PAPERS ON MALAY SUBJECTS.

[Published by direction of the Government of the Federated Malay States.]

A HISTORY

OF THE

PENINSULAR MALAYS

WITH CHAPTERS ON

PERAK & SELANGOR

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SECOND EDITION: REVISED

PRICE: THREE DOLLARS

SINGAPORE
KELLY & WALSH, LIMITED,
32 Raffles Place and 194 Orchard Road.
1920.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **The Peninsular Aborigines** ........................................ 1
2. **The Proto-Malay** ............................................... 10
3. **Early Peninsular Civilization** ................................. 13
4. **The Coming of the Malays** .................................... 18
5. **The Malacca Sultanate** .......................................... 31
6. **The Portuguese Ascendancy** .................................... 43
7. **The Dutch Ascendancy** .......................................... 62
8. **Singapore, Johore and Muar** .................................. 85
9. **Early Perak History** ........................................... 93
10. **The Perak War** .................................................. 133
11. **Selangor** .......................................................... 153
THE PENINSULAR ABORIGINES.

It is a matter of common knowledge that the Malays were not the first inhabitants of the Peninsula. Though they have inter-married with the aborigines and show many traces of mixed blood they have failed to absorb completely the races they supplanted. The Malay settlers kept to the rivers: at their coming the earlier races took to the mountains or the swamps. Some of the old tribes have died out; some have adopted the ways of the Malays; others have 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 believed to have been the first race to occupy the Peninsula. As they are closely akin to the Aetas of the Philippines and to the Mincopies of the Andamans they must at one time have covered large tracts of country from which they have since disappeared; at the present day they are mere survivals and play no part whatever in civilised life. Slowly and 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; and yet 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 was found. Of the purest and most primitive Semang tribe only 113 were enumerated at the census of 1911, most of them having been found in territory ceded to Perak in 1909. Another similar tribe numbered 661 individuals; and of a third

1 Sēmang.
2 Sēmang Paya of Ijok and Upper Perak.
3 Jēher or Sakai Tanjong in Perak; Pangan in Pahang.
negrito by race but speaking the language of the Sakai, 681 were recorded. Other Negritos, no doubt, are to be found in Kelantan and in Siamese Malaya, but it is doubtful if the oldest race in Malaya is represented at the present time by more than 2,000 persons in all.

The culture of the Semang is very primitive. In his wildest state he cultivates nothing; he lives on the wild fruit of the jungle and on such animals as he can trap or slay. He is nomadic. His houses are mere leaf-shelters put up to screen him for the night. His communities are small; the jungle will not support a large population. Physically he is short in stature and light in build; his hair is frizzled and his colour a dark chocolate-brown. Of his religion very little is known. He seems to be free from the all-pervading horror of ghosts and of the dead that is so marked a feature of the beliefs of his neighbours; but he has faith in a future life and in an "isle of fruits" to which the departing soul wends its way. He fears thunder and lightning to such an extent that observers have credited him with a belief in some kind of Thunder-god. He is dirty in his habits and rarely uses water either for washing or travelling. His work is intermittent; he does little; he does nothing long. His most attractive quality is the cheery optimism with which he faces a life of appalling uncertainty and hardship. It is also notable that he cannot pronounce the letter R, though his Sakai neighbours can. The Malays of Northern Malaya experience a similar difficulty and may owe it to Semang intermixture.

Incidentally it should be explained that the word Semang, like most names given by a dominant to a subject race,

2 Sakai Jéram of the Perak River.
2 He pronounces it as the Arabic ghain or modern Greek gamma or even as y.
has come to be regarded as contemptuous. No negrito will answer to it. "We are not Semang," say the pure-blooded negritos of Ijok, "we are Sakai of the swamps; if you want Semang you will find them on the hills behind us." "Not so," say the negritos of the hills, "we likewise are not Semang; but if you cross the valley of the Perak river you will find Semang on the heights behind it." The traveller who follows that advice will find himself among fair non-negrito tribesmen who also repudiate the Semang name. A designation that is rejected or misapplied in this way is a fruitful source of error and confusion, especially among anthropologists of the excursionist type who accept uncritically all that natives have to tell them. Paradoxical as it may sound, the man who calls himself a Sakai is usually a Semang; he is never a Sakai. That word also is contemptuous; the true Sakai will not own up to it; he prefers to call himself a highlander or a man of the hinterland. The negrito, however, is flattered at being taken for a Sakai and accepts the name at once. Hence we get more confusion; but for all practical purposes a Semang is a nomadic primitive Peninsular negrito whose numeral system stops at two.

The fair wavy-haired aborigines known as the Sakai inhabit both sides of the Malayan main range from its extreme limits in the north of Perak to a point as far southward as Tanjong Malim. They are to be found also on the contiguous Kledang Hills, on Bujang Malaka, and on Gunong Benom in Pahang. There must be at least twenty thousand of these aborigines in Malaya—a very large number if allowance is made for the inhospitable character of their mountain homes. The number actually enumerated at the last census was 15,527. They speak three distinct

1 Orang Bukit. 2 Orang Darat. 3 One nai; two bie.
THE PENINSULAR ABORIGINES.

dialects or languages, and seem to represent more than one racial element, but they possess in common certain characteristics which justify their being classified together and differentiated from the other aboriginal tribes. They are fairer than their neighbours; they have a higher culture; they are wavy-haired; they paint their faces; they have the same numerals\(^1\); they have the same system of government; they have a peculiar religion common to all three divisions of the Sakai; and they are relatively dolichocephalic.

The Northern Sakai (who are found on the main-range from Sungai Raya and the Tenom northwards) are tall, active, well-built men, who are cleanly in their habits and suffer little from the skin-diseases that afflict most aborigines. They plant tubers of several kinds, also sugar-cane, millet and bananas. They build substantial houses of the long communal type and live in communities numbering sometimes as many as four hundred souls. They are good craftsmen, making excellent blow-pipes, elaborate quivers, powerful bows, and even iron-tipped arrows. They are less migratory than their neighbours, and their crops take longer to mature. They intermarry with strangers more readily than the Central Sakai and show signs of mixed blood, though their high standard of primitive culture makes it difficult to regard the Northern Sakai as a mere cross between the negrito and his neighbours. They numbered 6618 at the last census, and many doubtless escaped enumeration.\(^2\) Their isolation, their remoteness, and their culture make them a mysterious but most interesting people.

\(^1\) One \textit{ne}, \textit{nanu}; two \textit{nar}; three \textit{ni}.

\(^2\) The census did not include Kelantan and was not thoroughly done in Kuala Lipis district.
The Central Sakai are less advanced. They build flimsy huts instead of large communal houses, are shorter and weaker in build than their northern neighbours, are dirty to a disgusting degree, and have only small family clearings which they abandon while the crops are ripening. One would almost suspect them of being a degraded offshoot of the higher Northern Sakai stock were it not that they seem to be the purer tribe of the two. Their facial type is unmistakable and they refuse all intermarriage with other races. They are the best-known of all the aborigines. They were numbered as 7202 at the last census; and this figure is probably near the truth.

The Sakai of Gunong Benom were assumed to be identical with those of the main range until the census of 1911 when they were found to possess a language or dialect peculiar to themselves. Little else is known about them, but they are certainly Sakai in physical type and in their customs. The number enumerated was 1707.

All the Sakai tribes have the same political system—a confederacy of small family-communities under a common patriarchal chief. All alike maintain a certain tribal isolation and communicate or trade with the outer world through the tribal messenger. All alike conceal their personal names. All believe in a vast number of spirits of disease and in a future life; and they are in the habit of leaving food and implements on the graves of their dead so as to help the soul to leave the district. The Sakai have a curious hierarchy of magicians who are associated with the tiger (the local form of lycanthropy); these magicians are not buried in the ground but are left suspended on a tree or in a hut raised above the ground so that the tiger, the wizard’s familiar, may tear open the

1 The familiar-spirit (anak yang) resides in the tiger.
body and release the soul. These curious beliefs and practices extend, however, beyond the strict boundaries of the Sakai country. So also does the belief in a Sun-god, the beneficent giver of life, heat and light. "Was he all-virtuous?"—"Well, he could hardly be called that, for he devoured his own children." This Thyestean repast had its justification,—"for if one sun is so hot how could we have stood the heat of many?"—but the Sakai question the morality of the sun's behaviour, "and so did the moon, for she fled from him so that she might save the lives of her own children, the stars. That is why the sun shines by day and the moon by night; that also is why the sun is alone and the moon is surrounded by numberless children."

In the South of the Malay Peninsula we find two other primitive peoples who are neither Sakai nor Semang and yet speak non-Malayan languages. They are the Besisi of Selangor and Negri Sembilan, and certain Jakun tribes of Pahang.

The Besisi are unimportant numerically; only 1409 were recorded at the census of 1911. They have mixed with other tribes and copied Malay houses and modes of life to such an extent that they would be often indistinguishable from Malays but for their language. They differ widely from the Sakai both in racial type and in religion. In their features they are almost Malay or proto-Malayan; in religion they are agnostics. Their funerals are uncere­monious interments and they claim no knowledge of a future life. As for evil spirits, "I wish I could see them," said a Besisi, "I could then dodge them and escape all illness." Here we have the widespread theory of the ghostly origin of disease but not the horror of the supernatural which is generally found to go with it. The Besisi are a shy, unwarlike people who have accepted without resent-
ment the wrongs inflicted on them by past generations of Malays. Ask any one of them for his family history and you will often be told a harrowing tale of the cold-blooded murder of some parent or relative—and you will be told it without resentment as though it were the most natural thing in the world. There is something almost uncanny in the patience with which such injuries have been borne. There is something pitiful also in the uncomplaining manner in which these tribesmen submit to the petty traders who exploit them from day to day. Except for an occasional tree-hut and a tribal pattern of quiver the Besisi has no distinctive culture of his own. He is content to wash for tin, to sell the fruit of old abandoned orchards, to collect jungle produce and to do odd jobs on the plantations of others. He has none of the shyness or suspicion that drives the Sakai to isolate his tribe from the world and to limit all intercourse to the comings and goings of a single tribal emissary. The Besisi seems almost to desire dependence on others. From the days of Mudzafar Shah of Malacca he has been exploited and persecuted. He has been absorbed into the Malay population by conversion and inter-marriage, but he has never died out. He will lose his language and what is left of his culture; in time he will become a “Malay;” but he will not retreat, like the Sakai and Semang, before the advance of civilization and perish miserably when the opening-up of the country destroys the old hunting-grounds and drives their occupants further and further back into the inhospitable valleys of the interior.

We have also a number of wild tribes in the hillier portions of the coast region of Pahang and in certain parts of the Kuala Pilah district. They speak a common language and have certain peculiar beliefs as to the future life; unlike the Sakai of the mountains they use wooden blow-