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HISTORY,
PART I.
EVENTS PRIOR TO BRITISH ASCENDANCY.

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NOTES ON PERAK HISTORY.

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HISTORY.

PART I.

EVENTS PRIOR TO BRITISH ASCENDANCY.

WILD ABORIGINAL TRIBES IN THE PENINSULA.

IT is a matter of common knowledge that the Malays were not the first inhabitants of the Peninsula. Although they intermarried with the aborigines, and although they show many traces of mixed blood, they failed to absorb completely the races that they supplanted. The new settlers kept to the rivers; the older races lived on the mountains or among the swamps. Some of the old tribes died out, some adopted the ways of the Malays, but others retained their own language and their primitive culture, and are still to be found in many parts of British Malaya.

The Negrito aborigines, collectively known as Semang, are usually believed to have been the first race to occupy the Peninsula. As they are closely akin to the Aetas of the Philippines and the Mincopies of the Andamans they must at one time have covered large tracts of country from which they have since completely disappeared, but at the present day they are mere survivals and play no part whatever in civilised life. Slowly but surely they are dying out. Even within the last century they occupied the swampy coast-districts from Trang in the north to the borders of Larut in the south, but at the census of 1891 only one Negrito—who, as the enumerator said, “twittered like a bird”—was recorded from Province Wellesley, and in 1901 not one single survivor was found. Although present-day students, who naturally prefer the evidence of their own eyes to the records of past observers, are inclined to regard the Semang as a mountain-people it is quite possible that their more natural haunt was the swamp-country from which they have been expelled. Whether this be so or not, the Negritos of British Malaya are usually divided up by the Malays into three: the Semang Paya or swamp-Semang (now almost extinct); the Semang Bukit or mountain-Semang who inhabit
the mountains of Upper Perak, and the Pangan who are occasionally found in some of the hills between Pahang and Kelantan.

The culture of some of these Negrito tribes is very primitive. The wilder Semang are extremely nomadic; they are not acquainted with any form of agriculture; they use bows and arrows; they live in mere leaf-shelters with floors that are not raised above the ground; their quivers and other bamboo utensils are very roughly made and adorned. Such statements would not, however, be true of the whole Semang race; a few tribes have learnt to plant; others to use the blowpipe; others have quivers of very beautiful workmanship; some go so far (if Mr. Skeat is to be relied upon) as to include the "theft of a blunderbuss" in their little catalogues of crime—but, unless we are prepared to believe that they invented such things as blunderbusses, we are forced to the conclusion that they must have borrowed some of their neighbours' culture.

A few Semang are still to be found in the mountains between Selama and the Perak valleys; others doubtless exist in the little-known country that lies between Temengor and the river Plus; but south of the Plus we come to a fairer race, the northern division of the numerous tribes that are often grouped together as "Sakai."

If identity of language is any criterion of common origin the northern Sakai racial division includes the tribes known as the "Sakai of Korbu," the "Sakai of the Plus," the "Sakai of Tanjong Rambutan" and the "Tembe" who inhabit the Pahang side of the great Kinta mountains. As these northern Sakai are rather darker than the Sakai of Batang Padang and not quite as dark as the Semang, they have sometimes been classed as a mere mixed race, a cross between their northern and southern neighbours. This is not necessarily the case. Their rather serious appearance, for one thing, does not suggest an admixture of the infantile physiognomy of the Semang and the gay boyish looks of the Sakai of Slim and Bidor. Moreover, their industrial art (to judge by blowpipes and quivers) is higher than that of their neighbours either to the north or to the south. They practise agriculture and live in small houses raised above the ground—the commonest type of house throughout Indo-China.

The expression "Central Sakai" has been used to cover a group of tribes who live in the Batang Padang mountains and
speak what is practically a common language, though there are a few dialectic differences in the different parts of this district. Mr. Hugh Clifford was the first to point out the curiously abrupt linguistic and racial frontier between the “Tembe” to the north and the “Senoi” (his name for the Central Sakai) to the south. But all the secrets of this racial frontier have not yet been revealed. Although the Sakai who live in the valleys above Gopeng speak a language that very closely resembles the language of the Sakai of Bidor, Sungkai and Slim, they seem still closer akin—racially—to their neighbours in the north. Moreover, if we look up from Gopeng to the far mountains lying just to the north of Gunong Berembun we can see clearings made by another tribe—the Mai Luk, or men of the mountains—of whom the Central Sakai stand in deadly fear. These mysterious Mai Luk have long communal houses like the Borneo Dyaks, they plant vegetables, they paint their foreheads, they are credited with great ferocity, and they speak a language of which the only thing known is that it is not Central Sakai.

As we proceed further south the racial type slowly alters until—in the mountains behind Tapah, Bidor, Sungkai and Slim—we come to a distinct and unmistakable race that is comparatively well known to European students. These Mai Darat, or hill men, are slightly lower in culture than the northern Sakai; they live in shelters rather than huts; their quivers and blowpipes are very much more simply made than those of their northern and southern neighbours. Linguistically we are still in the “Central Sakai” region.

Near Tanjong Malim on the boundary between Perak and Selangor the type suddenly changes. We come upon fresh tribes differing in appearance from the Central Sakai, living (in some cases) in lofty tree huts, and speaking varieties of the great “Besisi” group of Sakai dialects. The men who speak these Besisi dialects seem to be a very mixed race. Some dwelling in the Selangor mountains are singularly well-built men. Others, who live in the swamps and in the coast districts, are a more miserable people of slighter build, and with a certain suggestion of Negrito admixture. Their culture is comparatively high. They have a more elaborate social system, with triple headmen instead of a solitary village elder to rule the small community. This form of tribal organisation—under a batin, jenang and jekra (or juru kéra)—is common to a very large

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1 This is the type illustrated in Mr. Corruti’s photographs.
number of tribes in the south of the Peninsula and is also found among the Orang Laut, or sea-gypsies. The Besisi tribes cultivate the soil, build fair houses, have some artistic sense, are fond of music, possess a few primitive songs, and know something of the art of navigation. They are found all over Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Malacca.

In the mountains of Jelebu, near the head waters of the Kongkoi and Kenaboi rivers, are found the Kenaboi, a shy and mysterious people, who speak a language totally unlike either Central Sakai, Besisi or Malay. So little is known about the Kenaboi that it would be dangerous to commit oneself to any conjecture regarding their position in the ethnography of the Peninsula, but it is at least probable that they represent a distinct and very interesting racial element.

In the flat country on the border between Negri Sembilan and Pahang, we meet the Serting Sakai, an important and rather large tribe that seems at one time to have been in contact with some early Mon-Annam civilisation. Moreover, it is said that there are traces of ancient canal cuttings in the country that this tribe occupies.

By the upper waters of the Rompin river there live many Sakai of whom very little is known. They may possibly be either "Besi,er, " "Serting Sakai, " "Jakun" or "Sakai of Kuantan."

The term "Jakun" is applied to a large number of remnants of old Malacca and Johor tribes that have now been so much affected by Malay civilisation as to make it impossible to hope ever to clear up the mystery of their origin. A few brief Jakun vocabularies have been collected in the past; a few customs noted. It is perhaps too much to expect that anything more will be done.

The aborigines who inhabit the country near Kuantan (and perhaps near Pekan and even further south) speak a language of their own, of which no vocabulary has ever been collected, and use curious wooden blowpipes of a very unusual type. They may be a distinct race, for they seem to have a primitive culture that is quite peculiar to themselves.

In the mountainous region lying between this Kuantan district and the Tembeling river there is found another tribe of Sakai who wear strange rattan girdles like the Borneo Dyaks, and speak a language of which one observer, though acquainted with Malay, Central Sakai and Northern Sakai, could make nothing.
In the mountain-mass known as Gunong Bênom (in Pahang) there are found other tribes of Sakai speaking a language that has some kinship with Besisi and Serting Sakai. Very little else is known about them.

We possess fairly good specimen vocabularies of the languages of all the better-known Sakai and Semang tribes. With the single exception of Kenaboi they possess a very marked common element, and may be classed as divisions of the same language although the peoples that speak them show such differences of race and culture. This language is complicated and inflected, and has an elaborate grammar, but so little is known of the details of its structure that we dare not generalise or point to any one dialect as being probably the purest form of Sakai. It is impossible also to say which race first brought this form of speech to the Peninsula. It would, however, be rash to assume that Sakai and Kenaboi are the only two distinctive types of language used by these wild tribes. Nothing sufficient is yet known of the speech of the Mai Luk, of the dialects of Kuantan, and of the old Jakun languages. Far too much has been inferred from the customs of what one may term the “stock” tribes of Sakai, the tribes that are readily accessible and therefore easy to study. These Sakai have been visited again and again by casual observers, to the neglect of the remoter and lesser-known tribes who may prove to be far more interesting in the end. When we consider the physical differences between tribe and tribe, the differences of language, the differences of culture evinced in types of dwellings, in tribal organisation, in weapons, and in mode of life, we may perhaps be excused for thinking that the racial elements in the Peninsula will prove to be more numerous and important than scientists are apt to believe.

Meanwhile the Peninsula presents us with a curious historical museum showing every grade of primitive culture. It gives us the humble Negrito, who has not learnt to till the ground but wanders over the country and lives from hand to mouth on the products of the jungle. It gives us the same Negrito after he has learnt the rudiments of art and agriculture from his Sakai neighbours. It gives us the Sakai who grows certain simple fruits and vegetables and is nomadic in a far lighter degree than the primitive Semang, for a man who plants is a man who lives some time in one place and therefore may find it worth his while to build a more substantial dwelling than
a mere shelter for a night. Here, however, primitive culture stops. Even the man who has learnt to plant a crop in a clearing must abandon his home when the soil begins to be exhausted. The boundary between primitive culture and civilisation cannot be said to be reached until habitations become really permanent and until a comparatively small area can support a large population. That boundary is crossed when a people learn to renew the fertility of land by irrigation, by manuring, or by a proper system of rotation of crops. The Malays with their system of rice-planting—the irrigated rice, not hill rice,—have crossed that boundary. But no Sakai tribe outside the Negri Sembilan has ever done so.

EARLY CIVILISATION.

Although the British possessions in Malaya are not absolutely destitute of archaeological remains they are singularly poor in relics of antiquity when contrasted with Java and Cambodia, or even with the northern part of the Peninsula itself.

Ancient inscriptions have been found in Kedah, in the northern district of Province Wellesley, in the central district of Province Wellesley, and in the island of Singapore. That in Kedah has been completely deciphered; it is a Buddhist formula such as might have been written up in the cell or cave of an ascetic. That in the north of Province Wellesley was carved on a pillar that seemed to form part of a little temple; it has not been completely deciphered, but from the form of the written character it is believed to date back to the year 400 A.D., and to be the oldest inscription in this part of the world—unless, indeed, the Kedah writing is slightly more ancient. The rock carvings at Cheroh Tokun near Bukit Mertajam belong to various ages and are too worn away to be read in connected sentences; the oldest seems to go back to the fifth century and another to the sixth century A.D. As the monument in Singapore was blown up by the Public Works Department in order to make room for some town improvements it is no longer available for study, but from a rough copy made before its destruction it appears to have been in the ancient Kawi character of Java or Sumatra. It probably dates back to the thirteenth or fourteenth century A.D. Another inscription, presumably of the same class, is to be seen at Pulau Karimun, near Singapore.
Near Pangkalan Kėmpas, on the Linggi river, there are a number of broken monuments which, though they seem to be of comparatively recent date, are of considerable interest. On a curious four-sided pillar there are four inscriptions, two in clear-cut Arabic and two in the fainter lettering of an unknown script. Below these inscriptions there is a circular hole cut right through the pillar, and just large enough to permit of the passage of a man's arm—it is indeed believed that this pillar (which has been much used for oaths and ordeals) will tighten round the arm of any man who is rash enough to swear falsely when in its power. Near this pillar is another cut stone on which the lettering of some old non-Arabic inscription can be dimly seen. As there are many other fragments of carved stone that go to make up the kėramat or holy place of which the inscriptions form part, the Malays have invented a legend that these monuments represent the petrified property of an ancient saint—his spoon, his sword and his buckler. Muhammadan zeal seems also to have carved the holy name of Allah on the sword of the saint, and to have converted the first line of the inscriptions into the well-known formula, "In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate." Fragments of other monuments may be seen lying low in the swamp near which this Linggi kėramat is built up.

Besides these inscriptions traces of ancient non-Malayan civilisations have been found: (1) in some curious old bronzes, resembling bells, that have been dug up at Klang in Selangor; (2) in a little bronze image of a walking Buddha that was discovered in a Tanjong Rambutan mine at a depth of some sixty feet below the surface; (3) in an old Bernam tomb beautifully constructed of thin slabs of stone and containing some broken pottery and three cornelian beads, and (4) in pottery and iron tools that are continually being met with in old mining workings. More impressive, however, than any of these small relics are the galleries, stopes and shafts of the old mines at Selinsing in Pahang—the work of a race that must have possessed no small degree of mechanical skill. Who were the men who left these remains? If it be true (as the condition of the Selinsing workings seems to suggest) that the mines were suddenly abandoned in the very midst of the work that was being done, such a fact would lend further support to the natural conjecture that the miners were foreign adventurers who exploited the wealth of the Peninsula and did not make the country their per-
manent home. The Malays say that these alien miners were "men of Siam." Is this true? Students are apt to forget that "men of Siam," seven or eight centuries ago, would refer to the great and highly civilised Cambodian race who occupied the valley of the Menam before the coming of the "Thai" from whom the present Siamese are descended. It is therefore probable enough that the Malays are right, and that the mining shafts of Selinsing are due to the people who built the magnificent temples of Angkor. Further evidence, if such evidence is needed, may be found in the fact that the Sakai of certain parts of Pahang use numerals that are neither Siamese nor Malay nor true Sakai, but Mon-Khmer.

The general conclusion to be drawn from the traces of ancient culture in the Peninsula is that the southern portions of the country were often visited but never really occupied by any civilised race until the Malays came in A.D. 1400. Such a conclusion would not, however, be true of the Northern States, of Kedah, Kelantan, Trang and Singgora. There we find undoubted evidence of the existence of powerful Buddhist States like that of Langkasuka, the kingdom of alang-kah suka or of the Golden Age of Kedah, still remembered as a fairyland of Malay romance. This Langkasuka was a very ancient State indeed. It is mentioned in Chinese records as Langgasu as far back as A.D. 500, and was then reputed to be four centuries old; it appears (in Javanese literature) as one of the kingdoms overcome by Majapahit in A.D. 1377; its name probably survives to this day in the "Langkawi" islands off the Kedah coast. But the ancient States of Northern Malaya lie outside the scope of this pamphlet; they are interesting to us because they probably sent small mining colonies to the south and thus claimed some sort of dominion over the rest of the Peninsula. The great Siamese invasion changed all that. By crushing the northern States during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries A.D. it ruined their little southern colonies and left the territories of Perak, Johor, Malacca and Pahang a mere no-man's-land that the Malays from Sumatra could occupy without resistance.