THE
GOLDEN CHERSONESE
AND THE WAY THITHER

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ETC.

WITH MAP AND ILLUSTRATIONS

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INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

CANTON and Saigon, and whatever else is comprised in the second half of my title, are on one of the best beaten tracks of travellers, and need no introductory remarks.

But the GOLDEN CHERSONESE is still somewhat of a terra incognita; there is no point on its mainland at which European steamers call, and the usual conception of it is as a vast and malarious equatorial jungle sparsely peopled by a race of semi-civilised and treacherous Mohammedans. In fact it is as little known to most people as it was to myself before I visited it, and as reliable information concerning it exists mainly in valuable volumes now out of print, or scattered through blue books and the transactions of the Asiatic Society of Singapore, I make no apology for prefacing my letters from the Malay Peninsula with as many brief preliminary statements as shall serve to make them intelligible, requesting those of my readers who are familiar with the subject to skip this chapter altogether.

The Aurea Chersonesus of Ptolemy, the “Golden CHERSONESE” of Milton, the Malay Peninsula of our day, has no legitimate claim to an ancient history. The controversy respecting the identity of its Mount Ophir with the Ophir of Solomon has been “threshed out” without much result, and the supposed allusion to the Malacca Straits by Pliny is too vague to be interesting.
The region may be said to have been rediscovered in 1513 by the Portuguese, and the first definite statement concerning it appears to be in a letter from Emanuel, King of Portugal, to the Pope. In the antique and exaggerated language of the day, he relates that his general, the famous Albuquerque, after surprising conquests in India, had sailed to the *Aurea Chersonesus*, called by its inhabitants Malacca. He had captured the city of Malacca, sacked it, slaughtered the Moors (Mohammedans) who defended it, destroyed its twenty-five thousand houses abounding in gold, pearls, precious stones, and spices, and on its site had built a fortress with walls fifteen feet thick, out of the ruins of its mosques. The king, who fought upon an elephant, was badly wounded and fled. Further, on hearing of the victory, the King of Siam, from whom Malacca had been "usurped by the Moors," sent to the conqueror a cup of gold, a carbuncle, and a sword inlaid with gold. This conquest was vaunted of as a great triumph of the Cross over the Crescent, and as its result, by the year 1600, nearly the whole commerce of the Straits had fallen into the hands of the Portuguese.

Of the remaining "Moorish" or Malay kingdoms, Acheen, in Sumatra, was the most powerful, so powerful, indeed, that its king was able to besiege the great stronghold of Malacca more than once with a fleet, according to the annalist, of "more than five hundred sail, one hundred of which were of greater size than any then constructed in Europe, and the warriors or mariners that it bore amounted to sixty thousand, commanded by the king in person." The first mention of Johore, or Jhor, and Pèrak occurs about the same time, Pèrak being represented as a very powerful and wealthy State.

The Portuguese, by their persevering and relentless religious crusade against the Mohammedans, converted all the States which were adjacent to their conquests into