IN RUBBER LANDS.

By

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INDIAN CHRISTIAN NURSE AND HOSPITAL BABY.
IN RUBBER LANDS.

An account of the work of the Church in Malaya.

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CHAPTER I.

MALAYA—THE COUNTRY, ITS HISTORY, AND PEOPLE.

Nowhere in the world can more beautiful scenery of a tropical character be found than in the country of Malaya. The Peninsula, which is roughly 500 miles long and 200 miles broad at its widest part, is divided lengthwise by a chain of mountains into a narrow western area on the one hand, where are most of the centres of industry and population, and where the thick natural jungle has in many places been cleared to make room for cultivation or plantation; and on the other hand the much less known and more sparsely populated region of Pahang on the east.

Besides the beauties of mountain and coast, and of numerous tree clothed islands dotted over a tropical sea of brilliant blue, the country is remarkable also for its magnificent rivers, long and broad, but usually too shallow for the passage of vessels of any great size. This characteristic, as well as the bars, which on the east coast are heaped up at their mouth by the violence of the north-east monsoon, greatly diminishes their value as means of traffic. The most important of these rivers are the Perak River, flowing southwest for 150 miles and navigable by shallow-draft boats for about fifty miles; the Kelantan River flowing north and the Pahang River flowing east, both these latter being similarly navigable by flat-bottomed boats for about half their length.

Thick forest covering the hills; groves of coconuts bordering the sea, with Malay huts nestling beneath them; stretches of padi (rice) land in the plains; gardens of tapioca or sireh vine; orchards of plantain, mangosteen, rambutan or durian; rubber plantations or tin mines—such are a few of the scenes which meet the eye in passing through this rich and beautiful country.
In order to understand properly the peoples of Malaya, its mixture of races and the characteristics of its indigenous inhabitants, a study of its position on the map is of the first importance. Situated at the south-east corner of Asia, Singapore is the point round which all ships must turn on their way from Europe to China or Japan. Lying between India and Ceylon on the west, and China and Japan on the east, it is not surprising that we find in Malaya representatives of the inhabitants of all these countries, the most numerous being the Chinese from South China and the Tamils from South India. It is this cosmopolitan character, with its necessary adjunct of numerous vernaculars, which (as will be fully explained later on) makes missionary work in the Malay Peninsula of quite extraordinary difficulty.

Noticing again that Singapore lies only ninety miles north of the equator, it is natural that the Malay Peninsula should have a tropical climate, that tropical growth of palm and jungle should be its outstanding physical feature, and that the Malays should lack the enterprise and energy which are the product of cold or temperate climes.

The climate of the Malay Peninsula is extraordinarily equable, with very little seasonal variation and no extremes of temperature. Moist heat is its general characteristic, the shade temperature varying from about 74 to 94 degrees, with a mean temperature of 80 or 85 degrees. The average yearly rainfall of the lowlands is 90 to 100 inches, fairly evenly distributed throughout the year, but in hilly districts this may be far exceeded, the fall being sometimes torrential—a truly tropical downpour.

The densely wooded hills abound in animal life. The seladang (or bison) is the acknowledged king of the Malayan jungle and a great prize to the big game hunter; but elephant, tiger, tapir, panther, rhinoceros, and crocodile are to be found, as well as wild pig and some varieties of deer. Of birds the beautiful argus pheasant is the most notable; and snipe, teal, and pigeon attract those in search of sport.

From the point of view of government, the country is divided into three parts—the Straits Settlements, the
Federated Malay States, and the Non-federated States. The Straits Settlements comprise Singapore, an island situated at the extreme south of the Peninsula, and containing the capital city and port of the same name; Malacca, a district and town on the western coast some 100 miles north of Singapore; and Penang, or Prince of Wales’ Island, an island and town at the north-west of the Peninsula. Two strips of territory on the mainland are also included—Province Wellesley, opposite Penang, which was originally annexed to protect that port from the depredations of the Malay pirates who infested the rivers and were ever on the look-out for trading vessels entering or leaving the harbour; and the Dinding further down the coast, a district which may come into greater prominence in the future if its harbour facilities are developed and made use of.

The Straits Settlements (S.S.) form a Crown Colony under the Colonial Office, and are administered by a Governor (who is also the High Commissioner of the Federated Malay States), assisted by an Executive and a Legislative Council. Their joint population is now about 1,000,000, and comprises Europeans, Eurasians, Chinese, Malays, and Indians, besides a sprinkling of other races. Except amongst the Eurasians and Malays, there is a large preponderance of males over females in each race.

The Federated Malay States (F.M.S.) are four in number—Perak, Selangor, Pahang, and Negri Sembilan; of these Pahang, though the largest in extent, occupying as it does most of the centre and east of the Peninsula, is at present the least developed. These States came under British protection at different dates, the most important of which is that of the Treaty of Pangkor in 1874. The federation was completed in 1896.

General control is exercised by the High Commissioner and the Federal Council, and a British Resident is attached to each State. Each State has, however, its own Malay Sultan, on whose State Council the Resident has a seat, and a number of English officials assist in the administration.

It is important to note that though the Treaty of Pangkor
promises to the Malays the control of all matters connected with the Mohammedan religion, there is nothing in its provisions to restrict the work of missionary effort in the country.

The Non-federated States which make up the rest of the Peninsula are less closely attached to British rule, though each has a British Adviser to assist in the management of the State; they are Johore, Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu, and the small State of Perlis. Johore has always been an independent kingdom, but the other States have only of recent years (1909) been taken over by Britain from the suzerainty of Siam.

Though now somewhat thrown into the background by the more virile immigrant races, the Malays, as the natives of the country, are the people who first claim our notice. There is considerable doubt as to the source and original home of the Malays; a question on which their language, which is distinct from the Indo-European and Mongolian families, throws little light. Whatever their place of origin may have been, in the earliest historical times they inhabited the highlands of Sumatra, and from thence spread to the adjoining countries. They were not (so much we know) the original inhabitants of the Peninsula, but gradually supplanted the aboriginal tribes, remnants of which still remain as the Sakai, Semang, and other Negrite tribes of the interior. ‘These aborigines who lurk in the recesses of the forests, or on the thickly wooded mountain sides, can tell us nothing of the early days of the Peninsula.’* The Sakai are a shy harmless race, comparatively few in numbers, wearing little clothing, and killing their prey by means of arrows shot from long blow-pipes. They are found mostly in the more remote districts of Pahang, and come little into contact with civilization, only a few Europeans having succeeded in gaining any acquaintance with their language.

‘Unlike India, Ceylon, Burma, Siam, or Java, the Malay Peninsula has no ancient monuments, no archaeological remains of any value, no records of its early history.’* In the stories of the first Malay princes it is difficult to disentangle

* "British Malaya," published by Malay States Information Agency.