

Am I right in detecting an asperity, too, in the comment on p. 85, and repeated on p. 226, that W. H. Mercer, who in a Colonial Office minute referred to 'a federation of colonies *inter se*' (a phrase later occasioning much dispute), did so because, having been exposed to classics at school and university, he could assume that 'bits of Latin would not be incomprehensible to his similarly educated superiors'? If so, it is oddly acceptable on p. 101 for an Oxford-educated Australian to quote a bit of French. Not that Professor La Nauze is ever guilty of *bêtises*, *per se*.

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*The Straits Settlements 1826-67. Indian Presidency to Crown Colony.* By C. M. Turnbull. University of London, Athlone Press, 1972. 428 pp., maps. U.K. price: £5.50.

IN RECENT years several works have amplified our knowledge of the Malay states before the British 'intervention' of the 1870s. But it seems that none has concentrated on the general development of the Straits Settlements, Penang, Malacca, and Singapore, since the publication of L. A. Mills's *British Malaya* in 1925. Dr Turnbull's long-awaited book is the more welcome. It provides an excellent treatment of the Settlements in the period before their transfer from India Office to Colonial Office control in 1867. Her account is divided into a number of sections — dealing with the 'immigrant society', the structure of government, the economy, health, poverty and education, defence, piracy, the relations with the Peninsular states — and in almost all of them she offers some new perception or some new detail, based on wide reading in the official archives, particularly those in Singapore, on unprecedentedly extensive use of the local newspapers, and on access to some private collections, such as the papers of Sir Charles Wood.

In treating the 'immigrant society', for instance, Dr Turnbull observes the difference between the European community of the early days, returning to England only on retirement, small, bachelor-dominated, hospitable, free-and-easy; and the later more middle-class, more domestic, more 'British' community: 'the passing of the early, informal days when wealth, race and colour were of little account' (p. 30). Many Chinese, she points out, did not return to China, as they hoped, three or four years after their arrival, but they did return eventually: 'there were few elderly Chinese to be seen in Singapore, even in the last few years of Indian rule' (p. 36). In dealing with piracy, as another example, Dr Turnbull justifiably appears to amend my date for the Temenggong's mending his ways: she places that significant event in 1843-4 (p. 249). Her account of relations with the Malay states perhaps misses some points. Cavenagh's successful attempts to woo young Abu Bakar should perhaps be put into the context of relations between Johore and Pahang and form part of the description of the shift in policy

that led the Governor ultimately to the bombardment of Trengganu in 1862 (p. 287). But there are also some useful revelations. The idea of a Resident in Johore is brought up by the Temenggong's great opponent, W. H. Read (p. 282), and by the *Singapore Free Press* (p. 308). In the event Abu Bakar's good management enabled him to avoid receiving a Resident. But the currency of the idea as a remedy for misrule and anarchy on the Peninsula perhaps helps to explain its use by the second Colonial Office Governor, Sir Andrew Clarke, in dealing with Perak and Selangor. Dr Turnbull's account of the 'transfer' helps to explain why it was not done by the first Colonial Office Governor, Sir Harry Ord. The vocal opposition of Read and others to the government of the day did not cease with the 'transfer': they did not get the power they craved, and their protests so damaged the Colonial Office's opinion of its first appointee that no change of policy could be entrusted to him. 'Intervention', which Dr Turnbull sees as inevitable, and only delayed by the Trengganu episode, thus ensued when Clarke took over from Ord.

Comments like these on the connexion with the Malay states are not meant to imply that this is the main theme of a book on the Straits Settlements. Two criticisms of the work can indeed be advanced. One Dr Turnbull rightly defends herself against in anticipation, that the book is 'Europe-centric', or, as she puts it, that 'the Straits-based European minority play a role in this story out of proportion to their numbers . . .'. A basic difficulty is 'the absence of vernacular newspapers . . . and the dearth of documentary material in local languages . . .' (p. v). The best that can be done is to endeavour to use European material as effectively and as objectively as possible. Dr Turnbull suggests that 'anthropological, sociological and historical studies of Asian communities in neighbouring areas and at later periods . . . will probably provide greater indirect illumination in the future . . .' (p. v). No doubt. But it will still be the duty of the historian to check, with what sources he has, the relevance of other models and patterns to the very particular circumstances of the Straits Settlements in this phase.

The second possible criticism of the book may be more substantial: the useful information it conveys and the perceptive comments it includes do not perhaps sufficiently cohere. One may be tempted to use the work as an encyclopaedia, rather than as a survey of a particular 'immigrant society' which may itself suggest generalizations. Even the unvarnished style may lead in the same direction, though clearly Dr Turnbull does not lack the ability to turn a phrase — she speaks of the 'reluctant, exasperated admiration' European officials and merchants felt for the Chinese (p. 51) — or make a crack: Sultan Mahmud of Lingga was toasted at an 1853 Freemasons' dinner in Singapore with the air 'Welcome Royal Charlie', 'a salute which was sadly appropriate to his subsequent career and sorry end' (p. 280). Dr Turnbull's thesis, on which the book is based, was centred on the 'transfer' movement, and the material organized round the topics for complaint that Read and others put forward in pressing for Colonial Office rule. Perhaps that gave an otherwise impressive thesis only a rather tenuous unity; perhaps rightly, that structure has been abandoned in the book. But possibly it could still have been organized more effectively. The account of the transfer is splendid, but does not quite form a satisfactory climax.

The reviewer may add a general comment. No one who reads these pages can regard the Straits Settlements under Indian rule as an example of good government or as a source of consequent pride in British imperialism. The retrenchment and reorganization of 1830 made the administration quite incapable of coping with the expansion of trade and population and the demand for more sophisticated government in subsequent years: while subordination to Bengal meant that Straits officials were largely 'engaged in preparing voluminous and largely fruitless reports, narratives and accounts, and converting inaccurate statistics into meaningless terms . . .' (p. 84). There was much to criticize. Yet the motives of contemporary critics bear close examination no more easily than the operation of the government they criticized. The Supreme Government, particularly after the Charter of 1853, frequently passed legislation more dedicated to uniformity for India than concerned with the needs of the Settlements. The Straits merchants had no means of regularly making their influence felt, except through the newspapers, the presentments of grand juries, the holding of public meetings (protest movements were a commonplace), the activities of old hands back at home. The Governor's position was uncomfortable, if not hopeless: Butterworth prevaricated, half-blind Blundell was broken, even cheerful Cavenagh was worn down. But the strongest protests were always against taxation, particularly against measures that would infringe the free port status of the Settlements and thus destroy a supposedly fragile entrepôt trade. Ultimately the expense of what administration existed was borne by the Chinese immigrants through the farming of indirect taxes; and the deficit was made up, as the Chairman of the Company bitterly observed, by the "poor *ryots* of India" (pp. 352-3). Perhaps it was not surprising that the 'transfer' was only a minority cause: when trade was prospering, and the Governor succeeding in his almost impossible task, only a few wished to destroy the advantages of Indian rule by demanding a share of power. Maybe, too, we can find more sympathy for Blundell than the contemporary European wives could find for him or his numerous Eurasian children: a paternalist who viewed newspapers with contempt, saw merchants as money-grabbers, and considered lawyers a menace to true justice (p. 331). After the 'transfer' the Colonial Office system did not give the 'unofficials' all they wanted. In the history of the relations between the British and the Malay states, there is more continuity than earlier emphasis on the 'intervention' of the 1870s suggested. Dr Turnbull's work suggests that there is a continuity in the history of the Straits Settlements, too. The 'Indian' period established the tradition that government activities would be limited. It may also have established the view that those Europeans whose enterprise helped to expand the trade of the Settlements and the neighbouring states were to have only a limited share in deciding what exactly those activities should be and at what precise objectives they should aim.

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