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A JOURNAL IN THE FEDERAL CAPITAL.

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A JOURNAL IN THE FEDERAL CAPITAL. The Old-Time Malay Pawang—A European Witness To His Powers—Crocodiles, Monkeys And Hypnotism—Some Historcial Notes—A Road For Naval Guns—The First Malay Talkie—Out-Stations In The Future.

(By Our Kuala Lumpur Correspondent.)

Kuala Lumpur, Feb. 19.

LAST Saturday's article on the royal village of Bandar has evoked a most interesting letter from an old European resident who has had more than thirty year's experience of this country and was moved by the article to set down some of his early experiences in the Kuala Langat district of Selangor.

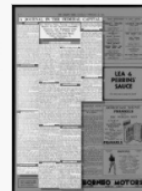
The outstanding part of his letter is that in which he gives the most remarkable personal evidence of the powers of the Malay pawang, the medicine man wise in the animistic lore lying beneath the surface of Malay Mohammedanism, that the present writer has ever read. Other writers, notably Sir Hugh Clifford, have written of similar performances, but they have guarded themselves either by putting the stories forward as second-hand or by wrapping them in the garb of fiction. This correspondent, on the contrary, says boldly that he has actually seen a pawang reveal powers over animal and bird life which rival those of the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

"It was your reference to Bandar that attracted me," he says. "I saw one of the very old-time Malay performances there on the Jugra side of the ferry. Several Malays had been taken about that time by crocodiles, and the last victim was a young girl bathing by that jetty you mention. I rather fancy the girl was of high birth, possibly even belonging to the Sultan's Astana at Bandar.

Fascinated Crocodiles.

"An old pawang entered the river to his waist, cut some reedy grass, and made himself a whistle or flute from the same. He then played some notes of a sort of tune, and very shortly a crocodile was seen approaching, with the pawang still up to his waist on the river's edge. Ther

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BANKRUPTCY COURT.

BANKRUPTCY COURT. Mention of Note Endorsed By a Sultan. His Highness the Sultan of Johore [was

Untitled

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another crocodile was seen, then another, until quite a number was there, with the pawang still tooting away on his flute.

"He then told us that the big crocodile had come and he quickened the playing faster and faster. Soon the crocodiles were struggling all together, tails flashing out of the water and a regular battle proceeding. Blood appeared freely in the water, which was in high commotion with the lashing of tails and struggling bodies and angry noises. They paid no attention at all to the pawang, who continued to tootle away very fast.

"Finally one body of a crocodile floated away and the rest gradually disappeared. Some other Malays put off in a prahu and towed ashore the dead crocodile, very badly mauled. The brute was cut up and in his stomach were the remains of many victims, in the form of bangles, buttons, belt clasps and so forth. It was claimed that the last victim's bangles and rings were recognised by the girl's relations. The pawang, still in the water, played some more tunes on his flute, slow and melancholy notes, and he said that these were admonitions to the other crocodiles to take no more victims at the bathing point."

The Pawang's Powers.

That is the story in my correspondent's own words. Some will refuse to believe it, some will say that it has become exaggerated in the passage of time, and some will say that the assembly of crocodiles may have happened but was not caused by the pawang. The various factions must be left to make what they like of the story, but they must remember that the correspondent was actually stationed in the Jugra district many years ago, that he is known to many of the older residents of Malaya, and that he relates this story in the course of a long letter much of which is not concerned with magical matters at all.

The calling of the crocodiles, moreover, was not the only demonstration of the pawang's powers. Let us go back to the letter.

"After he came out of the river he (the pawang) gave us a long yarn about Malays and their river-craft of old times, when they depended solely on the rivers for transport and had to know all about the denizens of the river waters and banks. To prove to us his powers he played more on his flute, different tunes altogether, and monkeys (kra) galore appeared on bushes by the river thereabouts, chattering away in a very excited state, jumping from branch to branch, and plainly upset about something.

"The pawang stated that old-time riverine Malays knew every tune for different animals and fishes—had to, for food and protection, but 'these young Malays' (a fine gesture of scorn from the old man) had abandoned the craft of their forefathers and had become landlubbers with little or no knowledge left in them (pointing scornfully at the men assembled there) of the old Malay *adat, undang-undang, etc.*"

A Mystery Performance.

Here is still another story of the pawang, in which he is seen in a very different role.

"On another occasion we were assembled at a bungalow where this old man gave a splendid performance of

mystery. We were about twelve men all told, one being a visitor from afar and actually unknown to most of us there—his name even unknown correctly. The host was asked by the pawang to write

down the visitor's name, or, better, ask the visitor to write down his own name on a piece of paper, which was folded up unseen by the pawang.

"The host then held the paper in his hand and we all joined hands, left to right in our line of chairs. The pawang had descended the verandah steps and stood quite outside during the name-writing. He then came up again and stood in turn in front of each European slightly touching our hands. Then he asked for a piece of chalk, went to the plank wall behind us, and wrote out the name of the visitor. It was not only his name, but the writing was just the same as the signature of the visitor.

"Of course, we all said 'collusion,' and I cannot swear to this day that there was not, but getting about was difficult in those days and to me the odds were against direct or deliberate collusion, for I know that the visitor was unknown to our host, and was merely a guest of another man there, casually brought along for a little Saturday night singing and 'bust-up.'"

Was It Hypnotism?

"The pawang was annoyed at our doubts and put up other mysteries. One was distinctly fetching. He took an ordinary keris off the wall of the bungalow in its sarong (sheath) and passed it round for inspection. It had sharp edges and several twists or curves. The pawang stood in front of us all (no preparation about this trick any way), rolled up his sleeves to the armpit, and began to draw his right hand forcibly down the sharp edges of the keris, chanting in Malay some unknown pantuns, possibly of Menangkabau origin and in a form of spoken Malay difficult to follow, as he mumbled his words quickly.

"Faster, faster he drew his right hand down the edges: then drip, drip, fell the blood on the verandah plank floor. He became quite hysterical and finally threw the keris away from him with a theatrical gesture, appealing to us not to touch the keris or pick it up, for it would burn us. Of course somebody picked up and felt the blade, and dropped the keris promptly. Some others tried it, and did the same. They all said it was burnin' hot. Then the pawang became normal again, showed us his hands (which were not cut at all), picked up the keris to pass it round as being free of any preparation or even still hot, sheathed it, hung it on the wall once more, and went down the verandah steps to give us time to talk it over."

A Very Old Man.

Hypnotism, you say? Perhaps so, but if the old-time Malays did in fact possess knowledge that the modern European does not this pawang would have had for he certainly was of a bygone generation. This is what my correspondent says about him:

"This pawang was a famous old man of Jugra in those days and must have been very old. Right down the track from Jugra Estate to the Langat River at Telok Datoh on the Jugra side, where Mr. D'Arcy Ervine's bungalow now stands on Banteng Estate (or did the last time I was in that neighbourhood many years back) lived a very old Malay or Banjarese, who was a famous hunter of those days. His land of possibly fifteen acres or more was pitted with holes, all staked with sharp bamboos at the bottom, for catching tigers and other wild animals. This old man had lost one arm in a fight with a crocodile and was wounded in many parts of his body from personal encounters with wild animals. He said

that the pawang was as old as his (the hunter's) grandfather, so the pawang must have been truly ancient. He looked it, and I am of the opinion that some Malays do live to extreme old age."

First Road To Jugra.

Those who know the Kuala Langat district today will be interested to know that at the time mentioned the bridge over the Langat River at Telok Datoh had not been even thought of, and all traffic from Klang to Jugra by road went across the Bandar ferry.

"I might say track rather than road," my informant remarks, "for it was then newly cut through jungle and was corduroyed, not metalled, and made very bumpy progress. Just about the fifth mile, where the turn-off is for Golden Hope Estate and so back to Kuala Klang—or Port Swettenham, as it is now—C. E. S. Baxendale had opened up in coffee on the left-hand side out to Jugra. It is years since I was down that way, but I last saw his land in secondary jungle, past the mere *bluka* stage of abandon-

ment; yet the old drains could still be spotted."

Relics Of Malay Warfare.

The article on old Malay forts along the Johore River which appeared in the last issue of the Sunday Times must have reminded many planters and others of similar discoveries in different parts of Malaya, and although my correspondent makes no reference to that article in his letter he has some very interesting things to say on the same subject.

"There were," he says, "several very old Malays at Rasa, near Seremban, some twenty years back who could tell tales of old battles between the different chiefs of Semujong—wrongly corrupted to Sungei Ujong. On Bukit Tunggu Estate, at the Bangi end of the estate near the F.M.S.R. line, was an old, primitive fort on a small mound, with below-the-ground room for the defenders. Leading from that fort was a track clearly marked into the jungle towards Bukit Tunggu itself. I followed it up once for some miles and, strange to say, came across poles which had plainly been used previously for telegraph wires right in the jungle. I have never found out what European party had used that track, but doubtless it was in the days of fighting between the States, when some of our troops were employed to settle the troubles.

Cannon And Trenches.

"Kepsyang Estate used to have an old cannon and trenches at the fourth mile, Labu Road, and old Malays told me of severe fighting thereabouts in the 'seventies. If the jungle in that area of Kuala Langat were explored thoroughly many relics should be found of the fighting days of Negri Sembilan.

"I came across a similar jungle track, but wide, at Parit in Perak, where our bluejackets had dragged guns. That was in the jungle reserve of Riverview Estate, now opened up, I believe. It must have been a wicked job for our A.B.'s in the thick jungle, but it was a very good earth road all the same."

And there ends a most welcome letter. One can only wish that more of our old-timers, the men who knew the Malay States in the pioneering days, would write down their memories, for these memories are precious historical material, now in the keeping of a generation that is passing away, and unless they are written they will be lost for ever. They have,

moreover, more than a sentimental value. Every country treasures its national and local history, and in the centuries to come there will be no more powerful factor in building up a true Malayan consciousness among the domiciled population of these States than the sense of continuity and tradition which a study of history gives.

Malay Cinema Critics.

To proceed from the past to the present: the first Malay talkie to be seen in Kuala Lumpur was shown at a local cinema last week, and the reactions of the Malays to it have been interesting. On the whole, they do not seem to have liked it very much.

The bazaar Malay, the rather harsh Javanese accent of the actors, and the air of reality which the cinema gives to domestic scenes which the orthodox Malay thinks should only be enacted in strict privacy, prejudiced them against the picture. On the other hand, it must be said that some Malay members of the audience, particularly women, seemed to be enjoying themselves thoroughly.

A European spectator who knows the Malays well described the picture as "a poor attempt at depicting Javanese life in the Hollywood fashion." Thus the heroine, a Malay girl of about eighteen years of age, was seen sitting on the knees of her lover and caressing him—a sight calculated to give any Malay except the sophisticated townie type a very severe shock.

Non-Malayan Customs.

The picture revealed interesting differences between the customs of Malaya and Java. The girl referred to above was seen wheeling a bicycle, whereas in this country girls of the more advanced communities rarely ride bicycles, let alone the Malays. In another scene a number of Malay women were seated on chairs, whereas in Malaya they would have squatted on the floor.

Technically the picture was not very satisfactory. The photography was not first-class and the Javanese Malay grated on the ear. The background of Javanese scenery was attractive, however, and there were some good dancing scenes. What annoyed the Kuala Lumpur audience more than anything was that the Malay spoken by the actors was not the high Malay which is heard in the bangsawan entertainments in this country,

but the bazaar variety. The comment of a local motor-car driver was significant. He applied to the picture the adjective *kasar*, which means rough, vulgar or coarse.

Out-Station Advantages.

One was struck by a sentence in the address which Mr. Sinnadurai recently gave to the Kuala Lumpur Rotary Club based on his long service in Pahang. "I love the place so well," he said, "that I wish to reside there: It is a place for peace of mind and prosperity."

Peace of mind! There are Europeans as well as Asiatics who would agree with Mr. Sinnadurai that that quality is to be found more easily in the out-stations. Work is usually lighter and less regulated by routine, there are fewer distractions of any kind, and social relations are pleasanter. The European official, in particular, is seen by the Asiatic in the out-stations in a more human light than is possible in the larger towns, where pressure of work compels a senior man to be pretty much of an automaton.

Given the right kind of temperament

life in a small Malayan town can be enviably healthy, pleasant and tranquil. The stream of life flows smoothly, and he who would have the rapids of social and professional ambition must journey farther afield. The nerve-strain of noisy streets and large office organisations is absent.

Now, however, there is a danger of these pleasant conditions disappearing in certain towns, for much of the work that has been done hitherto in the Federal capital will be done in the State capitals in future, and the latter will not be quite as peaceful places for the Government servant as they were in the heyday of Federation.

Romanised Or Jawi?

The decision of the Johore Government to publish official notices in the Jawi script in future is a reminder of the aversion felt by several of the Sultans for the Romanised script which is so commonly used nowadays.

At present both scripts are taught in the vernacular schools of the Federated States and the Colony, and also in the training college for Malay teachers at Tanjong Malim. It is no secret that there is influential opinion in favour of teaching only the Arabic script, but those who hold the contrary opinion point out that Romanised Malay is the Malay villager's only medium of communication with the non-Malay interests which have attained so important a place in the life of his country.



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