



Malaya and Rubber

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THE GOVERNMENT'S STAKE IN THE INDUSTRY.

Most of the rubber planting now going on in Malaya is pioneer work and possesses many of the features of estate life in Ceylon of a past generation. The bungalows are temporary shanties; and the race is to the strong. The jungle is penetrated by the prospector, who takes half a dozen coolies to cut *rentuses*; and an application goes in to the authorities, who demand the would-be owner's intentions, with the laudable, but more or less vain, object of keeping the London company-promoter at arm's length. There is no forfeiture of grant if the applicant changes his mind—if he can wait until the grant has actually been approved, he can turn his back on his pledge and snap his fingers in the face of the authorities. On receipt of notice that the application has been granted the cultivator can begin work. If the land is low-lying—most of what has been planted is, and there are huge areas not yet roaded of similar land—drains have to be made before the forest is felled. In former years, in several cases, the Ceylon method of felling first resulted in lalang getting the upper hand, entailing much expenditure and retarded development. Besides the peaty land existing on the west of the peninsula—which, however, is only hopeless if deep—the encroachments up the rivers and drains of the sea water at each rise of the tide is a novel feature to the Ceylon visitor. Our "coral strand" is to be found on the








Pahang side, I was informed, but in Perak and Selangor the "mangrove fringe" is found, and for varying distances inland where the ground is sodden and brackish, a creepy feeling comes over one. I shall never forget the drive of fifteen miles from Kapar to Kuala Selangor; no flowers and few birds; on either side of the road a drain of slime. In this were land-crabs and gigantic "tadpoles" crawling and sliding over its muddy bed—an effective representation of the pre-Adam Earth when it was "without form and void." The dark, uninviting jungle on the west side of the road will long remain unexploited; but on the other side mile after mile of the land has been taken up during the past year, even at the new rates, and much of it by experienced planters. Drains five and six feet deep, and any width up to twelve feet, undoubtedly accomplish wonders; and land which the uninitiated Ceylon man would reject is most often well worth buying. For two or three miles inland barges and "dug-outs" are to be seen lying stranded when the tide is out and floating on easily navigated water ways at other times.

AN EXCURSION.

The chief excursion began one afternoon with an eleven-mile ricksha run from Klang—rightly so called for the Chinese coolies ran the whole distance, without distress, in the heat of the day—past Vallumbrosa, Sungei Kapar, Kapar, &c. to Jalan Acoh estate. The Kapar district has become such a centre that a club-house is about to be built, and a membership of nearly forty is assured from Kapar. Mr. John Hunter's China pony did the run to Kuala Selangor like the Chinese rickshaw coolies—almost without turning a hair. After spending the night on the picturesque knoll which makes Kuala Selangor one of the prettiest townships of the coast, an early start was made for Batang Berjuntai, fifteen miles inland on the Rawang road. Again the road was good, even on this little frequented thoroughfare. From the "halting bungalow" at Batang Berjuntai—one half of the building is the police station—a short walk brought us to the edge of miles of fine jungle, into a 1,000 acre block of which, next to a forest reserve, we penetrated, over moss-hidden trunks of giants of a past century, through water holes and miles




century, through water holes and piles of leaves in all stages of decay and redolent of humus. One of the Tamil coolies engaged to cut a way through the undergrowth suddenly stopped and whispered "tiger" in Malay; but it was a false alarm, and the exploration continued, disclosing a most promising stretch of land for cultivation. The Tamils who had accompanied us had for some years been "squatters" on the roadside. The custom hitherto obtaining has been to allow natives—Malays, Javanese, Tamils, *et hoc*—to take up land along all the roads to a third of a chain or more. The result is many neglected holdings and depreciation of the value of the land behind; and the custom is not to be continued. Almost all existing estates are busily engaged in acquiring these frontages from the squatters; and many future estates will have to do the same, for there are scores of miles of these holdings still untransferred, in all sorts and stages of cultivation, and of neglect. In many cases the land had reverted to the State through non-payment of the pepper-corn rent; but the authorities have not been at all rigid in applying



the letter of the law. Whether the natives who are bought out will agree to work for the European *tuan*, or will seek fresh scenes—a percentage of them to begin an undesirable nomadic existence—is a problem I did not discuss. Back again from Batang Berjuntai the same afternoon to Jeram, brought me to my second chief objective. Here for four miles, on an undeveloped track along which no vehicle save a bicycle could be taken, we tramped until dark to the shelter occupied by the superintendent in charge of the Scottish Malay Co.'s property.

IN A MALAY HUT.






The estate bungalow was to be ready in a few days but the pioneer had rented a hut of attaps, bark, and bamboo in a Malay kampong. Shortly before our arrival a fire had been kindled below the floor, for all the native houses, and also estate bungalows, are built four or five feet from the ground, and some considerably more—just what ought to be done at Talawa and other places in the Wannu country. The living-and-every-thing-else-room was consequently full of smoke, which




one's eyes soon got used to and which was even welcomed when it was explained that hundreds of voracious mosquitoes had been driven out of the house by it. A bath in the moon-light; and a good dinner, with one's whisky and Tansøn (and cigarette ends chucked through the floor of bamboo strips on to the chickens below) was a delightful experience! Then sound sleep on a coverlet on the rib-like floor, until the cock below took its revenge for the insults of the evening before and began crowing, before the first streaks of dawn came through the gaps in the walls of bark. Remarkable progress has been made with the undulating portion of the Scottish Malay Co.'s land, and Messrs. J. A. Hunter, John Hunter and Harvey will be able to hand over nearly 400 hundreds of acres of cleared and planted land to the Company on the 1st June. The largest single block of land granted in one application in the Jeran division adjoins the Bukit Cheraka property. It is owned by a Ceylon syndicate. It, too, is fine land; and work upon it is to be commenced this month. Felling labour is plentiful in the locality, and between now and the end of the year, throughout the Mukim, many burnt offerings will darken the heavens at noon-day. And may the "toll of the bush" exact no human sacrifice!

EIGHTY-EIGHT MILES BY ROAD.




Part of the way back to the centre of things in the adjoining Mukim of Kapur was accomplished by hiring a village gharry and a rat of a pony, which was not a fine mover like the China nag until it had been urged into imagining that it was in a race; and then the final stage to Klang was done in a rickska as before. Eighty-eight miles by road in two-and-a-half days was the record of the trip off the railway; and with hospitable entertainment *en route*, equally from the many former Ceylon men, and from the few who have not migrated hence, not omitting a tribute to the one lady for many miles round,—the young and refined sister of a leading planter—whose presence sheds a beneficent influence throughout the country-side, the jaunt will be a pleasant recollection for many a day, whether rubber lasts or not!

There was not time enough to visit half the places one would have liked to see; but a thorough inspection of Sungei Rengam and Lowlands is a liberal education in itself. The bird's eye view from the knoll on which Lowlands bungalow stands, of the forest of mature rubber, right up to the base of the hill, is one of the sights of the agricultural world. Para has no fungus pest to compare in damage with the exhaustless efforts of the white ants. They have to be fought on these as well as on most other Malaya estates. Coolies who grow experts at the work are kept on this special task of looking for indications of the presence of the energetic termites, and then, if they have made their nest in the roots, the earth is cleared away and dry lime is plentifully sprinkled. If taken in time the tree is none the worse, as witness a fine fellow on Lowlands, the first which Mr. Pfenningworth, the experienced manager, treated in this way about four years ago. A curiosity which, too, we have not yet heard of in Ceylon, is the growth of "false buds"—for want of a better name; "wooden nutmegs" that would rejoice the heart of the dishonest trader—on trees both tapped and untapped. They are like warts covered with the bark, and sometimes holding on to the cambium, but, unless they have been allowed to grow to a large size, they are easily knocked off with a light hammer. Mr. Parkinson, the manager of Sungei Rengam, has wonderful growths to show of four and three year—old trees, and in one field of this age coffee and rubber are growing together, both magnificent testimony to the richness of the soil and the forcing climate, with the coffee already loaded with berries. This and many other illustrations justify the assertion that Malaya is ahead of Ceylon in growth one year in five; and another important fact is that in the peninsula mile after mile of unbroken jungle lie close at hand, while in Ceylon the stretches of land not let privately owned or claimed, do not represent unbroken sheets of virgin forest, save at considerable distances from present planting operations and in localities that are reputed to be very feverish. On the lower stretches of the Uva hills, for example, where the country appears to be open to the hand of the enterprising





be open to the hand of the enterprising man, he goes into it to find that patana land and jungle are mixed up in all sorts of job lots, and, when he goes to the kachcheri to file his application, he learns to his disappointment that the patches of grass land, numerous though they are, are as nothing to the number of native claims which the Settlement Officer will not reach and dispose of for months and for years.

A STRATEGIC MOVEMENT ON JOHORE.



As roads are driven into these vast stretches of country, and the land is made available, it will be grabbed up. The authorities are conscious, presumably, that the new terms—the future meaning of which will be more fully discussed later—will have the tendency to make investors look further afield, and they are as busy as bees, attempting to cope with the flood of work and struggling not to merit the criticisms, of which they constantly hear, against



the procrastinations encountered by land applicants in Ceylon. - The Dutch Colonies will, before long, be formidable competitors, and Pahang, the largest of the F. M. States, is attracting increasing attention; but Johore is the immediate fancy. Sir Frank Swettenham's Johore concession has naturally attracted wide-spread attention, and it is known that very rich virgin land lies up the Muar river. Consequently, while the terms remain easier than those of the Protected States, with Johore much more accessible from Singapore than Pahang, the run is naturally greatest on the extremity of the peninsula. What time will elapse before the land policy of Johore comes into line with that of the Protected States,—whether by absorption, or by some other special arrangement with the Sultan, who is now on his way to his dominions from England—is a question of high state; but certain it is that the present terms will not outlast the present year, for many landhungry eyes are already turned upon Johore; and the result will follow "as the night the day."—F. C. R. in *the Times of Ceylon*.

