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RIVER VIEW IN PERAK.

[R. K. Jowett, Aylesbury.

## PERAK VIEWED FROM A GHARI.

By H. K. JOWETT.



FIRST catch your ghari. Not always an easy matter this, for the ghari-wallah is a wily rascal, and, being generally an ex-policeman, displays much of the policeman's faculty of being invisible when wanted. Gharis are, as the local phrase has it, "of sorts"—good, bad, indifferent—though the good ones cannot be said to preponderate. Now a Perak ghari is among the most curious of the wheeled things that creep upon the earth. It has ways peculiar to itself, and goes through life with a disregard of consequences that would delight the heart of an English butcher-boy. To mention only a few of its vagaries: it takes a pride in becoming wheelless at inconvenient moments, it shows a marked affinity for the roadside ditch, and it will turn a speedy somersault on very slight provocation.

Nevertheless there was no option but to use this means of transit, and the two Europeans whose doings are here briefly chronicled, confronted with Hobson's choice, duly

hailed a ghari. On examination the conveyance proved to be a kind of crude sedan-chair on wheels, with the passenger accommodation uncomfortably curtailed so as to give the horse freedom of action. The motive power in this instance consisted of a small Sumatran pony, while the driver, who squatted on one of the shafts of the vehicle, was a dark-skinned native of doubtful nationality.

It should be mentioned that Perak (pronounced *Peyrah*) is a wealthy state under British protection in the north of the Malay Peninsula. The nearest bit of civilisation—if the track of a mail-steamer may be regarded as the limit of the "civilising sea"—is the town of Penang, the capital of the island of that name, at the entrance of the Straits of Malacca. Situated in the heart of the tropics, and favoured with an equable climate, Perak has been called the land of eternal summer. On the morning of our journey we were not disposed to quarrel with that appellation. The cloudless sky was of the deepest blue, and hill and dale were bathed in the brilliant tropical sunshine. The



A PERAK GHARI.

graceful branches of the betel-nut palms swayed gently in the faintest of breezes, and the early dew still glistened on every leaf and blade. Behind us lay Taiping, the capital of the country, while in front, crowned with a coronal of snow-white mist, the gigantic Mount Bûbû rose head and shoulders above his brethren.

We were making for the heart of the great semicircle of hills which fences in this district, the cart-road on which we were travelling being one of the military roads made by the British troops in the war twenty years ago. The Perak Expedi-

flowing with milk and honey, well watered and fruitful, and beautiful for situation even amid the many beauties of this favoured region. The Malay makes no attempt to live up to his ancient reputation of cut-throat and thief; on the contrary, he is law-abiding and courteous, and he is essentially a tiller of the soil. A man of primitive ideas and habits, he sees no necessity to improve on the patriarchal practice of making the earth yield him daily sustenance—a matter of no great difficulty in the perennial vegetation of the tropics.

Pursuing our journey (which, by the way,



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A MINING VILLAGE IN KINTA.

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tion of 1875-6 was not a very lengthy or important affair and is almost forgotten now. Its immediate object was to punish the murderers of Mr. J. W. W. Birch, the first British Resident, and its outcome has been the conversion of Perak into one of the most prosperous of the outlying dependencies of the empire.

Before noon we had crossed the mountain range by the picturesque pass at Gapis, and it was not long before Kuala Kangsar, the residence of the Sultan and the old capital of the state, was reached. Kuala Kangsar is the Malay's earthly paradise; it is his land

was enlivened by some of the usual incidents of ghari waywardness) we crossed the palm-fringed Perak River, and after a further five hours of steady travelling through forest scenery found ourselves, towards evening, in sight of the town of Ipoh. The township of Ipoh, in the Kinta district, is the centre of the largest tin-producing area in Perak, and it is to tin that Perak owes its wealth and importance. Nothing could be more striking than the difference between the desolate expanse of worked-out mines in the neighbourhood of Ipoh and the stretches of agricultural and sylvan scenery through

which we had just passed. In place of the Malay hamlet, with its sprinkling of sturdy men and lustrous-eyed women, we had come upon crowds of Chinese in a noisy Chinese settlement. There are in reality two Peraks—the Perak of the field and the Perak of the tin-mine, the Perak of the Malay and the Perak of the Chinaman. The Celestial—wiry, active, industrious, the embodiment of energy and commercialism—is a complete contrast to the indolent, jungle-loving Malay. If the Chinaman is a striking figure from the business point of view, there is an atmosphere of romance and mystery surrounding the Malay which makes him by far the more attractive personality.

While it may be reasonably doubted whether the thrusting of Western ideas upon Orientals is always a beneficent proceeding, there can be no question about the material advantages which Perak enjoys as the result of British protection. Twenty-five years ago the chief means of communication, apart from the rivers, were native paths and elephant tracks; piracy was not unknown along the coast, and civil war on a small scale was a common condition of things. To-day one can travel throughout Perak, on metalled roads, or can journey by rail in certain districts. The Perak River has been bridged, telegraphs have been extended in all directions, and cables connect the state with Penang,

Singapore and the outer world. Moreover life and property are safe, justice is administered, vernacular schools abound, and the poorer Malays (formerly subject to slave bondage and the *corvée*) are now free to work out their destiny in their own way.

In a country where hotels are unknown, the rest-house and the European club are necessary institutions. The club is the common meeting-ground of the English community, and unbounded hospitality is there showered upon the traveller. And in the regions east of Suez, "where a man can raise a thirst," the club is a goal towards which the wayfarer trends with a good deal of interest. The Ipoh Club is pleasantly situated, cool and compact, and well sustains its reputation as a centre of social intercourse and festivity.

We had come nearly sixty miles in our jolting ghari, and, with the train running into Ipoh station, there was obviously no need to employ that erratic vehicle farther. The railway to Teluk Anson, the southern port of

Perak, had recently been completed, and the next morning we were quickly conveyed by the iron horse to our destination. Passing through magnificent scenery, this ride by rail was as interesting as, and far less fatiguing than, the road journey of the previous day; but we were nevertheless not altogether sorry to have surveyed a large expanse of Perak from the vantage-ground of a common ghari.



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A MALAY MAIDEN.