of keeping them, once imported, in the face of desertion and crimping. The annual report of the Indian Immigration Department for 1906 said:

As the rubber already planted comes into bearing, the labour force required to deal with land now under cultivation will increase, and it is to be hoped that means may be found for securing (enough immigrants).

In 1907, the Department reported:

The supply of labour, although better than in any previous year, was still unequal to the demand. The demand is, however, for labour at a reasonable price . . .

There had for years been complaints that many employers who did not themselves import labour 'habitually engage Tamil labour which they attract away from the service of the original importer.' 'An employer who sees his neighbours profiting by the labour of coolies who he has been at the trouble and expense of importing has . . . a distinct grievance'. As an example, the total labour force on estates in Selangor and Negri Sembilan rose from 10,077 to 19,354 during 1906, but in the same year 3,182 of those labourers absconded—'Though some may have sought employment on other estates in Selangor and Negri Sembilan, many (if not most) sought employment on various mines in Selangor, or were engaged outside these States, possibly in Perak, but certainly in Johore and Malacca'.⁷

In 1906 the Resident-General of the Federated Malay States visited India and, in a report made on his return, recommended the appointment of a Straits Settlements or F.M.S. Government officer to be Emigration Agent in India; the formation of an Immigration Committee of two officials and two unofficials, the chairman to be the Superintendent of Indian Immigrants; and the passing of a law to require all immigrant labour to be imported under the Committee's direct supervision. These recommendations were carried out. In May 1907 the Emigration Agent was selected and set up his headquarters at Madras, with the duty of exercising more systematic control over recruiter's 'coolies' for Malaya—'more careful supervision is necessary because of the recent large increase in the number of immigrants and the reckless

⁷Ibid 1906.

commission paid by one or two employers'—and at the same time land was obtained at Negapatam on which to build a large depôt to accommodate unindentured labourers awaiting shipment. This was opened in 1908 and was known as 'Kangany Camp'. Above all, the Immigration Committee was appointed

to advise the Government on questions connected with the introduction of labour from India, Java and elsewhere, and its employment on estates, the construction of public works and otherwise.

The Superintendent of Indian Immigrants had previously suggested that 'a scheme by which all employers of Tamil labour should bear a portion of the cost of importation should not be an impossibility and an arrangement might be devised by which the grant of free tickets formed part of some arrangement for the improvement of the labour supply'.⁸

At the first meeting of the Committee, one of the two unofficial members, J. Turner (who had charge of various estates in Penang and Province Wellesley and was president of the Malay Peninsula Agricultural Association and the Perak Planters Association, as well as being a Legislative Councillor) stated that what was required was one grand scheme for the introduction of labour on a large scale, in meeting the cost of which *all* employers of imported labour should participate. The Committee agreed and was in favour of taxation to meet the cost of importing labour, feeling that a poll tax would be best. Turner then proposed a scheme whereby ships would carry all labourers from the depôt at Negapatam at a fixed rate, the bills to be paid by the Immigration Committee out of the money raised by taxation. A later meeting agreed on the draft of a law setting up an Indian Immigration Fund—'*The Tamil Immigration Fund Enactment*'—and this was passed and brought into force at the beginning of 1908.

The law was designed first to make all employers of Tamil labourers bear their fair share of the cost of importing them, secondly to prevent the deduction of large amounts from the labourers' wages on account of recruiting expenses, thirdly to attract more labourers by assuring a prospect of good wages free of excessive deductions, and fourthly to prevent malpractices by recruiters and kanganyes in India.

⁸Ibid 1906.

The system was that:

an assessment on the amount of work done by their coolies is levied on all employers of Tamil labour, and the proceeds are devoted to paying the passages over from India of all Tamil coolies. A kangany recruiting for a particular estate can obtain free passages for the coolies he collects if he is provided with a licence issued by the Immigration Committee. The licence is signed by the employer, who guarantees certain wages and undertakes that the deduction that can be made from those wages on account of all expenses incurred on the coolies' behalf before his arrival on the estate shall in no case exceed a certain maximum. If any employer is found to be making deduction from the coolies' wages to an amount larger than this maximum, then free passages from India will no longer be granted to coolies for his estate.⁹

Thus in 1908,

free passages were granted from the Immigration Fund to all independent labourers applying for them and to employers for coolies imported by them, on condition that the assessment was not to be deducted from wages and that the deduction from wages on account of all advances and expenses incurred previous to the arrival of the immigrant at his place of employment were in no case to exceed Rs. 12.¹⁰

This was only the beginning. Later in the year the scheme was expanded to defray the expenses incurred in India, as well as the actual cost of the sea passage. It was also arranged to pay an allowance for recruiting expenses to the employer for each adult labourer imported from India, on condition that the labourer was landed in Malaya free from debt and that no deductions would be made from his wages on account of advances or expenses incurred in India. The allowance was \$3 for a male immigrant recruited by a kangany, \$3.50 for a female immigrant recruited by a kangany, and \$2 for an immigrant recruited through the Indian Immigration Department. It was considered, with complete justification in the light of what followed, that these arrangements would 'act as a powerful inducement to coolies to emigrate to these parts'.¹¹

In mid-1909 the recruiting allowance paid to the employer from the Fund was increased to \$4.50 per kangany-recruited labourer, and it was made obligatory for all labourers to be brought to their place of employment free of all debt, *whether to*

⁹Ibid 1907.

¹⁰Ibid 1908.

¹¹Ibid 1908.

employer or kangany. 'The rapid increase in the number of kangany coolies that have come across, since the new rule became known in India, would appear to show that *the fact that coolies are now brought on to the estates free of debt acts as a powerful attraction*'.¹²

Later in 1909 the scheme was expanded to pay the railway fares of the recruited labourers from their districts in India to the port of embarkation. Local agents were appointed at the various recruiting centres in India to assist kanganies.

There was an enormous increase in the number of kangany-recruited labourers in 1910—indeed, 'the number of coolies that came over from India in the months of May, June and July were, however, so large that the bills for passage money absorbed all the balance to the credit of the Immigration Fund, leaving nothing available for recruiting allowances. The payment of recruiting allowances was therefore suspended' (but the arrears were paid in the following year)—and at the end of the year the recruiting of indentured Indian labourers ceased completely *and was never renewed*. It was forbidden by law in 1914.

Most of the immigrants had hitherto come through Negapatam. But in 1911 there was a considerable increase in the number who came through Madras, and:

A kangany camp at Avadi, near Madras, was first used in May. All coolies for shipment at Madras are collected at this camp, and sent to the wharf by special train on the day of shipment, so that coolies recruited up-country do not now enter the streets of Madras.¹³

In the same year, it became necessary to sound a word of warning to employers:

The affluence and power acquired by many of the kanganies is a matter which requires the careful attention of all employers of labour; kanganies can make themselves very useful in obtaining labour and in every matter affecting its employment on the estate; but it is dangerous to allow them to get too much control into their hands at the expense of the personal influence of the manager of the estate. There are indications of such a state of affairs existing at present at some places; it will be a serious menace to the stability of labour forces throughout the country if this tendency becomes much accentuated.¹⁴

¹²Ibid 1909.

¹³Ibid 1911.

¹⁴Ibid 1911.

From the beginning of 1912, the quarantine expenses of immigrants—on many occasions shiploads of immigrants had to be quarantined because of cases of cholera or smallpox—which had hitherto been paid by the importing employer, were paid from the Fund. In 1912 the revenue collected by the Fund was \$1,189,308, and the expenditure was as follows:

Passages from India	\$372,368
Train fares in India	51,089
Quarantine expenses	165,343
Recruiting allowances	215,912

The Fund by this time applied to all the Straits Settlements (except Singapore) and all the Malay States (except Trengganu and Perlis, both relatively unimportant). The revenue of the Fund was increased from 1912, when it was made obligatory for any employer taking on a locally-engaged Indian labourer to send in a fee of \$1, together with the man's name and particulars of his previous place of employment.

In 1912 it became necessary for the newly-formed Labour Department to issue a disclaimer, saying:

The Indian Immigration Fund is not part of the general revenue of the Government. It is administered solely in the interests of the importers of Indian labour, by the Controller of Labour, under the authority of the Indian Immigration Committee, which at present consists of three official and six unofficial members. The Government is the largest contributor to the Fund through the assessment it pays on account of all labourers from the Madras Presidency employed in the Railway and Public Works Departments, by the various Sanitary Boards and by other departments.¹³

In 1914, the use of the Fund was extended to pay the cost of local fares by bus, rail or steamer from the port of disembarkation in Malaya to the place of employment. It could then be said with truth:

The Committee now accept responsibility for the payment of practically the whole cost of bringing labourers from their own homes to their places of employment, with the exception of the commission paid to the kangany, agency charges and the cost of feeding in the depôts here pending distribution. As the employer also receives from the Fund \$4 for every labourer recruited by him, recruiting would cost him very little more than the assessment rate paid to the Immigration Fund, provided that the commissions to kangany are kept within reasonable limits.¹⁴

¹³Labour Department Annual Report for 1912.

¹⁴Ibid 1914.

In the same year, indentured Indian labour was made illegal.

The success of the Fund, and the arrangements it paid for, in encouraging an increased and steady flow of South Indian labour into Malaya is clear from the figures for assisted immigrants from South India. The Fund began in 1908, but it was not until 1910 that the new arrangements could be considered completely under way and widely known in India. The number of kangany licences jumped from 1,225 in 1908 to 6,278 in 1910. The figures for assisted Indian immigrants into all Malaya were:

<i>Year</i>		<i>Assisted Immigrants</i>		<i>Non-assisted Immigrants</i>
1907	..	24,709	..	30,334
1908	..	20,049	..	29,017
1909	..	20,288	..	25,409
1910	..	<u>56,002</u>	..	25,198
1911	..	<u>78,356</u>	..	30,115
1912	..	<u>73,761</u>	..	33,257
1913	..	<u>91,236</u>	..	27,347

The figures for the Federated Malay States were even more revealing:

<i>Year</i>		<i>Assisted Immigrants</i>		<i>Non-assisted Immigrants</i>
1907	..	24,302	..	10,500
1908	..	17,758	..	9,000
1909	..	17,687	..	8,000
1910	..	<u>50,475</u>	..	8,000
1911	..	<u>67,403</u>	..	11,000
1912	..	<u>65,102</u>	..	12,000
1913	..	<u>80,485</u>	..	9,000

The number of kangany licences increased correspondingly:

<i>Year</i>					<i>Licences</i>
1904	..	..	..	..	280
1906	..	..	..	..	938
1908	..	..	..	..	1,225
1910	..	..	..	..	6,278
1912	..	..	..	..	10,145

INDIAN IMMIGRATION FUND AND SUPPLY OF INDIAN LABOURERS

The number of South Indian labourers entering the three main developing Federated Malay States during these years was:

Year	Perak	Selangor	Negri Sembilan
1907 ..	3,007	18,251	2,863
1908 ..	1,986	13,695	2,060
1909 ..	2,292	13,381	1,869
1910 ..	8,873	35,074	6,358
1911 ..	22,173	36,179	8,552
1912 ..	19,375	37,531	7,491
1913 ..	24,608	43,528	5,149

The number of indentured South Indian labourers recruited for Malaya dropped correspondingly, until recruitment ceased:

Year	Indentured Labourers		
1904	2,654
1905	4,823
1906	3,674
1907	5,499
1908	5,456
1909	4,119
1910	2,523
1911	Nil

And the Indian population of various areas in Malaya increased in a spectacular manner over the years as the following census figures show:

Year	Malacca	Perak	Selangor	Negri Sembilan	Johore
1891	1,647	15,143	3,592	1,117	—
1901	1,276	35,037	16,847	5,526	—
1911	7,527	74,771	74,079	18,248	5,669
1921	18,857	134,215	132,561	33,658	24,184

The area planted with rubber rose during the years as follows:

Year	Acres	
1889	4,000
1905	127,000
1910	1,125,000
1920	2,475,000

With the introduction of the recruiting system set up under the Tamil Immigration Fund, and its unquestionable success from 1910 onwards, it was soon clear that the problem of ensuring sufficient Indian labour for the newly-developing rubber estates had been solved.

The general procedure of recruitment in India in due course settled down to the following. To obtain a licence from the Controller of Labour, the Kangany had to be an Indian of the labouring classes who had been previously employed as a labourer under the employer for whom he intended to recruit. His licence, which was filled up by his employer, stated the number of labourers he was authorised to recruit, the rate of commission payable to him, and the period of validity of the licence—usually 50; \$10 per adult; and 6 months, respectively. The licence had to be registered at the Labour Department in Penang, at the Emigration Depôt in India, and with the Financial Agents of the estate in India. The kangany had to confine his recruiting to his relations and friends and was allowed to recruit only in the district of his native village. His recruits had to be entrained at the railway station nearest to his village and he had to obtain a railway receipt for the train fares paid by him. The more important railway stations had agents maintained by the emigration authorities whose duties were to check the labourers passing through and to repay the train fares where the kangany was unable to do so. These agents also enabled a check to be kept on the number of labourers entrained at the authorised station, since it was forbidden to pick up labourers *en route*. On arrival at Negapatam, the labourers were not allowed to be taken to eating shops or other places in the town, in case substitution might take place, but were met by a clerk from the Emigration Depôt and conducted to the Depôt. There, they were lined up for examination and those whose hands showed no evidence of manual labour were rejected. They were also closely questioned as to their desire to emigrate and any whose answers were not satisfactory were rejected. There was very little chance of a labourer being shipped across to Malaya if his relatives or his employer were anxious to prevent it—every morning in the Depôt, at ten o'clock, all the labourers were made

to sit in rows, and a procession of claimants was conducted up and down the lines. If single women or minors were brought in soon before the next sailing date, they were delayed for one shipment in case claimants turned up. Labourers rejected at the *Depôt* were handed over each day to the Financial Agents of the estate, and the emigration authorities made arrangements for their return journeys and their subsistence on the way back, the cost being recovered from the kangany concerned or, failing that, from the recruiting estate. Recruits were rejected on the grounds of physical unfitness, debility or old age, suspicion that single women or minors had been improperly recruited, suspicion that the labourers had been picked up *en route* from professional recruiters or places outside the kangany's authorised areas, previous employment in Malaya on estates other than the present recruiting estate, or that the labourer was not an agricultural labourer or an otherwise suitable person to send across.

On the day of sailing, the labourers first ate their meal and were lined up for final inspection, to have their clothes disinfected and to confirm once again that they were willing to emigrate. They were then taken over by the staff of the shipping agents, a numerical register of them was made, estate by estate, and each labourer was given a tin ticket showing the registered number of the estate to which he was bound. They embarked in lighters at the *depôt* jetty, sailed past the port office where they were checked again by the port staff and the police, and went on board the steamer, to start the trip to Malaya.¹⁷

By 1912, the new system had been firmly established and was a clear success, meeting the needs of the expansion of rubber production. In 1910, there was a very rapid increase in the world demand for rubber and the price rose quickly to 12 shillings a pound. During the resulting boom from 1910 to 1912, many new rubber companies were formed. By 1919, plantation rubber had largely replaced jungle rubber (from Brazil) in the world market. The export from Malaya rocketed from 200 tons in 1905 to 196,000 tons in 1920.

¹⁷Appendix to Labour Department Annual Report for 1922.

In 1918 there were 2,131 employers who were contributors to the Indian Immigration Fund, distributed as follows:

Penang, Province Wellesley and the Dindings	122
Malacca	74
Perak	651
Selangor	758
Pahang	47
Johore	90
Kedah	147
Kelantan	17
Perlis	6
Singapore	26
Negri Sembilan	193

The Straits Settlements Indian Immigration Department, which formally had been a branch of the Penang Chinese Protectorate, was separated from the latter in 1908. The State Immigration Departments in the F.M.S., which had been under the direct supervision of the British Residents of the States, were amalgamated into a Federal Department in 1905. In 1912, both were amalgamated into a newly-formed *Labour Department* of the Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States, under a Controller of Labour, with headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. In the same year the F.M.S. Labour Code was passed, consolidating into one law the provisions of the various separate laws about labour matters which it superseded. The labour laws of the Straits Settlements were similarly consolidated into one enactment in 1920. These laws applied to labourers of all races.

During this period, the question of 'desertion' continued to be a problem to employers, as the following extracts from reports show. In Negri Sembilan in 1910, for example, it was said:

'The number of desertions was large: 1,728 on an average labour force of 8,690, or 19.88 per cent . . . There is, I think, no doubt that some planters do not admit the right of their coolies to leave on a month's notice, and a number of the 'desertions' reported would probably not be held to be illegal if the circumstances were fully known.'¹⁸

¹⁸Indian Immigration Department Annual Report for 1910.

In 1913, for the whole of the Federated Malay States, the report showed that, even allowing for the intransigence of some employers, the difficulty was genuine:

The numbers shown as having deserted during the year are again very large, amounting to 43,728 out of an average labour population of 153,662. It is probable that these figures are an overstatement of the case, as many employers give a wide interpretation to the terms 'desertion' and are inclined to classify all labourers under that heading who leave their employment against the employer's wishes, whether there has been an infringement of the law or not.

When all allowances have been made, however, there is no doubt that the number of desertions among Indian labourers constitutes a grave handicap to employers who import this class of labour. It is now generally recognised that a remedy cannot be sought in the direction of restricting, directly or indirectly, the liberty of the labourer, but must be attempted by the unremitting efforts on the part of employers to improve the health and other conditions on places of employment, and on the part of the Indian Immigration Committee to increase the facilities, while reducing the cost to individual importers of bringing labourers from India.¹⁹

Government itself appears to have been a culprit:

Indians represent by far the greater proportion of labourers employed by Government, and only 733 out of an average population of 20,383 were imported from India. But it should be remembered that the Government, besides contributing as employer to the Indian Immigration Fund, meet the entire cost of establishing and maintaining the depôts at Madras, Negapatam, Penang and Port Swettenham, and also pay a subsidy to the steamship company which conveys the immigrants from India.

The temporary character of much of the labour recruited by Government departments also presents special difficulties in the way of recruiting labour from India, which do not arise on estates where the place and nature of employment are more settled.²⁰

The dimensions of the problem are described below:

The number of desertions of Indian labourers reported during the year amounted to 40,028 as compared with 39,921 reported in 1914... The figures vary but little from year to year. 28.45 per cent were reported as leaving their employment without notice in 1913, 26.61 per cent in 1914, and 29.05 per cent in 1915...²¹

¹⁹Labour Department Annual Report for 1913.

²⁰Ibid 1913.

²¹Ibid 1914.

But as the success of the new Immigration Fund system became more assured, and as the labour requirements of the country became more stabilised, the difficulty gradually ceased, and by 1917 it is clear that 'desertion' had rapidly dropped to a minor instead of a major problem:

The actual amount of labour in the four States is the greatest there has ever been and in spite of complaints from individuals estates of shortage of labour it would be incorrect to say there has been any real scarcity. What is true is that largely to meet the requirements of further extensions of the area of cultivation there is a continued demand for further supplies of labour, to meet which demand the supply has hitherto been readily forthcoming.²²

The system of assisted immigration under the Indian Immigration Ordinance had thus solved the problem of ensuring an adequate supply of South Indian labourers both for estates and for Government works.²³

²²*Ibid* 1917.

²³Statistical tables are compiled from annual reports of the Indian Immigration Department and the Labour Department.

Chapter XI

JAVANESE LABOURERS

The search for labourers to work on the large-scale plantations in the Malay States was not confined to India and China. The over-populated island of Java, in the Netherlands Indies, was also a source of immigrants. The availability of labour from Java was known fairly early, and the number of such persons signing contracts in the Singapore Chinese Protectorate was:

1886	..	..	..	..	2,741
1887	..	..	..	..	3,589
1888	..	..	..	..	4,931
1889	..	..	..	..	4,974
1890	..	..	..	..	5,133

Nearly all these contracts, however, were for service in Borneo or elsewhere outside Malaya, and although Miss Bird in 1883 mentioned the employment of Javanese labourers in Perak, it was officially stated in 1890 that 'no very large number of this class of labourers is employed either in the Straits Settlements or the Native States'.¹ But the 1890 Labour Commission thought that 'every reasonable measure should be taken to encourage the importation of Javanese labour'.

This was done, although the numbers obtained were much less than the numbers of Indian or Chinese. The F.M.S. Labour Commission of 1910 reported that an estate requiring Javanese labour would (through European firms in Java or certain firms in the Straits Settlements) send a petition through the consul in Penang or Singapore to the Governor-General of the Netherlands Indies. The labourers were actually procured by native recruiters, and were paddy planters or sugar planters (or sometimes syces and domestic servants). The *Netherlands Indian Labourers Protection Enactment 1909* of the Straits Settlements governed their employment. The original contracts were in Dutch and varied considerably, but were usually for three years and 'most employers prefer to bind the labourer for the longest period

¹S.S. Labour Commission Report 1890—para. 225.

recognised by law'. The cost of importing a labourer varied between \$57 and \$67, of which from \$10 to \$30 (usually about \$15) was recoverable from his wages in instalments not larger than \$2 a month.

The wages varied—for men, from 35 cents a day plus 10 cents ration allowance, to 25 cents a day with free food; and for women, from 25 cents a day plus 10 cents ration allowance, to 15 cents a day with free food. It was said that 'as a rule the labourer is fairly well housed in lines raised some feet above the ground', lines which were of good design and fairly clean. Health was satisfactory—much better than for indentured Indians—since 'the Javanese is suited to the climate, which indeed closely resembles that of his native country, and is less liable to contract disease than the Tamil'.² The Javanese labourer was on the whole well treated by his employer, because he was 'inclined to resent ill-treatment' and it was 'not possible to make a slave of him'.

The 1910 Commission stated:

It is satisfactory to record that on many estates a large proportion of the labourers re-engage for a further period of 300 days service, while of the rest a fair number remain on the estate as free labourers. Such re-engagement is the best proof that the labourer is contented, and satisfied with the conditions of his employment. As a rule a higher rate, in some cases as much as 60 cents per diem, is paid to men on second or subsequent contracts and to free labourers.

This is not to suggest, however, that everything was completely satisfactory. The Commission reported that:

Most employers prefer to set their labourers *tasks*, as when so employed they are said to work better and require less supervision. If the task is a fair one the labourer is probably not averse to the system, as he may frequently finish his task and return to the lines earlier than if employed on ordinary day work. On some estates where most of the labourers are employed on task work, it is, I understand, the rule that if the task for the day is not finished the labourer receives no name—i.e. no pay for that day—but has to finish the task the following day, receiving a 'name' for that day only. On other estates a 'half name'—i.e. half a day's pay—is given for an unfinished task, and the frequent occurrence of 'half names' in the checkrolls, together with the poor wages earned by many of the coolies during the month, inclines me to believe that the task is too severe.³

²F.M.S. Labour Commission Report 1910.

³Ibid.

Furthermore it was said that under the law:

labourers are entitled to rest one day in the week . . . The labourer may be induced by the offer of higher wages . . . to work on the rest day, but I am not altogether satisfied that his inclinations are always considered, especially in the case of labourers employed on tapping, which goes on continually during the greater part of the year. Constant work on rest days even at higher rates of wages may, like too severe tasks, conduce to discontent.⁴

It was 1912 before the Labour Department began to pay any special attention to Javanese labour. In 1913, it calculated that labourers from the Netherlands Indies were employed on 163 estates and amounted to 12,197; there were 64 estates employing 50 or more.

The labourers were of four classes. *First*, there were those who were obtained directly from the Netherlands Indies under permits issued by the Netherlands Indies Government, who were recruited by licensed recruiters of their agents and signed contracts in Java. In 1912, 3,267 such contracts were registered in the Federated Malay States. The cost of recruiting one labourer was about \$90, of which the employer was allowed to recover only about \$11.50 from his wages. *Secondly*, there were labourers who made contracts locally under the Labour Code to work for a fixed period—they were either immigrants whose original contracts had expired, or labourers recruited from Singapore. *Thirdly*, there were labourers whose contracts had expired and who had settled in the country and worked for estates on a month to month basis . . . for example there was a large settled community of such persons in the Ulu Langat district of Selangor. *Fourthly*, there were gangs of Javanese and Banjarese, working under their own contractors, who moved from estate to estate and undertook job contracts; the Javanese specialised in digging drains and Banjarese in felling trees. These gangs worked mainly in Perak.

At this time Perak employed the largest number of indentured Javanese labourers—at the end of 1912 there were 4,100, employed on 27 estates, mainly in the Telok Anson area. A large

⁴*Ibid.*

proportion of them would renew their contracts again and again. In contrast, the Javanese labourers in Selangor were largely locally recruited and worked on monthly agreements, and were said to be 'well paid, healthy and contented'. There were hardly any Javanese in Pahang or Negri Sembilan.

The Labour Department Annual Report for 1913 said:

There has . . . been a large amount of desertion amongst labourers on contracts of service. Such desertion is, of course, natural as the wages under such contracts are generally 25 cents for men and 15 cents for women, while free labourers could probably earn 44 to 50 cents . . . There is, however, cause for suspicion that crimping of a more or less organised nature has occurred in many districts and that labourers were brought to Singapore and there signed contracts for labour in Borneo or other places outside the F.M.S.⁵

In the same year it was said:

The recruiting of N.I. (Netherlands Indies) labourers for the F.M.S. continues to be very unsatisfactory and I fear will greatly prejudice the use of this class of labour unless some more satisfactory method of recruiting is found. The objections to the present method are manifold. The expenses of recruiting are exceedingly heavy, and showed a steady increase during the year . . .

In addition to this, long delays often occur between indenting for and receiving labour. The contracts are often dated six weeks or two months before the date of arrival of the labourers on their estates, with the result that the labourers are at times badly affected by the long detention in the recruiting depôts.

. . . There can be little doubt that the effect of the present system of recruiting in the long run will be that only estates which can get no other form of labour will import indentured Javanese, and as such estates are generally ones which are handicapped either by position, unhealthy conditions or unsatisfactory management, they are the type of estate for which indentured labour is least desirable.

By 1914 the fourth type of labourer—the contracting gang—had become a negligible factor. 'The days of rapid development being over for the time being, estates generally open up new areas gradually, using their own labour'.⁶ The number of locally-signed contracts began to exceed the number of Java-signed contracts. In the former, 'the usual period is 300 working days

⁵Labour Department Annual Report for 1913.

⁶Ibid 1914.

JAVANESE LABOURERS

and an advance of \$15 to \$10, of which \$10 to \$7 is made recoverable, is commonly given to labourers signing on. This system is thoroughly popular with the labourers'.⁷

The number of Javanese labourers working on three-year contracts in the Federated Malay States was:

	<i>Perak</i>	<i>Selangor</i>	<i>Negri Sembilan</i>	<i>Pahang</i>	Total
1912	4,409	656	542	761	6,368
1914	3,543	107	130	777	4,557
1916	981	Nil	60	1,202	2,243
1918	480	Nil	14	1,804	2,298
1920	1,037	Nil	33	2,718	3,788

Indentured labour for Javanese was not legally abolished until 1932, but the numbers after 1920 were very small in all States except Pahang.

The total number of Javanese labourers, indentured and free, actually at work on estates at this time, was:

	<i>Perak</i>	<i>Selangor</i>	<i>Negri Sembilan</i>	<i>Pahang</i>
1912	.. 5,622	3,091	1,384	800
1914	.. 5,661	1,968	1,850	636
1916	.. 3,338	1,532	1,268	1,347
1918	.. 2,583	2,394	1,145	2,127
1920	.. 2,361	2,186	1,383	2,988

These figures are very much smaller than the figures for Indians or Chinese labourers on estates.

⁷Ibid 1914.

Chapter XII

INDIAN LABOURERS 1904-1920

Health

The health of the *indentured* Indian labourers always gave cause for concern. In 1906 in Perak it was said that 'over 70 per cent of the total number of deaths (of statute immigrants) were due to bowel complaints, dysentery and diarrhoea A peculiarity of these outbreaks is that they effect only the new arrivals'. For instance, on one estate with a population of 509 indentured labourers, 'in May a severe epidemic of dysentery set in and lasted for six months When I visited the estate in May I found about 30 per cent of the indentured males in hospital'. On the other hand, the health of the 'free' labourers on most estates 'appeared exceedingly good'. The figures for indentured labourers in Perak at this time were:

Year	Average number of indentured Indian labourers	No. of deaths amongst them ¹
1903 ..	2,102	178
1904 ..	1,184	58
1905 ..	2,714	294
1906 ..	3,515	289

The *Indian Immigration Enactment* of 1904 made it obligatory for managers of estates to provide medical attention and hospital accommodation for their labourers. In the years that followed many estates hospitals were built.

An interesting comment on the reasons for the differences in health between indentured and unindentured labourers is contained in a report from Perak in 1908:

An estate which has appeared fairly healthy so long as free coolies only were employed not infrequently has shown itself to be exceedingly unhealthy after statute immigrants have been on the estate for a short time. This may, perhaps, be explained by the fact that free coolies naturally leave when they find that the place does not suit them. In such

¹Indian Immigration Department Annual Report for 1906.

cases the estate becomes short of labour and consequently applies for statute immigrants. I do not think there is a reason for objecting to the engagement of statute immigrants on old-established estates that have employed statute immigrants for years past, but in the majority of cases when an estate that has not previously employed this class of labour applies to do so it is because of its unpopularity with free coolies. It is, I think, advisable that estates in Perak, and more especially small and newly-opened ones, should be encouraged to employ free labourers rather than statute immigrants.²

By 1909 the requirements of the law had been fairly adequately enforced with regard to estate hospitals, and the annual report for that year stated:

This year marks an improvement on the last. Probably the opening of the new hospitals and the more general administration of quinine as a malarial prophylactic, have operated in lowering the death rate. For example, the opening of the Batang Berjuntai hospital seems to have greatly diminished the mortality in the group of estates which it serves. This is not to be wondered at, as these estates had formerly to send their sick to the Kuala Selangor Government Hospital from which they were variously 8 to 17 miles distant. This meant that slight cases were not sent in, and very severe cases often could not be, owing to the difficulty of transport. With the exception of estates in the Batu mukim of Kuala Lumpur, all important estates in Selangor and Negri Sembilan now have their own hospital accommodation or have been formally exempted from providing such.³

There were sound reasons to account for health difficulties in new arrivals from India:

It is necessary to emphasise here that the climate and physical conditions in humid Malaya are very different from those to which labourers, with the possible exception of Malayalis, are accustomed in dry South India where water is scarce in most parts in the hot season, the soil is arid and palms or more rarely trees stand in isolated loneliness, a marked contrast to evergreen Malaya with its unfailing drinking and bathing water, and trees huddled together to exclude the sun. Coming from areas in which the labourer finds little shade and is exposed to a strong bright light, he finds the lower temperatures of Malaya and, save in the paddy fields, the ubiquitous shady canopy of vegetation a pleasant change yet one that probably calls for a little acclimatisation. Some newcomers naturally do not succeed in adapting themselves during their first experience to the new conditions . . .⁴

²Ibid 1908.

³Ibid 1909.

⁴Labour Department Annual Report for 1935.

It was also explained that:

There is little to choose between the respective physiques of the average Tamil and Chinese immigrant, it is rather to their modes of life that we must look for an explanation of the great differences in powers of resistance to malaria of the two classes of labour.

The Tamil cooks for himself, has to find his firewood and buy his food, he is for the most part little skilled in cooking and is careless as to the quality and variety of his foodstuffs, he often drinks to excess and uses no mosquito curtain, when debilitated by an attack of malaria his cooking operations are reduced to a minimum, he goes to his long day's work on a handful of cold and sour rice which has been left over from the previous day, a rapid deterioration in health results, and death from malaria or intercurrent disease of the bowels is a common end.

The Chinaman is fond of good food and sees that he gets it, one or more cooks are employed for each gang, and he is supplied with well-cooked meals, ample in quantity, and varied in quantity, he seldom drinks, and uses a more or less efficient mosquito curtain at night, he is thus able to offer a stout resistance to malaria.⁵

The general health on the estates improved considerably during the second decade of the century, and the following serves to illustrate the improvement:

It is well known that the year 1911 was remarkably unhealthy, not only on estates but among all classes of the population, but a reduction from 7,162 deaths in 1911 to 4,057 deaths in 1913 among an Indian labour population which increased from 110,000 in 1911 to 133,000 in 1913 required more than mere natural causes to account for it, and great credit must be given both to employers of labour and to the Health Department for the result that has been achieved.⁶

It was, however, reported from Negri Sembilan in 1911 that:

Serious sickness, with a high percentage of mortality, has in several cases occurred where an estate has had a large and sudden influx of coolies supplied by some professional agent in India . . . that is to say, otherwise than by a genuine kangany-recruiting; a large proportion of the coolies supplied in this fashion are not proper agriculturalists, and they easily become a prey to disease, while the staff and accommodation on the estate, calculated to meet normal requirements, are not adequate for conditions of this kind . . . where . . . an unhealthy estate is 'flooded' with Indian labour, serious sickness, with a very high death rate, nearly always occurs.⁷

⁵Ibid 1915.

⁶Indian Immigration Department Annual Report for 1911.

⁷Ibid.

By 1914 it was clear that the death-rate was dropping as sanitary measures improved. The figures were:

<i>Federated Malay States</i>				<i>Number of deaths</i>	
<i>average number</i>				<i>of Indian estate</i>	
<i>of Indian estate</i>				<i>labourers</i>	
<i>labourers</i>					
1911	..	..	110,000	..	7,162
1912	..	..	122,000	..	5,014
1913	..	..	133,000	..	4,057
1914	..	..	128,000	..	3,695
1915	..	..	120,000	..	2,519

The major cause of illness and death, which ten years earlier had been dysentery and other bowel complaints, was now malaria, which accounted for over 40 per cent of the admissions to estate hospitals.

By 1915 there were in the Federated Malay States a large number of estate hospitals:⁸

<i>Total number</i>				<i>Number of</i>		<i>Number of</i>	
<i>of estates</i>				<i>estate</i>		<i>estates</i>	
				<i>hospitals</i>		<i>served by</i>	
						<i>these</i>	
						<i>hospitals</i>	
Perak	..	..	270	..	62	..	120
Selangor	..	..	277	..	59	..	159
Negri Sembilan	..	..	153	..	41	..	63
Pahang	..	..	18	..	7	..	?

In the same year the Senior Health Officer said:

At many of the large estates a plentiful supply of good water is brought by pipes to the lines; upon smaller estates, or those less fortunately situated, bricked and cemented wells are in use, unprotected holes in the ground are no longer considered good enough for the water supply of labourers.

Anti-malarial measures of various sorts are universal upon most up-country estates, the most common is the prophylactic administration of quinine; many estates now spray with oil all swamps and ravines adjacent to the cooly lines, and a few have expended large sums on subsoil drainage.⁹

⁸Labour Department Annual Report for 1915.

⁹Ibid. *ibid.*

Housing

The house accommodation provided for the labourers was a matter which by this time was closely watched by the Indian Immigration Department. In 1907 it reported, for instance, that in Selangor and Negri Sembilan:

The accommodation provided for coolies I found to be on the average good, many new blocks of lines having been erected during the year. In several instances, however, the rooms were dark and not well ventilated owing to the coolies themselves putting up screens of bark, attap and cloth around the verandahs of the lines . . . The lines consist of blocks containing from 10 to 20 rooms each, but in some cases . . . coolies were housed separately and allowed to cultivate for their own use a small piece of land around their quarters. In a few instances I found overcrowding, but the accommodation was on the whole sufficient . . .

By 1910, the report said:

Generally speaking, labour was better housed than at any time previous in this State (Selangor). The favourite type for new lines adopted was one with raised lines, supported on brick pillars, and a corrugated iron or zinc roof . . . Towards the end of the year certain type plans were prepared by the Principal Medical Officer, to which in future any new lines will have to conform under the directions of the new Health Department.

In December 1916, an official standard of housing accommodation was for the first time laid down by law—a rule under the Labour Code made it obligatory for a separate room to be provided for each married couple and for not more than three adults to be accommodated in a room of less than 100 square feet of floor space.

The type of housing provided by employers for their Indian labourers, about 1920, in compliance with the regulations of the Government, was said to consist:

normally of a long barrack-like structure of wood, roofed either with 'attap', a local palm, or with tiles or corrugated iron. The line is divided down its length by a partition which does not reach the roof and single rooms are provided back-to-back so that each line is in effect a double line facing both ways. Usually, though not always, the lines are lifted above the ground on piles, and a room is provided underneath the main building for a kitchen and for storing belongings; in fact in such lines the labourers live more on the ground space than in the rooms above. Sometimes a verandah is provided; sometimes not.¹⁰

¹⁰V. S. S. Sastri—*Report on Conditions of Indian Labour in Malaya*—C. 83.

INDIAN LABOURERS 1904-1920

The officers of the Indian Immigration Department (and its successor, the Labour Department) inspected the estates to check that conditions were satisfactory and to see that they were improved where necessary. By 1911 the majority of all estates were being inspected annually:

			Number of estates		Number inspected during year
Perak	..	..	154	..	150
Selangor	..	..	174	..	110
Negri Sembilan	..	..	50	..	34

In subsequent years the proportion of estates inspected remained about the same, or improved.

Wages

The daily wages of indentured Indian labourers in 1906 were:

			With rations		Without rations
Men	..	..	20 cents	..	28 cents
Women	..	..	12 „	..	20 „

These rates remained about the same until the last indentured labourer completed his indenture in 1913. The daily wage of 'free' labourers on estates in 1906 was, in Selangor and Negri Sembilan:

Men	..	..	27-35 cents
Women	..	..	20-25 „
Children	..	..	10-20 „

The lower rates were paid in Selangor and the higher in Negri Sembilan. In contrast, in the same year in Selangor there were some 600 Tamil labourers employed in the Sungei Besi tin mines and they, working on contract, averaged 40 cents a day, and some earned as much as 60 to 80 cents a day.

In 1907, before the implementation of the Indian Immigration Ordinance made it obligatory for Indian labourers to be landed free from debt, it was reported:

The sum debited against new coolies arriving on the estate varied from \$12 to \$16 per head, being made up of passage money from Negapatam

and money advanced in India and on arrival on the estate. This money is recovered from the cooly by small deductions from his wage each month.

Labourers in the Public Works Department earned from 30 cents a day upwards, but those working on railway construction earned more.

On the estates at the time it was said:

Payment was generally regular but late, hardly ever before the 21st of the month subsequent to that for which the wages were due. Under this system employers never owe their labourers less than three weeks wages, and any quantity between this and seven weeks or even two months.

It is worthy of notice under this system that an absconding cooly can in no case get away without leaving at least three weeks wages behind him.

This was gradually rectified as the results of the regular inspections by officers of the Labour Department bore fruit.

In 1915 the wages of males was 40 cents a day in Perak and in Negri Sembilan 35-40 cents for tappers and 30-35 cents for weeders. Rates for women were from 25-30 cents a day. Rates were lowest in the coastal districts of Selangor. The annual report for the year says:

There are signs of a tendency to demand an increased wage, due probably to the gradually rising cost in the price of imported articles as much as to the higher price of rubber; for the Indian labourer in the Malay Peninsula spends a good deal on luxuries: motor bus rides, stout, and numerous cheap manufactured articles, undreamed of in his Indian home, are items in his budget in the Federated Malay States.

Wages varied enormously according to the locality of the estate—from 27 cents a day for unskilled men near Klang to 45 cents for skilled tappers in remote or unhealthy spots. Although in 1916 there was no change in the nominal wage rates, the average earnings of labourers of all classes rose by about 5 cents. This was because of greater opportunities allowed for overtime work. By 1917 it was said that in Perak rates of 45 cents and 35 cents for men and women respectively were becoming increasingly common, and that in the second half of the year there was a general rise in the rates in the coastal districts of Selangor. In 1919 it was reported that there had not been:

any appreciable alteration in the rate of wages which remains at 40 to 45 cents a day for tappers according to the position and healthiness of the estate. There were however greater opportunities of working overtime

as a result of the order permitting an employer to call on his coolies to do not more than three hours work per day on food production in addition to his normal day's work.

The annual report of the Labour Department for 1920 said:

It was universally felt that the rise in the wages for labourers was not commensurate with the rise in the cost of living and the General Labour Committee . . . recommended that the minimum rate of pay for adult men and women for a full day's work should be 50 cents and 40 cents respectively; that bonuses should be given for length of service in the employment of one company at the rate of \$12 for the first year, \$18 for the second year and \$24 for the third year and subsequent years of continuous service . . . They also recommended the issue of rice at a preferential rate of 50 cents a gantang. These recommendations were accepted by many places of employment.

The General Labour Committee mentioned in the above quotation was formed at the suggestion of the Indian Immigration Committee, made to the Planters Association of Malaya, to consider various matters connected with labour. It discussed questions of wages, exchange, recruiting, co-operative estate shops, land settlement, care of mothers and infants and registration of Hindu marriages. And 'considerable progress had been made by the end of the year towards putting the recommendations of the Committee into effect on all the larger places of employment'.

The Indian population was, quite definitely, to a very large extent transitory. Each year, the number of departures was almost of the same order as the number of arrivals, as the figures show:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Indian Arrivals in Malaya</i>	<i>Total Indian Departures from Malaya</i>	<i>Estimated total Indian populations of the F. M. S.</i>
1905	39,539	19,754	75,000
1906	52,041	21,878	95,000
1907	60,542	30,522	115,000
1908	54,522	30,920	123,000
1909	49,817	31,374	133,000
1910	83,723	39,080	140,000
1911	108,471	48,103	190,000
1912	106,928	63,885	210,000
1913	118,583	70,090	220,000

IMMIGRANT LABOUR AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MALAYA

The number of Indian labourers employed on estates in the Federated Malay States during this period was:¹¹

	<i>Perak</i>	<i>Selangor</i>	<i>Negri Sembilan</i>	<i>Pahang</i>
1906 ..	6,351	17,651	3,011	—
1908 ..	12,528	26,973	5,425	303
1910 ..	26,073	48,058	10,484	653
1912 ..	43,525	66,791	11,884	643
1914 ..	47,203	61,573	10,455	913
1916 ..	56,368	68,997	11,181	1,750
1918 ..	58,977	65,803	13,074	1,626
1920 ..	65,037	74,085	19,410	2,434

¹¹Compiled from Annual Reports of Indian Immigration Department and Labour Department.

Chapter XIII

TIN MINING TO 1920

While the rapid expansion of rubber estate planting was occurring, and the great influx on Indian labourers which accompanied it, a considerable change was taking place in the pattern of tin mining. The situation in 1903 has been described in an earlier chapter. By 1907 the more easily won tin deposits were said to have been exhausted, and all mining expenses correspondingly increased, so that it became impossible to work profitably under the old system:

The day when the Federated Malay States might be regarded as the happy hunting ground for the small miner seem to have passed, and the future of the tin-mining industry in the States will depend upon the economical development on a large scale of low-grade propositions.¹

Thirty years before, no machinery of any kind had been used in the mines except the Chinese wooden endless-chain pump and the overshot water-wheel. Then, following the example of the first European proprietors who entered (unsuccessfully) into mining, centrifugal steam pumps came to be used in all the larger mines. In 1907 it was explained that new European mining companies had recently begun working, and:

modern machinery and labour-saving appliances have been extensively adopted and, as a result, many propositions are paying good dividends which, under the old methods, could not have been dealt with at all. The hydraulic system of working is one of the most economical methods . . . The enormous pressure of the head of water is directed against the sides of the hill containing the pay-dirt, which is then washed down in enormous quantities and then treated in the ordinary way . . . The Chinese have not been slow to follow the example set them by their Western neighbours, and now no mine is regarded as properly equipped unless rails, trucks and hauling engines are used to replace the coolie.²

And in 1909 the amount of equipment in use in the mines totalled 13,843 horse-power, which was reckoned to be the equivalent of 110,744 labourers. So that, although the actual labour force in that year was 183,119, the total of labour force plus labour-saving equivalent came to 293,863. By 1914, the

¹*Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya*—p. 506.

²*Ibid.*

IMMIGRANT LABOUR AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MALAYA

steam, gas, hydraulic, oil and electrical plant in the mines totalled 28,390 horse-power, the equivalent alone of 326,864 labourers. Machine-power was gradually supplanting man-power, even before the advent of the major labour-saving device of the dredge.

The pattern of tin mining was changing. Perak was the main mining State. And in Perak, Kinta had completely over-shadowed Larut as the main centre. The change in the distribution of mining labourers in the State shows this clearly:

				<i>Kinta</i>		<i>Larut</i>
1910	..	..	..	67,067	..	10,155
1915	..	..	..	76,620	..	6,219

Perak had far outstripped Selangor in production, as the figures in the annual reports show:

Tin produced in Thousands of Pikuls

				<i>Perak</i>		<i>Selangor</i>
1890	..	..	..	250	..	170
1898	..	..	..	340	..	280
1906	..	..	..	430	..	260
1914	..	..	..	480	..	250

The general situation in the Federated Malay States was:

			<i>Tin Exports</i> (In Thousands of Pikuls)		<i>Labour employed</i> <i>in Tin Mines</i> (In Thousands)
1906	..	..	816	..	212
1908	..	..	813	..	192
1910	..	..	854	..	170
1912	..	..	813	..	211
1914	..	..	823	..	171
1916	..	..	737	..	139
1918	..	..	627	..	144
1920	..	..	586	..	89

The sub-divisions of the industry about this time are well illustrated by the example of the figures given for the State of Perak for 1916:

		No. of Mines	No. of Labourers
<i>European-owned</i>			
Large open-cast	..	16	8,052
Hydraulic	..	17	4,136
Lodes	..	4	1,665
Bucket dredging	..	9	1,902
<i>Chinese-owned</i>			
Large open-cast	..	14	6,324
Hydraulic	..	2	445
Small open-cast	..	?	41,753
Lampans	..	662	13,710

Gravel-pumping as practised by the Chinese in Perak consists of lampanning ground, which ordinarily would have been worked as pure open-cast by hand labour. Water is conducted from ground level to the bottom of the mine in ditches in which the earth is barred or changkolled, these ditches carrying the mixture of earth and water connect with a pump sump where a gravel pump is installed. The pump then lifts the mixture out of the mine and discharges it into elevated sluice-boxes where the tin-ore is concentrated.

The great innovation was the introduction in 1912 of Bucket-Dredges. This was a European capitalised venture, not followed by the Chinese, which in the end accounted for the larger part of the tin production of the country. The following is a contemporary description:

A bucket dredge for tin mining as used in Perak consists essentially of a pontoon which carries power-plant to supply energy to a chain of buckets which are used to excavate earth below ground level. This earth is scooped by the buckets and dumped into a revolving screen and so into sluice-boxes where the material is washed and the tin-ore recovered. The dressing-plant is also carried on the pontoon. The chain of buckets travel round a ladder which can be set at various angles, so that the earth may be excavated from varying depths. The greatest depth dredged in Perak is 60 feet. For purpose of manoeuvring the dredge, which floats on the water in the paddock, of holding it to face and of moving it on other required directions, steel ropes attached to winches on the

pontoon are led out in various directions and anchored to the ground. The tailings from the dredge fall into the worked-out ground beneath it.³

The first dredge was built in Perak. By 1916 there were 9 in that State. The first dredge in Selangor started in 1918. By 1920, there were 20 dredges in operation in the Federated Malay States, and considerably more 'proposed and under construction'. The labourers employed on dredges increased rapidly:

	<i>No. of labourers employed on dredges</i>			
1913	228
1914	508
1915	1,521
1916	1,902
1917	2,156
1918	2,562
1920	2,844
1921	5,608
1922	5,189
1930	12,293

Tin production levelled off at approximately 50,000 tons per year, and remained (despite considerable drops in years when trade conditions were adverse) of the same order into the middle of the century. But the number of labourers employed in the industry dropped greatly as different methods and labour-saving devices came more into use. The largest number of labourers employed appears to have been 229,778 in 1907. By 1922, it had dropped by 62 per cent to 81,898:

This decrease in the labour force was offset by a great additional increase in the use of labour-saving appliances, the total for 1913 being 36,000 h.p. against 59,278 h.p. in 1922; this additional horse-power was partly due to the installation of new bucket dredges. These figures are quoted to show how largely mechanical power is taking the place of manual labour in Malaya.⁴

³Perak Administration Report for 1916.

⁴*Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States.*

The highly-capitalised and mechanised European-owned tin dredges gained a gradual preponderance in the industry. By 1922 there were 33. By 1930 there were 107. There was a rapid change in the proportion of tin produced by the traditional Chinese methods and the new mechanised European methods:

				Chinese		European
1910	..	..	..	78%	..	12%
1920	..	..	..	64%	..	36%
1930	..	..	..	37%	..	63%

The proportions remained approximately the same after 1930.

Whereas the labourers on the early mines had been almost exclusively Chinese, the workers on the European-owned tin dredges were not predominantly of any racial group, Malays, Indians and Chinese being employed in approximately the same numbers, the labourers being usually directly employed and paid a daily or monthly wage. The Chinese, therefore, had lost their complete monopoly of employment in the mines. But other fields of employment opened up for them. In 1922 it was said:

In pre-rubber days, with the exception of a few odd thousand Chinese employed on sugar and tapioca estates, there was no other employment for productive labour in Malaya. With the advent of the rubber plantations, the sugar and tapioca estates disappeared; but the number of Chinese employed on agriculture greatly increased. Thus, whereas before any increase in the mining population entailed recruiting from China, now the miner has another market open to him, and the future inter-supply of labour to the two industries—mining and planting—will be dependent largely on the price of the two commodities—tin and rubber—produced, and the respective inducements that can be offered by way of remuneration.³

It was also said that 'besides those actually employed in the mines, there are many thousands employed indirectly in connection with mining operations. The total number dependent on the mining industry is not far short of 125,000' (in 1922). Increasing mechanisation brought the need for ancillary establishments to provide and repair the machinery. These ancillary activities were almost entirely conducted by the Chinese.

³*Ibid.*

Dulang Washers

One type of Chinese labour which is of interest is that engaged in 'dulang washing' (which is the process of panning for tin—*dulang* being the Malay word for the tray or pan used). This work was entirely done by women, more than ninety out of every hundred of whom were Chinese. Each worked under the authority of an individual dulang pass issued by the Mines Department, the number of passes issued being:

No. of Dulang Passes Issued⁶

1908	..	..	..	..	8,278
1909	..	..	..	..	9,596
1910	..	..	..	..	10,257
1911	..	..	..	..	10,807
1912	..	..	..	..	12,031
1913	..	..	..	..	14,155
1914	..	..	..	..	?
1915	..	..	..	..	15,859
1916	..	..	..	..	14,007
1917	..	..	..	..	13,870
1918	..	..	..	..	15,774
1919	..	..	..	..	15,553
1920	..	..	..	..	12,867

The dulang washers were not wage labour, however, but were independent and self-employed. The majority of them worked in Perak. The writer of the F.M.S. Mines Department Report for 1909 waxed eloquent in their praise:

There is no more pleasing sight to be seen in the Federated Malay States than the Chinese woman washing for tin-ore in a stream—up to her waist in water—with a small child strapped to her back above her waist. Of the alien races who live in these States . . . there are none to be compared with these women, who for sobriety, morality and honesty are not to be beaten . . .

They have remained a feature of tin mining up to the present day.

⁶Statistics are compiled from Annual Reports of the Federated Malay States Mines Department and the Labour Department.

Chapter XIV

CHINESE LABOURERS 1900-1920

Indentured Labour

In the first decade of the century the importation of *indentured* Chinese labourers decreased. 7,462 were brought into the Federated Malay States in 1900, but only 864 in 1909. The decrease was due to the unpopularity of *sinkheh* labour with Chinese employers, especially mining employers. Parr explained in his Commission's report of 1910:

When communications improved and the facilities for absconding increased, indentured Chinese labour on mines fell into disfavour and diminished rapidly, until recently it has practically disappeared in mining districts and has been confined almost entirely to the sugar estates in Krian.¹

A witness before the Commission said:

The reason the system is still in vogue on the estates situated on the Kurau river (Krian area) in Perak is because they cannot get any other labour and because *sinkheh* labour is cheap.

Indentured Chinese labourers were also employed by Chinese labour contractors working on European coffee and rubber estates in Negri Sembilan, and on tapioca estates in Malacca (mainly Hainanese labourers on the latter).

The system of recruiting in China for the Straits and the F.M.S. is as follows. A *depôt* in Singapore is connected with those in the open ports, and the latter have recruiters and these men again have their sub-recruiters, who scour the country and do their best to recruit labour by all manner of means and by offering all sorts of inducements. The *depôt* in China sends overseers to look after the men on board, see that they do not mix up with other passengers, and keep them separate from *sinkhehs* belonging to other *depôts*.

On arrival at the Straits, these overseers hand the coolies to the licensed *depôt*-keeper and his men. The local recruiters are really runners attached to the *depôts*. There is no local recruiting, the recruiting has already been done in China . . .

. . . The man, after he got to the *depôt*, was kept there until he was redeemed. The meaning of redemption is that some person came forward and paid his passage money. Then, in the case of employers of labour, the cooly would be taken to the Protectorate to sign a contract . . . The person who paid for the immigrant's food in the *depôt* was in the

¹F.M.S. Labour Commission Report 1910.

first instance of course the *depôt*-keeper; subsequently the person who redeemed him paid the cost of his food, the expense of bringing him from China, and other expenses . . .²

The form of contract which the *sinkheh* signed was prescribed by law. The 'general form of coolie contract to complete 300 days work' for Chinese labourers in use at this time was set out in the *Labour Enactment No. 1 (General) 1904*. It applied to labourers who had received advances from an employer who, "in consideration of the entering by the labourer into this contract, has agreed not to demand repayment of the said advances'. No deductions from wages were allowed for any expenses incurred by the employer on account of the labourer prior to his arrival at his place of employment. The conditions were that the labourer should complete 300 days work, and work overtime when required to do so; nine hours, or a previously specified task, constituted a day's work. 'From time to time during the term of the contract', the employer had to pay wages at a prescribed rate per day, plus a prescribed rate for overtime work performed. The labourer could not be compelled to work for more than 26 days a month, nor on the usual Chinese feast days (a minimum of seven prescribed feast days in the year). If absent from work (except from sickness) the labourer was liable to pay the employer 15 cents a day for food supplied to him during the absence; if he absconded, he was liable to repay to the employer the cost of recapturing and arresting him; if money was owed to the employer for either of these reasons, the contract was deemed extended at a wage of 15 cents a day until the amount was paid off—but the contract could not be extended beyond two years from the date of signing. The employer was bound to provide the labourer, free of charge, with accommodation, food, medical treatment, and the services of a barber, and to make one free issue of a mosquito net, a sun hat, a coat, two pairs of trousers, two bathing clothes, a pair of clogs and a blanket. The employer could require the labourer to perform the contract 'under any headman, mandor, contractor or other person', the employer however remaining responsible for the observance of the conditions of the contract.

²Ibid (evidence of Acting Protector of Chinese, Selangor).

For Chinese mining labourers the law in the Federated Malay States was altered by the *Labour Enactment 1904 No. 1 (Chinese Mining)*, so that instead of needing to have a written contract with each labourer, the employer could post up on the mine a notice in Chinese setting out the conditions of employment, which would then be

binding as a contract under this Enactment as between such employer and such labourers as may enter such employment while such notice shall continue to be so affixed.

The notice had to be approved in advance by the Protector of Chinese and a certified copy deposited in the nearest police station, and no labourer could thereby be compelled to work for an employer for longer than six months, irrespective of any debt he might owe to anybody. (There was a similar clause covering tribute labourers, except that for them the maximum enforceable period was one year). A labourer could, like a labourer who had signed a written contract, be punished by law for failing to carry out his bargain:

Every contract labourer who without reasonable excuse, to be allowed by the Court, neglects or omits to fulfil his contract, or omits or refuses to work, or absents himself from work, or absconds from the place in which he is employed, shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding \$50, or to imprisonment of either description for a term not exceeding six months, or to both . . .

However, he could free himself from his contract at any time by paying to his employer 'the amount of all advances made to him or on his behalf, together with all other moneys due and owing by him to his employer, and, further, the sum of \$2, as smart money, for every month, or every thirty days work, as the case may be, which may remain uncompleted thereunder'.

It appears that one reason for the falling off in the number of contracts entered into at the Protectorate, however, was that the employers did not feel the need for the protection of the law to ensure that the agreements were honoured.

The Chinese mining employers by this time seem to have preferred direct recruitment from China when they wished to obtain new labour from there:

The employer sends a man he knows and can trust to China with funds, and this man brings down a batch of friends and relatives to work for the

employer until they have paid off the moneys he has expended upon their passage, etc. The whole system is as devoid of legal sanction as the 'kangany' system developed by the Selangor and Negri Sembilan European planters (i.e. before the Indian Immigration Fund arrangements incorporated it). In the eyes of the law, the men are free from anything but a verbal contract terminable at a month's notice.³

The 1906 Annual Report of the Secretary of Chinese Affairs, Straits Settlements, stated:

Practically all the Chinese labour in the F.M.S. is 'free'—i.e. not under any contract for a period exceeding one month enforceable in court of law . . . In Selangor, 500 'unpaid passengers' were redeemed from their obligations by persons who paid off their debts to the lodging-houses which had advanced them the cost of their passages. In many cases these persons were undoubtedly employers who took over the men to work for them, but regarded as an unnecessary formality the signing of contracts with them.

The depôt which operated about 1890 for the reception of all Chinese labourers into Kuala Lumpur appears to have fallen into disuse. The lodging houses had by 1910 become an essential link in the chain of labour supply. The proprietor of one lodging house in Kuala Lumpur said:

About 200 *sinkhehs* lodged in my house last year . . . They were under the charge of *Kheh Thaus* who brought them from Singapore. They were not locked up but were guarded by the *Kheh Thaus* and not allowed to go out. Period of stay varied from five to 15 days. I charged 25 cents per day for each *sinkkeh*. This charge included food and was paid by the *Kheh Thaus* . . .⁴

Another lodging-house keeper said:

Kheh Thaus bring the *sinkhehs* to my house. The doors of the rooms in which the coolies lodge are locked and the *Kheh Thaus* keep the keys. I charge 30 cents per head a day for board and lodging. Sometimes *sinkhehs* escape from my house through the skylight.⁵

Whereas the *sinkhehs* employed on mines were for the most part Hakkas and Cantonese, those employed on agriculture were 'Te Chus, Lui Chus and Kau Chus from the province of Kwang Tung', and of course, in Malacca, Hainanese.

³Ibid (notes by W. D. Barnes, British Resident, Pahang, and earlier Secretary for Chinese Affairs).

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

The number of indentured Chinese *sinkheh* labourers on estates in Malacca had, by 1905, been dropping for some time. The figures were:

*Sinkhehs on Malacca Estates*⁶

1902	.. .. .	412
1903	.. .. .	257
1904	.. .. .	185
1905	.. .. .	125

It was said that there was practically no difference in treatment between *sinkhehs* and *laukhehs*, accommodation and food being identical, the only difference being in the wages.

The employment of *sinkhehs* on the Krian sugar estates, in Perak, was unsatisfactory. The Commission reported that, there, the comparative isolation of the estates enabled the employer 'to treat the indentured labourers with a severity (it might in some cases be termed ferocity) which would be impossible on estates less difficult of access. I attribute the cruelty and abuses which have surrounded . . . and still surround the system of indentured Chinese labour on the Krian estates to the situation of the estates . . . and to the 'rumah kechil' system, which obtains, I believe, in the F.M.S. in the Krian district only and is coeval with sugar planting'.

The 'rumah kechil' system meant that:

sections of an estate are let out for cultivation to Chinese styled the *towkays* or headmen of the 'rumah-kechil' for cultivation, the crop being purchased at a fixed price by the owner of the estate. Many of the indentured labourers are distributed amongst their lessees or contractors and are housed in small lines, or rather huts, from which their cultivation system 'rumah kechil' takes its name. Indentured labourers handed over by the headman of the 'rumah kechil' are entirely at their mercy, the owner or . . . the manager concerning himself very little with the affairs of such labourers.⁷

The daily life of the indentured labourers employed in the rumah kechil was succinctly described by a Chinese estate manager as follows:

Hours same all over estate; about 5 a.m. *sinkhehs* are turned out to bathe; whistle blows at 5.30 a.m. *Sinkhehs* get rice, vegetables, soup, salt fish,

⁶Blythe—*Historical Sketch of Chinese Labour in Malaya*—p. 87.

⁷F.M.S. Labour Commission Report 1910.

tea and rice-water before going to work at 6 a.m. Rice water is sent out to field and eaten there at 9 a.m. Whistle blows at 11 a.m. for stopping work. Sinkhehs then bathe and get food (congee only). They go back to work at 1 p.m., at 3 p.m. they again take rice water in the field. At 5 p.m. work is stopped for the day. *Sinkhehs* bathe at about 6 p.m. *Sinkhehs* get rice, vegetables, fresh or salt fish and tea. Bathing is compulsory. At 8 p.m. *sinkhehs* again bathe and are locked up for the night at 9 p.m.⁸

There was profit to be made in selling necessities to the *sinkhehs*:

Supplies to coolies working in '*rumah kechil*' are obtained from or through the headman of '*rumah kechil*'. In case of coolies working in head kongsi from the head kongsi. On supplies to coolies the kongsi makes about 10 to 12 per cent. In case of supplies by headmen of '*rumah kechil*' to *sinkhehs* allotted to them—profit not known—may be more. *Sinkhehs* do not use chandu. Sometimes chandu dross is supplied to them by the headman of '*rumah kechil*' or by head kongsi, in which case the cost is debited to cooly . . .⁹

The treatment of these labourers was not satisfactory. The acting Protector of Chinese, Perak, said to the Labour Commission on the 8th June 1910:

I visited . . . Aik Heng Estate (sugar and rubber) on Kurau River . . . My special object was to enquire into the state of affairs in '*rumah kechil*' No. 1, three headmen of which had in January been sentenced to three month's rigorous imprisonment and to pay costs of prosecution or one month's rigorous imprisonment in addition for voluntarily causing hurt to a *sinkheh* . . . Also the owner of the estate had been fined \$50 for delay in sending the sick *sinkheh* from the same '*rumah kechil*' to hospital in November last. The *sinkheh* was admitted to hospital at 6 p.m. and died at 2 a.m. next morning. Diagnosis of cause of death on post-mortem was dysentery. Enquiries on 25th February had elicited the fact that this *sinkheh* was made to eat human excrement on the day before he was sent to hospital in addition to a long course of cruelty, because he was too ill to go to bathe. The headman compelled this cooly to eat human excrement. He rubbed the excrement on the cooly's teeth. This *Kong Thau* was one of the three headmen who were sentenced to imprisonment for voluntarily causing hurt to another *sinkheh* as above stated . . . No further legal proceedings were taken in connection with the *sinkheh's* death, as the Medical Officer said it could not be proved that the privy from which the excrement was taken was infected . . .

He further reported that:

On 21st April, with Assistant Commissioner of Police Mr. Fairburn, I visited Kwong Li Estate in consequence of information received in the

⁸Ibid (evidence).

⁹Ibid (evidence).

Bagan Serai hospital of cruelty on the part of the *Kong Thau* of the kongsi, who was alleged to have practised unnatural offences. We arrived at the estate at 11 a.m. I informed the *Kong Thau* that I had come to enquire into the allegation. The *Sinkhehs*, some 60 in number, were interrogated one by one, but for two hours no facts were elicited. It was quite clear to me that the coolies were terrorised, and on my going out into the open alone I was immediately surrounded by numbers anxious to give information. On returning to the kongsi I was satisfied that one *sinkheh* had stated a fact when he said that he was being subjected to an unnatural offence at the time of our arrival. I was also satisfied that the *Kong Thau* made a practice of it in the kongsi, and that resistance had been visited with cruelty by the *Kong Thau*.

This *Kong Thau* was charged on three counts of unnatural offences before the Supreme Court and on 27th May, received an aggregate sentence of nine years rigorous imprisonment. In delivering judgment Mr. Justice Braddell said he was satisfied that the whole labour force had been terrorised.

I am sorry to say the practise of unnatural offences is not uncommon, and I fear there is an enormous amount of undetected and unpunished cruelty to *sinkhehs* on the Krian estates, and that this will continue to be the case so long as visits of the Protector are cursory and few.

The Commission stated that:

The housing of Chinese indentured labourers . . . on estates in Krian leaves much to be desired, the lines or 'rumah kecil' in which the majority of the labourers live are mere hovels and sanitation is conspicuous by its absence.

It is interesting to compare the conditions of the Chinese indentured labourers who worked on European-owned coffee and rubber estates in Negri Sembilan. These labourers were not directly employed by the European employer, but through Chinese labour contractors. The conclusion of the Commission about them was:

There appears to be no ill-treatment of Chinese indentured labour on European-managed estates in Negri Sembilan . . . There are, however, some matters which require attention.

For example, on one estate:

. . . the indentured Chinese labourers are confined within a palisade from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.; chandu and provisions are supplied to labourers in lieu of wages in contravention of . . . the Truck Enactment. Wages are withheld until the expiration of the labourers' contracts instead of being paid monthly as prescribed by . . . the Enactment.

The Chinese contractor, a 36-year old Hainanese, for this same estate stated on the 2nd July, 1910:

The *sinkhehs* live in a kongsi house which is surrounded by a wooden palisade. A watchman is on duty at the gate. The 14 runaways escaped by burrowing a hole under the kongsi house . . . The coolies are locked up after 6 p.m. They are let out to work at 6 a.m. The working hours are from 6 a.m. to 3 p.m.—9 hours a day. They, however, have half an hour's rest at 11 a.m. to eat some congee . . .

I supply free food to the *sinkhehs* under contract with the manager of the estate. Pork once a week—salt and fresh vegetables, oil and rice every day . . . The total cost of rations per head for the *sinkhehs* comes to about \$9 a month. *Sinkhehs* get free rations, tobacco and clothes. Their wages are not paid monthly but are to be paid at expiration of their contract. They do not receive any cash. I supply them with all necessities. Their wages are 5 cents a day.¹⁰

A Chinese contractor on another estate in Negri Sembilan, who employed 300 men, 49 of whom were *sinkhehs*, said:

Although the wages stipulated for the *sinkhehs* by their contracts are 6 cents per diem and 7 cents an hour overtime, I allow 60 cents per diem for rubber tappers . . . *Sinkhehs* on an average can earn 60 cents per diem at weeding or hole-digging.

From their wages I deduct advances and passage money, also cost of food. Account books are made up monthly. Food cost about \$6 a month on an average price. Rice alone comes to about \$3.60 a month. I do not pay any wages to indentured *sinkhehs* until their debt is wiped off, but give them small sums in cash from time to time.

I have a shop on the estate and sell spirits, European and Asiatic, and also chandu to my coolies. I buy Government monopoly chandu at Port Dickson, 3-hun packets at 13½ cents, sale price to coolies 17 cent . . .¹¹

The general conclusion of the Assistant Protector of Chinese, who inspected these estates in Negri Sembilan at that time, was:

The *Sinkheh* seems to be healthy and contented, and to be well housed and fed. He frequently bolts, because by doing so he can earn 60 cents a day on the next estate as a *laukkeh*, instead of 5 cents and food as a *sinkkeh*. A consequence of this is that he is kept under strict supervision, in one case surrounded by a high palisade and guarded by a watchman in his non-working hours . . . He is too much of an adept at bolting and exchanging his *sinkkeh* for a *laukkeh* status for his employer to treat him ill.¹²

¹⁰Ibid (evidence).

¹¹Ibid (evidence).

¹²Ibid (evidence).

The general financial aspect of the employment of *sinkhehs* on rubber estates is summarised in tabular form in Appendix I of the 1910 Labour Commission's report:

Taking it that a cooly can earn 50 cents daily on a rubber estate, a *sinkheh's* work for 100 days should be worth \$50.

					\$
Passage, etc. (see below)	..	..	..	..	20
Food for 100 days at \$4 p.m.	..	..	..	..	13
Clothing .. .. .	..	..	..	..	5
Wages at 5 cents a day for 100 days	..	..	..	..	5
					<hr/> 43

Profit to Employer .. \$7

Cost of Sinkheh

Transport from village to treaty port, including boarding-house fee .. .. .	..	..	..	..	2
Passage from Canton or Swatow to Port Swettenham ..	..	..	..	..	12
Advance to <i>sinkheh</i> in China .. .. .	..	..	..	..	3
Commission to recruiter in China .. .. .	..	..	..	..	3
					<hr/> 20

The advent of the more profitable crop of rubber brought an end to the large-scale estate cultivation of tapioca and sugar. By 1909 the area under sugar was 7,128 acres in the Federated Malay States and 3,638 acres in Province Wellesley. The F.M.S. figure by 1910 had fallen to 3,759 acres (1,405 of which were interplanted with rubber) and by 1911 to 2,133 acres; 'in a short time there will be little or no sugar grown'—a situation reached in 1913. As for tapioca, in 1916 in Negri Sembilan only 775 acres remained, in contrast to the huge area that had been cultivated at one time in the Tampin district. When in 1911 the Government announced (and enacted formally in the Labour Code, 1912) that all indentured Chinese labour contracts would lapse and become illegal on the 1st July, 1914—which meant the end of cheap labour under complete year-long control—the death knell of these two estate crops, the cultivation of which depended upon an abundant and dependable supply of very cheap labour, was sounded for all time.

Rubber Estates

The Chinese labourers employed in the F.M.S. on *estates* increased as follows:

		<i>Perak</i>	<i>Selangor</i>	<i>Negri Sembilan</i>	<i>Pahang</i>
1912	..	5,177	6,256	9,699	307
1914	..	4,085	5,441	12,829	1,645
1916	..	7,952	10,286	22,261	2,332
1918	..	6,148	10,218	27,536	2,470
1920	..	7,705	7,561	22,254	3,346

Although the provisions of the 1912 Labour Code applied to Chinese labourers, it was reported by the Labour Department in 1913 that:

Owing to the lack of Chinese-speaking officers it has not been possible hitherto to exercise any effective control in matters concerning Chinese labour, and no attempt could be made in the year under review to enforce those provisions of the Labour Code which relate to Chinese labour . . .

It frequently happens that Chinese labourers employed on an estate are engaged through a contractor and do not appear on the checkroll or live on the estate, so that there is no accurate information available about them. The rate of wages of Chinese labourers varied from 50 cents to 80 cents.

In the following year it was reported impossible even to get reliable returns of the labourers employed:

The chief difficulty lies in the fact that, in the majority of cases, Chinese labourers are employed through an illiterate sub-contractor, and the owner or manager of the place has no direct dealings with the labourers and is only concerned with the fulfilment of a contract to carry out certain work.

Similarly it has not been found possible in practice to enforce the provisions of the Code relating to truck usages so far as Chinese labourers are concerned. Here again the contractor or headman intervenes between the owner and the labourers, and this is inevitable owing to the inability of employers to understand the labourers' language. It is also an undoubted fact that Chinese labourers in this country actually prefer to have food and other necessities found for them and charged against their wages account, even if the rate charged be high, to being put to the trouble of buying and cooking food for themselves.

In 1917 it was said:

Chinese estate labour is all handled by contractors. The manager of an estate gives a contract to do a piece of work to a Chinese contractor.

The contractor gathers the Chinese labour, completes the work assigned and receives payment. Generally, as the work progresses, the manager makes advances to the contractor against the part of the work completed. Should the contractor receive a large advance he may abscond with it, leaving the work unfinished and his labourers unpaid and gravely dissatisfied with the manager. This was the cause of nearly all the wage troubles in 1917.

On nearly all the older estates (in Negri Sembilan) the *kongsis* of the Chinese are substantial and suitable . . . Medical attendance is provided by a hospital dresser, who visits all lines once a day or once in two days to spy out the sick, and treat them or bring them to hospital. Each estate has its own hospital or has a share with neighbouring estates in a group hospital. The hospitals are visited by European doctors once in two weeks or once in four weeks.¹³

As for wages, in 1919 'figures from the contractors' wages books on 26 estates show an average earning of \$1.24 per working day by a tapper as against \$1.08, the figure found by the same means in 1918'. The value of this can be seen from the cost of food in 1920:

The general charge by contractors for rice supplied to their labourers is about 30 cents daily for each man; vegetables cost about \$8, so that the average monthly cost of a labourer's food is about \$17.¹⁴

¹³Labour Department Annual Reports for 1913, 1914 and 1919.

¹⁴*Ibid* 1920.

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