

Introduction



THE phenomenal growth of Ipoh in the thirty-year period from 1884 when the Kinta Tin Rush began in earnest, to the start of the First World War in 1914 was unprecedented in the history of any town in the country. From a small riverine *kampong* she grew into the second largest town in the Federated Malay States, after Kuala Lumpur, the Federal capital. What was even more remarkable about this growth was that unlike administrative capitals or “official towns” such as Kuala Lumpur or Taiping, Ipoh did it all on her own, without Government help. The growth and development of Ipoh was due entirely to the efforts of the “unofficials,” as the Colonial Government called the private sector in those days. This “benign neglect” by the Government was grossly unfair considering the fact that Ipoh was the town that contributed the most to its coffers, spearheading the development of the country. The ambitions of the good people of Ipoh to make their town a metropolis like Kuala Lumpur were turned down by the Government again and again.

Yet in spite of all her setbacks, Ipoh could still consider herself lucky because she had one thing in abundance – TIN! Ipoh was situated at the heart of the richest tin mining district in the world – the fabulous Kinta Valley. It was tin that built Ipoh. Tin gave the people an identity, a confidence, and a pride. It gave the city her fables, her legends, her stories of awe and inspiration. Tin was, in short, the soul of Ipoh.

After the First World War, when it became clear that the Colonial Government was not going to give Ipoh the things that she asked for, such as the shifting of the district capital from Batu Gajah, a seaport, and the shifting of the State capital from Taiping (although she had been promised that), the city had to struggle with the hard realities of the day – the Great Depression of the early 1930s, tin control, immigration restriction, *etc*, making tin mining increasingly difficult. Still, the tin miners had remarkable resilience, and made the best of the opportunities that were still present.

This book is about the pioneers of Ipoh, and about the Golden Age of the city, when there was so much tin in the environs that fortunes were made seemingly at will. However, the Kinta Tin Rush attracted not just the mining towkays and coolies, but all sorts of people – adventurers, mining advancers, money-lenders, merchants, crooks, prostitutes, *etc*, turning Ipoh into a cosmopolitan centre. Among these pioneers were men of ability, foresight, even of genius, who in the process of building their personal fortunes founded the institutions that made the city tick, the schools, the hospitals, the chambers of commerce, the mining associations, the legal firms, the dispensaries. Ipohites must take pride and inspiration in the fact that their city was built by such enterprising people, because now tin is gone and they have to fall back on themselves to rebuild their fair city.

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