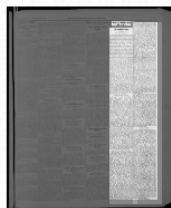




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WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE F. M. S.


The Financial Crisis.

[BY J. C. PASQUAL].

Under the above caption and in view of the financial crisis in which the F.M.S. are engulfed at this moment, I venture to retrace the successive stages of development which have raised the Protected Native States of the Malay Peninsula to the giddy pinnacle of being one of the most precious gems in the tropical dependencies of the Crown, and the causes which, within the last decade or two, have wrought their baneful influence and brought these States to the verge of utter ruin. This is not written in a carping spirit of destructive criticism; and if the personal element is introduced in this article it is done for the sake of chronological accuracy and to bring out the outstanding mistakes made in the past with the view to their avoidance in the future. It is not pleasant to write about these things, but I cannot look the other way or be a silent spectator when the affairs of a country in which I have been associated almost from the beginning and am not disinterested are not as they should be.




To the casual observer the unenviable condition of the F.M.S. is unhesitatingly attributed to the universal upheaval caused by the war. This is true up to a certain point, but a closer scrutiny will reveal the truth that the world slump has only aggravated a situation from which there is no escape and brought on the financial debacle before it is due. There is not the same distress evident in Burma, where economic conditions are





Burma, where economic conditions are said to be almost normal, neither in Ceylon, nor in French Indo-China and the neighbouring countries, although the same economic disturbance that swept over the F.M.S. with cyclonic force must have strained the financial stability of those countries in an equal degree. What, then, is wrong with the F.M.S. ?

NLB A MEANINGLESS PHRASE. NLB



The answer is the first letter of these magic initials. F-ederation—a hollow, meaningless phrase which has dazzled the eyes of the world and, blurring all sense of proportion, has infused a spirit of optimism and extravagance which finds expression in schemes staggering in their dimensions and costs, and out of all proportion to present requirements. There are other correlative causes, but they will be dealt with in their proper places. Our administrators saw in the Malay Peninsula a country covered with a network of railways spread over smiling fields of rubber, flourishing towns rising in all directions, and industries developing on all sides with a rapidity perhaps unprecedented in the history of empire building. That the realisation of the conception of this Utopia would be rendered nugatory by the paucity of population—that dominating factor in the creation of wealth—never once entered into their calculation. It is through this grave over-sight that we now see empty trains running on the railway that links with the Siamese system on the West Coast, and the spectacle of the East Coast line, which has been threading through 200 miles of uninhabited primeval forest now suddenly brought to a standstill-somewhere on the border of Kelantan for lack of the financial stimulus necessary for its further progress. For this unsatisfactory state of affairs no one can reasonably fix the blame on the two present chiefs who rule the destinies of the F.M.S., as it is none of their seeking, but a legacy handed down to them by the policy of their predecessors. But I am anticipating and had better start from the beginning.

ACTS IN THE POLITICAL DRAMA.

There is hardly any person remaining in this country who can recall the early history of the Malayan States as I perhaps may claim to do, as of the original actors in the drama of the romance of Empire—for the British rule of the Malay Peninsula is nothing else—only one person is in the land of the living, while of my contem-



poraries in the early days of Protection under the Residential system most of them have gone to their rest and the remaining few have retired to the homeland in the enjoyment of a well earned reward. When a mere lad of ten I was brought face to face with the trouble in Perak when Mr. J. W. Birch was assassinated, through seeing well dressed Malays continually calling at our house to interview a near relative of mine who was instrumental in bringing to justice the minor Perak Chiefs that were mixed up in the murder of the first British Resident of Malaya; and for many years I had in my possession, until I lost it not long ago, the kriss with which Culope, the slave of Maharaja Lela, is said to have stabbed Birch. The official account says he was speared, but I am inclined to believe that the kriss did the foul deed, as my relative (maternal grandfather) had means of worming out the secrets of this sad tragedy, not accessible to his superior officers, and before his death handed the fatal weapon to my father as a souvenir of the best piece of work he had ever done during his long and faithful career in the service of the

East India Company and the Straits Government. This, however, by the way.

The second act in the drama of British political enterprise in Malaya opened in Selangor which had to be brought under the aegis of the Straits Government through the endless internecine troubles so common to the Native States of that period and acts of piracy in the Straits of Malacca which were hampering the trade of the Colony. It was my good fortune to land in Selangor shortly after the inauguration of the Residential system when Mr. F. A. (now Sir Frank) Swettenham was the third Resident. The first Resident was Mr. Davidson, a prominent lawyer of Singapore and the next Captain Douglas, R N R, whose son, the late W. W. Douglas, was a prominent figure for nearly 40 years in official circles throughout the F. M. S. The reign of both Davidson's and Douglas's was short lived, as the former died in a carriage accident in Singapore, while the latter was asked to retire owing to a diplomatic blunder he had committed through sending the regalia of the Sultan as a native curio to the Paris Exhibition, where it was lost. Selangor was then a geographical abstraction and I was nearly over-carried to Kuala Selangor by the Malacca Portuguese skipper of the forty-niner in



which I had embarked from Singapore, who would persist that Selangor was a town at the mouth of a river of that name. The real name of the State was, and is still, by the native known as Klang, while what is now known as Klang was then called Pengkalan Batu, which was the first seat of the Government and the Residency. I had booked my passage for Selangor. As for Kuala Lumpur outside official records in the Colonial Secretary's Office in Singapore and the Chinese merchants in Malacca who were financing the rich tin mines there, it was practically unheard of. The railway from Klang to Kuala Lumpur was just being traced and in parts well under construction, and it meant a journey on foot through the forest to get to K. L. from the little landing place on the Klang river called Pengkalan Kundong (I think that was the name) which boasted of half a dozen ramshackle huts belonging to some Malays who made their living by catching lobsters.

The interior was sparsely peopled by the Malays, who mostly lived in the coastal districts and on the banks of the rivers, and the country was infested by wild animals. On my arrival I was greeted with the news that the son of Haji Kechil, penghulu of Petaling, was carried off by a crocodile; that Raja Mas, the penghulu of Ulu Klang was gored to death by a seladang; while there was considerable excitement over the ravages of a man-eater said to be the were-tiger of Datoh Sati, the Korinchi penghulu of the village of Setapak who had recently died. The Korinchi Malays (from Sumatra) are universally credited with the attribute of turning into tigers after death, and some years previously one of the Korinchis who had opened up a clearing on the Pudu road for a settlement was clubbed to death by the infuriated native Malays who blamed the Sumatrans for the great number of their friends and relatives who were continually being eaten by tigers on Bukit Nanas, where they were cutting bertam attaps to roof the new and rising town.

KUALA LUMPUR.

Kuala Lumpur, which had just been made headquarters of the British administration in place of Klang, boasted of a few rows of shop houses built of adobe, or clay baked in the sun, thatched with attaps, and fires were of frequent occurrence. Previous to British occupation it was ruled by the Chinese under a Capitan China appointed by the Sultan with powers of life and death over his



own subjects, and well do I remember how the few of us who used to foregather in Kim Lee's (a Malacca Baba) shop—a store-cum-bar place of rendezvous by the bank of the river—shuddered at the thought that we were sitting on the site where Capitan Yap Loy, the greatest and most renowned of the Capitans China, used to chop off the heads of criminals and prisoners of war captured during the rebellion of the Raja Mahdi. I had never met Yap Loy, but happened to arrive in K. L. on the very day of his funeral, which was the grandest thing ever known in the way of funerals in Selangor as the whole countryside mustered to pay their respects to this great man, and the congestion was so great that there were many accidents, and Jimmy Bristowe—the best known and most popular man about town at the time—returned home with his bowler hat battered out of shape. Yap Loy, who started in a small way, as a pork butcher, not only became a Capitan China, which meant the wealthiest man amongst the Chinese, but in recognition of the part he had played in the suppression of the rebellion of Raja Mahdi, was raised to a high rank in the Malayan nobility by the Sultan, and used to travel about in right regal style, surrounded by his entourage and Panglimas, and heralded by sword-bearers and men carrying tombaks (spears) after the Malay fashion. It was he who invited the Resident to remove his head quarters from Klang to Kuala Lumpur. The office of Capitan China was maintained for many years by the Government after the death of Yap Loy, but it was shorn of all its former glory, though the term Panglima as applied to men in the secret service of the Capitan China was kept up to within recent years.

(To be continued.)

