ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO THE FEDERATED MALAY STATES 1923
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TO THE

FEDERATED

MALAY STATES

(1923)

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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INTRODUCTION

A guidebook is written for a distinctive readership. Whereas most books on foreign regions are intended for people who will never be near the place concerned, a guidebook must explain unfamiliar matters to persons who will experience them firsthand and for that reason provides information that is often unavailable from other sources, particularly concerning routine details of everyday life. Much of the interest in old guidebooks stems from this fact, that they bring the past to life in a way that administration reports or formal histories rarely accomplish. Old guidebooks also contribute to an understanding of the attitudes and preoccupations of an earlier generation by showing what features of another society are thought worthy of praise and what of condemnation.

C. W. Harrison's Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States was first published in 1910. The 1923 edition reprinted here was provided with a new set of photographs and revised information where certain details had fallen out of date, but otherwise differed little from the original version.

The only article substantially changed between the first and fourth editions of the book was that on tin mining by F. J. Ballantyne Dykes. In 1910 mining was labour-intensive and largely a Chinese industry. European entrepreneurs had for years tried without success to compete using more capital-intensive, mechanized techniques. Dykes wrote: 'The white man has come and watched the Chinaman working and has smiled at his methods; but the white man has often gone with schemes for revolutionising these methods but seldom returns, whilst the methods still remain and enable the Chinaman to prosper.
—and sometimes grow rich." In 1910 suction dredges were a recent innovation and just beginning to have an impact on Malayan tin mining. By 1923 bucket dredges were revolutionizing the mining industry, making it possible to work lands not accessible by conventional methods, such as swamp or grounds where deposits were not rich enough to pay be using labour-intensive methods. The initial cost of a dredge was high, however, and more easily absorbed by European joint-stock ventures than by the private partnerships favoured by Chinese investors. Europeans thus obtained their foothold, and by 1930 63 per cent of Malaya's tin output came from European-owned mines.²

The shift to mechanization brought about a reduction in the size of the labour force engaged in tin mining. The first edition of Harrison's Guide reported a workforce of some 185,000 men, and three years later the figure had reached 216,000. In 1923 depressed economic conditions had caused a 29 per cent reduction in output (from 50,127 tons in 1913 to 35,286 tons in 1923 but the size of the labour force had fallen by 62 per cent to 82,000.

Rubber was given cursory treatment in both the first and fourth editions of the Guide. There is an interesting description of a visit to an estate, but none of the economic detail provided for tin. In 1910 this omission was a surprising oversight since rubber had already become a major factor in the Malayan economy, but later editions failed to remedy what had become an egregious deficiency. The paucity of references to Malaya's Indian population is presumably a result of the overall neglect of the rubber industry.

The bulk of Harrison's book is taken up by a chapter outlining an itinerary through the Federated Malay States, describing the various towns and districts met along the way, and a chapter entitled 'Notes for Travellers' containing a mélangé of information about institutions and local society in Malaya. There is the occasional patronizing remark (although nothing that exceeds the comments on European women, described as a man's 'feminine belongings', but these sections also bring out features of life in British Malaya not often remarked elsewhere. There are, for example, Harrison's strictures on diet, apparently the result of hard-won experience, and observations on fruits and vegetables, clothing, and transport. The section on varieties of race is thorough and deftly portrays the occupational specialization by race that was one of the distinctive features of British Malaya. It mentions, too, the curious practice of referring to Punjabis, and non-Tamils generally, as 'Bengalis', a usage that still prevails in modern Malaysia in defiance of conventional ethnographic categories. There are brief but vivid accounts of a pauper hospital and of the treatment of persons with mental disorders, and a striking description of the inmates of hospital 'decrepit wards' making their way into town to peddle baskets of their own making. The section on hospitals makes the cogent point that attitudes toward European medicine were influenced by a tendency for people to use it as a last resort, with the result that the mortality rate was exceptionally high and hospitals earned a reputation as places where people died.

The description of Kuala Lumpur shows something of the charm of the city, which offered quiet rides past the gardens of the European residents to the fringes of the forest, sports, good shops and English society, in short 'the advantages of the big cities like Penang and Singa-
pore, without their disadvantages in the way of jostling crowds, dust, heat, noise, smells and turmoil generally'. Harrison writes of people who spent 'month after month' in the city, 'doing, with complete satisfaction, nothing in particular', almost inadvertently communicating a sense of the stupefying ennui that could attack those Europeans not involved in administration or business. His explanation of the 'griffin system', whereby persons of modest means could invest in race-horses, ingenuously shows not only an aspect of colonial social life but also how middle-class men, given power and position far above what they would have achieved in Britain, contrived to imitate the behaviour of the wealthy.

The fondness of shooting, a common feature of the colonial empire, is another example of middle-class emulation of aristocratic pursuits. The most striking characteristic of this activity is that it normally had no utilitarian purpose, although as a favour to the local population a sportsman might undertake the elimination of a troublesome tiger or a marauding elephant. In the case of big game shooting the object, as described by Theodore Hubback, was to secure trophies, principally tusks, horns, heads and skins, while large creatures which did not offer suitable trophies, such as the tapir, Hubback declined to classify as big game. Most shooting, however, appears to have been directed simply toward causing maximum carnage in a brief period of time. The reader is told of a one-day bag of 609 snipe managed by a party of five men in 1893, a feat Harrison lauds as involving more than the simple firing of guns: 'It entailed the severest kind of hard walking in water and mud, under a tropical sun ....' Fishing was much the same, and a photograph in the book shows sixty-eight fish taken by two men from the Bukit Merah Reservoir in the course of a single day.
The defence of opium found in the book was a contribution to one of the most contentious issues of the early twentieth century. Throughout the nineteenth century opium was an important source of income for British traders and for British colonies, but opium had come under strong attack in England, and colonial administrations were being subjected to severe criticism for condoning and profiting from the trade. In the colonies many held that the anti-opium lobby was meddling in affairs about which it knew little or nothing, and that opium sold under controls was less harmful than alcohol. It was also suggested that if opium were unobtainable addicts would turn to illegal and more harmful drugs such as morphine. Such arguments represented a rearguard action, and when Harrison’s book first appeared in 1910 the government of Malaya was in the process of bringing opium (along with alcohol and other items) under stricter control by replacing revenue farms, whereby contractors sold opium and other products under a government licence, with a system of government monopolies. The Malayan government, however, drew a substantial proportion of its revenues from opium sales, and efforts to eliminate entirely the opium trade constituted a serious threat to the financial position of the colony. In the event the British Government in 1925 became party to an international agreement requiring that the sale and consumption of opium be phased out, and an Opium Revenue Replacement Fund was created in Malaya to overcome the loss of revenue from this source.

The chapter on Malaya’s museums contains a great deal of information, illustrating among other points how the emphasis of museums has changed. The exhibits described during the 1920s consist primarily of natural history collections and examples of physical culture. The section
on knives was extensive, as it should have been in view of the abiding Malay interest in edged weapons, and other Malay crafts, many of them now little practised, were also well represented. Museum displays of this sort do still appear in Malaysia, but there has been an increasing tendency to replace comprehensive displays of tools or animals with dioramas showing tools in use, or animals in a natural setting.

Finally, the map issued with the Guide deserves comment. Its most noticeable feature is the great expanse of the Peninsula without roads, and the concentration of transportation facilities in the tin mining areas of Perak and Selangor. The road and railway connections in Pahang described in the 1923 edition were new developments. In 1910 Harrison wrote that Pahang possessed ‘about 250 miles of road, 200 of path and, at present, no railway’ to serve a population of some 100,000 people in an area of 14,000 square miles. By 1923 there had been some changes, notably the arrival of the railway, but the capital was still at Kuala Lipis, in the area of Pahang most accessible to Kuala Lumpur but far removed from the town of Pekan where the Sultan resided, and Pahang remained the most neglected of the Federated Malay States.

C. W. Harrison was born in 1874 and joined the Malayan Civil Service as a cadet in 1897. His career was composed of a standard run of district and secretariat assignments with some time spent as Commissioner of Lands and culminating with a posting as Under-Secretary to Government. He retired in 1927. In addition to his guidebook Harrison wrote extensively for the Press, and a collection of his articles was published in 1916 under title The Magic of Malaya. He also prepared the Perak State
Council minutes for 1877–1879 for publication in their series of *Papers on Malay Subjects* and wrote a booklet for the Malayan Information Agency explaining conditions of service and other matters for potential recruits to the Malayan Civil Service. The British Library holds a copy of one further work, a family history entitled *The Harrisons of Newton and Bankfield in Lancashire* which was published privately in 1939 (Exeter, W. Pollard & Co.).

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