



THE SINGAPORE RIVER . . . IS ALMOST CHOKED WITH SAMPANS ON WHICH MANY CHINESE ARE BORN, LIVE, AND DIE, MUCH LIKE THE RIVER POPULATION OF CANTON

HERE EAST AND WEST MEET

Singapore—at the crossroads of the World

“ONE SEEING is worth a hundred tellings” is a Chinese proverb, the truth of which no one will deny. But a fleeting glance at the huge array of ships from the ends of the earth which ride at anchor in the great land-locked harbor of Singapore drives home the oft-repeated fact that Singapore, or “S’pore” as the British residents write it, stands indeed at the crossroads of the world. Here vessels, of an immense variety of shapes and sizes, with varying degrees of beauty and trimness, almost rub noses with the cruder, more picturesque, but smaller native craft that have braved the terrors of the seas to make this port.

The name of “Raffles” might almost be a synonym for Singapore, so constantly is it heard here. Our home for several months was the long-famous “Raffles Hotel” where we were first introduced to Singapore’s specialty, the “Million Dollar Cocktail.” “Raffles Square” is the principal but somewhat congested shopping-center where one is sure to meet friends or acquaintances. Then there are “Raffles

College,” “Raffles Museum,” and a host of others.

In front of the town hall, in a crescent where many roads meet, is a fine statue of Sir Stamford Raffles, himself, keeping watch over the city he founded. In passing by car or rickshaw, I always felt an urge to stop and salute this bronze man whose brain envisaged a great port growing out of a miserable little fishing village of Malays with strong piratical inclinations, on a jungle-smothered, tiger-infested island. It was he who purchased the island of Singapore from the Sultan of Johore in 1819 for the East India Company.

With the name Raffles ringing in our ears, we were more than casually interested in meeting a descendant of Sir Stamford, Mr. Stamford Raffles, a member of the Kuala Lumpur Rotary Club. It was at a picnic party which Choo Kia Peng, the Chinese president of the club, gave for us at his lovely hill home overlooking the jungle. There was but small chance to converse with this tall, fine-looking, affable gentleman for, lunch being over, my husband

claimed all the men for an informal Rotary talk. "Rotary before self" is a slogan tacitly understood in our family!

The city of Singapore with its cosmopolitan population of 540,000 lies at the southern end of the island of Singapore which is twenty-seven miles long by half as many miles wide. It is the Asian half-way house between Europe and America, the gateway to the very extensive Dutch East Indies, the turning point of the steamers to Australasia, and from here boats sail to the seacoast trading countries of the world. Eighty-eight different lines call at Singapore and entrances for the year 1928 totalled 47,969 vessels. Entrances and clearances numbered 97,062. Stupendous, isn't it? Those of you who believe that all the big things are in the West, please get down your almanacs and compare this with London, Liverpool, Antwerp, and New York.

While Singapore is a conglomeration of colors, races, castes, and a babel of tongues, if one were taken blindfolded to certain sections and then shown the streets, he would unhesitatingly declare he was in China. The Singapore River is lined with typical two-storied Chinese houses with shops on the street level and living quarters above. The river below is almost choked with sampans on which many Chinese are born, live, and die,—not unlike the river population of Canton. The Chinese are the workers in this peninsula and are, therefore, the ones who have acquired wealth, many of them being millionaires, possessing not one but several magnificent homes.

The European homes in Singapore are big and commodious with wide, open verandas, usually on hills amidst luxuriant foliage. But the most impressive of all is the great white home of the governor of the Straits Settlements, high on its hill set in a great expanse of lawns and gardens. It was our misfortune to have just missed Sir Hugh Clifford, the governor of the Straits Settlements, an honorary member of the Kuala Lumpur Rotary Club, who had been forced to resign because of his wife's illness, thereby falling short of his fifty years of colonial service by four years.

His career reads like a romance. At the tender age of seventeen he went out to Malaya in government service. For years he lived in the native states, and for months at a time was entirely cut off from men of his own race. He wisely seized this opportunity to learn the difficult Malayan language and win the confidence of the Malays with the result that he has

to his credit many books of exquisitely written short stories based on his life among these people. My husband had many letters of introduction to Sir Hugh. The office of governor was temporarily filled by the Honorable Mr. John Scott, colonial secretary.

Jim presented letters to him and found him most kind and considerate. The next day we received an invitation to luncheon at Government House. Seated at the round table were perhaps fifteen guests, the most distinguished being Rajah Brooke of Sarawak, the only white rajah in the world. This impeccably groomed Englishman attracted attention at once. His abundant pure white hair set off a somewhat youthful countenance, tanned by exposure to the tropical sun. My luncheon neighbor told me that our fellow guest was the third member of the Brooke family to hold this unique position. His wife, the ranee, an Englishwoman, and his two daughters, so he said, were then in England enjoying a holiday.

The story behind this title reads like a fairy tale, one of those things that seem too fantastic for real life. Think of an Englishman becoming an Oriental monarch! And this is how it happened. Once upon a time there was a young Englishman by the name of James Brooke who had served in the East in many capacities for the greater part of his life. He had cruised in the Indian Archipelago and had touched at North Borneo. The native peoples here were largely pirates and young Brooke yearned to better their condition. Time came when he inherited a considerable fortune by the death of his father and he decided to make his dream come true.

He purchased a royal yacht, fitted it up and trained a crew of twenty or so and set sail for Borneo. He landed at Sarawak and was warmly welcomed by an old acquaintance, Raja Muda Hassim, uncle of the Sultan of Brunei, who had a rebellion on his hands at the moment which he was ineffectually trying to crush. He pleaded with Brooke to aid him and, possibly goaded on by the fear that because of his weakness, he might lose Sarawak anyway, he promised in return to make Brooke the rajah of Sarawak. Brooke, on his part, probably saw in this a chance to put some of his pet altruistic schemes into practice. Thus at the age of thirty-eight he found himself, by the consent of the sultan of Brunei, the absolute monarch of Sarawak, and ruled for twenty-seven years when the reins of government passed into the hands of a nephew who reigned wisely for forty-nine years. The present rajah, Sir Charles Brooke, has held the title and position since 1917.

Beside the 315,000 Chinese in Singapore, there are 32,000 Indians, mostly Tamils from South India and wherever the Hindu goes, his religion goes too, clinging to him like his very shadow. Our stay in Singapore happened to coincide with the Tremiri or fire-walking ceremony. Thus we had the opportunity of witnessing this weird rite. In truth, for a few moments we feared we were going to be thrust into the rôles of some of the *dramatis personae*.

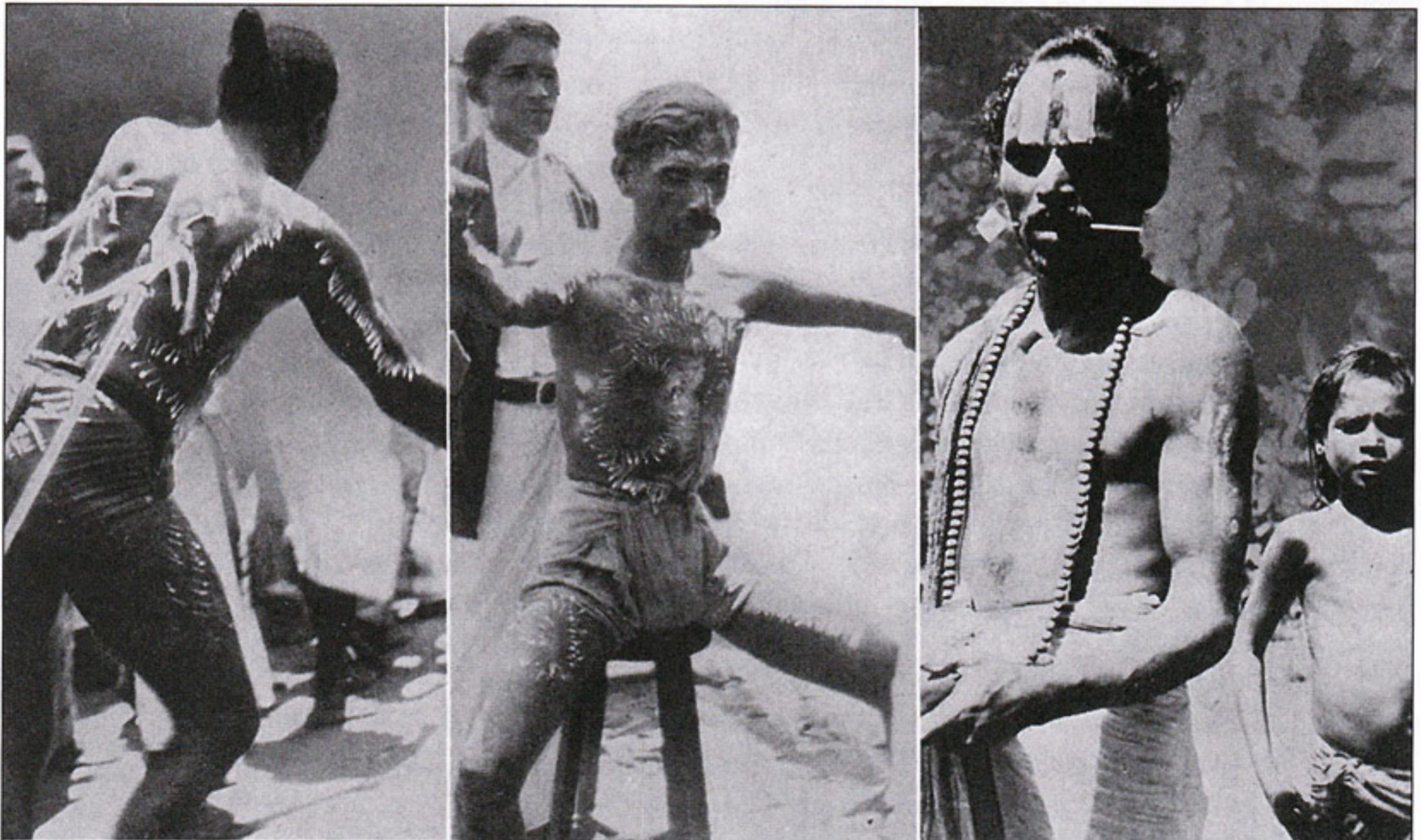
No sooner had we descended from the motor car than we were engulfed in a seething, swaying, chanting swarm of gesticulating, almost naked brown men about three hundred strong. We were carried right through the gateway of the temple into the open court and were rapidly being pushed toward a bed of burning coals about twenty feet in length and five in width, then in prime condition. Just in the nick of time we were rescued by a tall, bearded Sikh policeman, who, noticing our predicament, fought his way to us through the mob and by pushing and shoving, opened up a passageway for us to a safer spot.

That sun-soaked temple courtyard remains to this day a ghastly memory. Almost faint and nauseated were we in that over-used air permeated by the overpowering smell of burning aromatic gum, used in

all Hindu worship; with the dank, moist heat arising from the perspiring brown bodies pressed against us; with the grewsome sights that met our eyes wherever we looked.

Horrified, we gazed at men whose bare bodies were ornamented with row after row of square-headed pins, thrust through the skin, not over a quarter of an inch apart; men with skewers thrust through tongues and cheeks; men with innumerable sharp hooks piercing the body from the ends of which, fresh green limes dangled by slender threads; men with horseshoe frames over their shoulders which were supporting the ends of three-foot spears, the many sharp points of which were pushed through the skin about the waist.

To make the torture more extreme, the devotees were being flogged while their courage was sustained by the chanting of the holy books. One woman, well past middle age, stumbled blindly along, great beads of perspiration dropping down upon the saffron dipped *sari* which covered her body. Her hands were held by friends who walked in front of her, while others struck her constantly with leather thongs. She bore up until she was confronted with the bed of coals when she mercifully fainted dead away and was carried around the fire. Some of the



RELIGIOUS DEVOTEES HAVE THEIR BARE BODIES ORNAMENTED WITH ROW AFTER ROW OF SQUARE-HEADED PINS THRUST THROUGH THE SKIN, CLOSELY TOGETHER, AND MANY WITH SKEWERS THRUST THROUGH TONGUE AND CHEEK, MAKE THEMSELVES READY FOR THE FIRE-WALKING CEREMONY.

men ran over the gleaming coals while others walked on them more leisurely, but a great many of them collapsed after passing through the milk and water pool at the far end.

To Europeans this religious observance smacks of the Dark Ages and appears unspeakably cruel, but to the Hindu devotees it means purification. One cannot but be impressed by such sublime faith.

"In the clubs of Malaya there are unique yet legitimate classifications. For instance, we have a 'Malay Chief' as a member. A Malay Chief is a headman of a district who renders service only to Malays. His office and duties are quite different from those performed by the British district officer. The post is not elective but hereditary.

"One of the most charming gentlemen one can



MALAY BOYS HAVE A CHEERFUL SMILE FOR THE PASSING TOURIST. THE MALAY IS CHARACTERIZED BY AN INNATE GENTILITY WHETHER HE BE AN UNEDUCATED LABORER OR A TALENTED, WELL-INFORMED OFFICIAL.

As to Rotary in Singapore, my husband will now tell the tale: "My first call was on the Honorable Mr. John Scott, acting governor of the Straits Settlements. I do not think I ever made a call on anyone in which it seemed so much was at stake. I feel sure, it was not alone the letters that led to this genial official extending to me so freely his support and encouragement, for when one meets this most kindly Englishman one believes that helpfulness in all worth-while matters is a natural trait of his. I will ever be grateful to him and to my little advisory committee: R. J. Farrer, C. M. G., then president of the municipality; Dr. A. L. Hoops, principal medical officer for the Settlements; and Harold Fairburn, inspector-general of police.

meet among our Rotarians is a certain chief. His father sort of upset things for a while in the old days, but the son in the picturesque trappings of his father now haunts the jungle no longer. He plays bridge, drinks Scotch and soda, has 'Ole Man River' on his phonograph after a ten-course dinner, and predicts that Ramsay MacDonald's visit to the United States will serve to cement Anglo-Saxon relations.

"On June 6, at an evening meeting at Raffles Hotel, the club was organized with seventy-one charter members and with an attendance at the dinner of sixty-two. In obtaining them, I had probably made, including return visits, two hundred calls on men in their offices.

"The club in this great city of many races has

grown rapidly, and now, a year later, possesses 144 members representing eighteen different nationalities which constitutes, in international representation, a record for all Rotary, I am sure. I will quote from a recent letter from President Braddell: 'Our membership includes the following nationalities: American, Arabian, Armenian, Chinese, Dutch, English, French, German, Indian, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Malayan, Persian, Roumanian, Russian, Scottish and Swiss.'

"Rotary in Singapore and elsewhere in British Malaya is doing wonderful work in cementing the Oriental and Occidental races in a common cause, the welfare of Malaya; and you may rest assured of its future in our country, supported as it is by all our leading men, including the highest government officials."

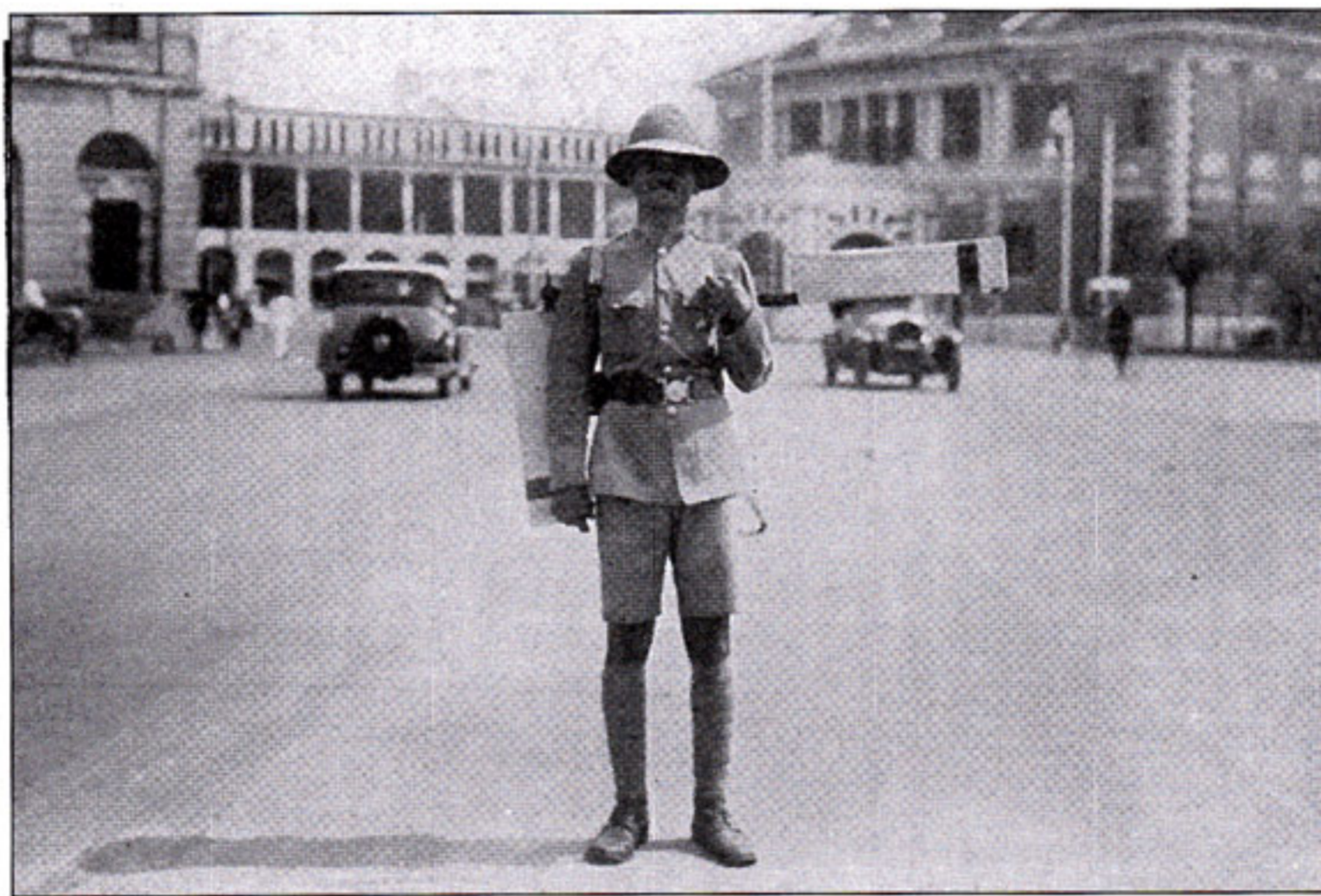
Up the coast 125 miles from Singapore is Malacca, a Sleepy Hollow sort of place, redolent of bygone days. Here we came in contact with the true Straits-born Chinese, a very fine type of man and different in many ways from the Chinese born in China.

My husband's report adds: "I wish space permitted me to dwell on that very charming group of British and Chinese that largely comprised the membership of the Malacca club which came into exist-

ence with 60 charter members on June 24. I cannot refrain from mentioning D. A. E. Bell, local manager of the Hong Kong Shanghai Banking Corporation, Loh Kim Swi, a prominent Chinese, and E. G. Martin."

Penang, with 333,000 population, is the second largest port and commercial city in British Malaya and my husband regarded it as very important from a Rotary standpoint. He comments: "I was fortunate here in that the British Resident Councillor, Hon. Mr. E. W. F. Gilman, had previously become a member of the Kuala Lumpur Rotary Club. A strong group of seventy charter members including many desirable Chinese as well as a representation of Malays and Indians, brought Rotary into existence on August 12, 1930, with the Hon. Mr. P. M. Robinson, head of a large smelting concern, as its first president.

"I left Malaya believing that Rotary was firmly established, even though it had come into existence at a time of great financial depression when local residents saw their two great products, rubber and tin, selling for less than actual cost of production. The clubs are Singapore, Penang, Malacca in the Straits Settlements, Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Seremban, and Klang in the Federated Malay States."



ONE OF SINGAPORE'S TRAFFIC POLICEMEN, STATIONED AT ONE OF THE CITY'S BUSIEST TRAFFIC CENTERS.