

THE MALAY STATES.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—Your correspondent, Mr. Alleyne Ireland, in his article published in your issue of Tuesday, April 5, 1904, has weighed the Malay in the balance and judged him wanting. Mr. Ireland says:—"The Malay, being for the first time in his history free to follow his own inclinations, sits down in the shade and watches the white man, the yellow man, and the black man do the work of his country." The Malays are not a nation, as yet; they are only a race, and they have no one to speak for them with authority. So they put up with much unmerited abuse from people who do not understand them. But it is worth the while of one who writes from the most Malay district perhaps of all the Federated Malay States to say a word on their behalf.

Mr. Ireland says that they watch foreigners do the work of their country. They do. None of them would deny it. But the work which these foreigners do is the foreign work of the country. The white man, the yellow man, the black man are exotics in the brown man's country, and their works are like them—exotic. And without going outside the bounds of Mr. Ireland's article I propose to show that where there is work in the Federated Malay States suitable to the Malay and natural to his country he does it. The Malay of the coast is a born seaman. So the Marine Departments of the Malay States are wholly and absolutely dependent on Malays for the crews of their yachts, their boats, and their launches, with the exception of the engine-rooms of the steam-driven vessels. The whole of the coastwise trade of Malaya, excepting again in the engine-room, depends on Malay sailors. And the allied department of the Customs is again purely Malay, with the exception of the English-speaking clerks, who are from India or China originally. The Education Department depends on hundreds of Malays as teachers and pupil teachers in the vernacular schools. The messengers or peons in all the Government departments are Malays. The Forest Department depends on Malays for its rangers and guards. The Survey Department employs Malays as coolies and chainmen. Malays are to be found even in the very Chinese Mining Department in the capacity of mines rangers. The whole of the land administration, where not purely clerical, depends on the Malay penghulus and headmen. The police, though strengthened by the Indian soldier races, is preponderantly Malay. These are the main departments in the Government service, and there are large numbers of Malays in every one of them. But these departments represent nothing exotic, nothing foreign to the country or to the spirit of the Malays.

It is when we turn to the exotic departments that the difference is apparent. The Railway Department, for instance, and the Public Works Department are chiefly staffed by Indians of all kinds. The Malay knows nothing of railways or roads, but he is well content to let the white man, the yellow man, and the black man introduce them to his country, for they have very obvious advantages. The Malay is glad to travel on the railway, but he will not engage on heavy earthwork in its construction. He will drive his bullock cart along the roads when made, but he will not break metal to surface them. The Malay does not hanker for hardship. He allows hard manual labour to be performed by the Indian, whose ancestors have done nothing else for untold generations, or by the Chinese, whose overwhelming pressure of population at home drives him abroad to seek a livelihood. The Malay does not do clerical work. Seeing that a generation has hardly had time to grow up since the British have been in his country, it is scarcely to be wondered at that a class of writers has not, happily as some think, arisen. So much then for the departments of Government.

I turn now to the trade and industry of the Malay States. To take the chief industry, that of mining, first. This is purely Chinese; mining is very hard work, very speculative work, and not, to the coolie, very remarkably remunerative. The Malay does not engage in it, save in remote spots where the tin, if scarce, is easily won, being washed out of streams and quarried from beneath rocks. The open-cast or underground mining does not attract the Malay. So he watches the yellow man do the work, and his aristocracy draws a percentage of the profit, whilst the pay of the lower classes in the Government departments is defrayed from the royalty on the tin exported, and the roads and railways are built from the same funds. The Malay has very distinctly the best of it here. To take planting; coffee was once the great staple immigrant industry, but it has now been displaced to a very great extent by rubber. The Malay was induced to plant coffee some years ago; then came a slump, and the Malay, in common with the white, the yellow, and the black man, lost money. This was a solitary instance in which the Malay attempted exotic cultivation, and he found it was a mistake. So he has confined himself to the coco-nut plantation and the rice swamp, out of which he makes a profitable livelihood, as his ancestors did before him. The area under coco-nuts and rice is, in the enormous majority, Malay. It is difficult to say from the nature of the case what proportion of Malays is engaged in shopkeeping and general trade; but considerable numbers of them do engage in it, though here they are unable to compete with the yellow man. As no other nation has ever yet successfully competed with the yellow man in general trading, it is not surprising that the Malay should fail in the contest. As regards domestic service there are a considerable number of Malays engaged in it; but this is again an exotic trade and, the service of foreigners being an exacting service, owing to their strange ways, the Malay has no great liking for it, and after all it is not so very profitable.

To sum up, Sir, the Malay is aware of his own limitations, and he keeps within them. He will co-operate in work which he understands, but he stands aloof from employment which is foreign to his nature and his country. The "long, long thoughts" of the white man, the slow persistence of the yellow man, and the thrifty habits of the black man are not of his nature. And who shall say that he is not well advised to leave them to the foreigners whose ideals may be realized through them?

I am, Sir, C. W. HARRISON.
Tampin Negri Sembilan, Federated Malay States.