MALAYAN HISTORICAL SERIES

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SINGAPORE — A POPULAR HISTORY

1819 – 1960

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SINGAPORE–
A POPULAR HISTORY

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Number Two

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PREFACE

The ancient, fabulous city of Singapura, which, because of its strategic position, commanded the sea-routes between the Indian Ocean and the China Sea, was sacked and utterly destroyed at the end of the 14th century. The jungle crept back over the ruins, and more than four hundred years later the island was a small and unimportant possession of the Temenggong of Johore, who in turn owed allegiance to the Sultan of Johore, Riouw and Lingga. At the beginning of the 19th century there came a time of confusion, when the Dutch occupied Riouw and over-awed the Sultan (with the express intention of keeping the British out of the East Indies), and when the Temenggong looked on the reigning Sultan as a usurper. Into the confusion stepped Sir Stamford Raffles, representing the English East India Company and determined to establish a new British port east of the Straits of Malacca.

This book opens at the explosive moment when Raffles and the Temenggong, meeting on the southern shore of the island, discuss the founding of a settlement, which has since become the State of Singapore. Its growth is traced, not by examining

in detail the ways — significant though they were — in which the governments of other countries influenced its development, but by presenting the people who lived and worked in it, and by whose efforts it became a vast international city and port.

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The Cover Illustration is reproduced from a photograph kindly supplied by Singapore Information Services, of *Singapore from Mount Wallich, 1856*, an oil painting by Percy Carpenter displayed in Raffles Museum.

Plates 1 & 5 are reproductions of photographs kindly supplied by Mr. Leon Comber; Plates 2 & 4 are reproductions of illustrations appearing in C. B. Buckley's *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* (Fraser & Neave Ltd., Singapore, 2 vols., 1903); Plates 3, 6, 7 & 8 are reproductions of photographs kindly supplied by Singapore Information Services.

The sketch-map of the Japanese thrust towards Singapore (p. 137) is the work of Mr. Peter Russell.

Chapter One

BETWEEN WORLDS AND WORLDS

. . . sailing between worlds and worlds with steady wing.

I. 1819

Not one stick or stone of present-day Singapore was standing on the morning of Friday, the 29th day of January, 1819. Towards noon of that day two men, the Temenggong Abdur Rahman and Sir Stamford Raffles, with whom the story of the modern city begins, met for the first time in the shade of a cluster of coconut palms on the southern shore of the island.

Near the palms was the Temenggong's house. Built off the ground on nibong posts in the Malay style, its bamboo framework covered with kajang and an attap roof, it was bigger than the houses of the Malay village which lay between it and the Singapore River.

There were, probably, some thirty to fifty houses in the village. Among them were those of Abang Johore, the Temenggong's brother, Inche Talib, one of the Temenggong's most trusted followers, and Inche Salleh, who had met Sir Stamford Raffles at the river bank and had led him to the meeting place. Apart from piracy which they considered a manly occupation, these people lived mainly by fishing and gathering the natural fruits of the jungle trees.

The slow, ageless life of the island centred on the Singapore River. It was shaped like an angry cobra; starting from some unknown source in the inland hills, it wound sluggishly through the jungle until, just above the Malay village, it opened out into a wide tidal basin, the distended hood of the cobra. The bank on the village side was of firm ground, several feet above the water, but the far bank was a low-lying swamp, covered with twisted mangroves and cut by creeks which filled and emptied with every tide. The only occupants of the basin were Orang Laut, a simple roving sea-people who lived their whole lives afloat in their open prahus.

Seawards, the basin closed in sharply to the head of the cobra, and its teeth were there in the shape of sharp jagged rocks which obstructed the narrow passage. In the bay beyond, seven ships of the British expedition lay waiting the result of Raffles' visit to

the Temenggong.

That, at first glance, was the island and its inhabitants. But up-river, beyond the basin and out of sight, Chinese cultivators were at work with their customary energy clearing small patches of jungle on the hillsides and planting them with gambier. One of these planters was established on the western side of Bukit Selegie (which was to become Mount Emily); there were at least three on the other side of the river, on the hill that was to be known first as Mount Stamford, and is today Pearl's Hill, Tan Ngun Ha on its western side, Tan Ah Loo on the south-west, and Heng Tooan on the south-east. There were about twenty plantations in all, and the Chinese who did not live on them, had houses on the banks of the river, above the Temenggong's village. They accepted the authority of their own Captain China, who was answerable to the Temenggong. These people thought only of the day when they would return to China, with Spanish dollars stitched into their belts; their annual pleasure was a sight of the one junk that came down on the north-east monsoon from China to collect their gambier and bring in supplies of rice and clothing.

The Malays, Chinese, and Orang Laut — say three or four hundred in all — were grouped round the Singapore River. The river carried their slight trade; but it also brought the island into bad repute.

In the words of Abdullah the Munshi, "At this time no mortal dared to pass through the Straits of Singapore. Jins and satans even were afraid, for that was the place the pirates made use of, to sleep at and divide their booty, after a successful attack on any ship's boats or prahus. There also they put to death their captives, and themselves fought and killed each other in their quarrels on the division of the spoil."

Whether he was mortal, Jin or Satan, Raffles had not seemed unduly perturbed when he came ashore. The officers of his expedition and the captains and crews of his ships also showed a disappointing lack of fear; if they did occasionally look questioningly out to sea, it was not the thought of pirates that was worrying them, but the reported presence of a heavily-armed Dutch fleet. It might appear at any moment and challenge their right to be in those waters; for the Dutch had made it clear that they regarded the East Indies as their own particular property.

* * *

The Temenggong Abdur Rahman *owned* not only the whole island of Singapore, but the territory of Johore, stretching northwards up the mainland of Malaya. His title of Temenggong meant that he was also an hereditary minister to the Sultan of Johore, Riouw, and Lingga. Under the old Sultan Mahmoud this had been a position of authority, but

when Mahmoud died in 1812 the already crumbling empire had split up. Bugis schemers had pushed a weak, unwilling younger son on to the throne. The Temenggong had favoured the elder son, Husein, known as Tengku Long, and, after one unsuccessful attempt to remove the usurper, had withdrawn to the peninsula, cutting himself off from the Sultanate.

Only a few weeks before Raffles' visit to Singapore, the Dutch — in order to prevent the British from obtaining a foothold in the Indies — had moved in, and now dominated the Sultan and his Bugis friends. Daily the Temenggong had expected to see Dutch sails crossing the narrow Straits and bearing down on his island. Instead, the British had arrived. An interesting situation, the Temenggong must have thought, as he led Sir Stamford Raffles up to the verandah of his house.

Sir Stamford Raffles was one of the most brilliant men in the Honourable East India Company's Eastern service, but he was a governor out of tune with his times; he thought more of the people he governed than of the profit he made for his employers. Born at sea in 1781 he passed through childhood frustrated by poverty and lack of education, and at fourteen years of age joined the London headquarters of the East India Company in the humble position of a junior clerk. Exceptionally talented,

and capable of long periods of intense study, he had risen quickly in the Company's service. Within ten years he was given an Eastern appointment, as Assistant Secretary at Penang. He began a study which was to affect not only his own life but that of millions of others; he learnt the Malay language, then almost unknown by Europeans of the Company. With his knowledge of the Malays, their customs, and countries, came a sympathetic understanding which was to be his downfall. His preparations for the Java Expedition of 1811, in which Britain took the island from the Dutch, were followed by his appointment as Lieutenant-Governor. But his administrative reforms, by which he wished to improve the lot of the Javanese people, so long trodden down by the Dutch, were so far-reaching and costly to the East India Company, that he was removed from office. Though knighted for his services, he had been relegated to the subordinate position of Lieutenant-Governor of Bencoolen, a poor, fever-ridden outpost on the west coast of Sumatra.

It was from Bencoolen that he had seen the Dutch, returning to the East after the defeat of Napoleon, sealing off the Indies from the British, firing on their trading vessels, preventing Asian traders from reaching the Company's ports. Even more serious was the Dutch threat to Britain's trade with China. Already they controlled the Sunda Straits;

the other route, by the Malacca Straits, would also be under their control as soon as Malacca was handed back to them. In this view he was supported by Major William Farquhar, British Resident at Malacca, and both men agreed on the solution — Britain must open, by force of arms if need be, a new port within the East Indies.

It was Raffles, the dominant character, who obtained permission from the Governor-General of Bengal to search for and occupy a suitable harbour, and Farquhar, having handed over Malacca, joined him. Now, together, they left the shade of the seven coconut palms and followed the Temenggong up the steps to his verandah.

There the Temenggong entertained his guests. When he saw that Raffles had some definite purpose, he led him inside the house, out of hearing of the village Malays and the Orang Laut who had collected in the clearing beneath them.

Leaving them, Farquhar walked away from the river and the village and found a flat plain which followed the line of the sandy beach. It was covered with low jungle and lallang and ended by a freshwater stream that ran out of the hills and into the bay. Beyond was thick jungle, and Farquhar turned back, meeting on the way Captain Daniel Ross, one of the Company's best-known hydrographers and a captain of the expedition. Ross had been

making a quick survey of the harbour. Added together, the information of the two Scotsmen confirmed their first impressions that here was an ideal port: a good approach for shipping across the bay, a firm anchorage, plentiful supplies of fresh water, wood and ballast for ships, a safe haven in the basin of the river for smaller boats, and a flat plain on which to build a town. Equally important was the fact that, looking southwards across the bay, they could see the islands which flanked the Straits of Singapore five miles away — whoever occupied Singapore controlled the Straits and the trade route between India and China.

It was an exciting prospect. Raffles heard all this when he came out of the Temenggong's house. He was smiling. The Temenggong, he told Farquhar, insisted that the displaced heir to the Sultanate, Tengku Long, should be brought over from Riouw to ratify any agreement, but pending his arrival the British could begin landing their troops.

At 4 p.m. that day Raffles returned to his ship, and Farquhar began landing a small token force. By dusk, sepoys of the 20th Regiment Bengal Native Infantry were erecting shelters on the plain.

That day, which had begun like any other on the island, was ending. The island and its people, sleeping through the fables of pre-history, looking backwards through time to valiant kings and proud

empires, had been translated within a few hours into the nineteenth century. Never again could the island slip back into obscurity; it was certain that if the British did not hold it, the Dutch would soon take it.

And the heart of the island was the river, flowing darkly now that night had come. On its waters was a strange reflection, the flames of the sepoys' camp fires.

* * *

Early next morning, Batin Sapi of the Orang Laut left the river secretly in his prahu. With him were Abang Johore and Inche Wan Abdulla, carrying a message to Tengku Long, urging him to come quickly to Singapore.

Later that morning of Saturday, January 30, while the troops and baggage were being brought ashore, Raffles and the Temenggong made a formal agreement: the Temenggong was to receive three thousand dollars a year "On account of the English Company having the ground on which to make a factory". Once more the Temenggong insisted that only the prince Tengku Long could give final sanction, but meanwhile the Company's flag could be raised.

When the flagstaff had been planted upright on the rough grass bank above the beach, activity ceased for a moment on the Plain. The red-coated

sepoys of the 20th Regiment laid aside the branches with which they were building their shelters; the gunners, European and Indian, of the Bengal Artillery, in their blue jackets, ceased hauling on the guns they had ferried ashore; their officer, Lieutenant Ralfe turned, rule in hand, from his task of measuring out the first bastion by Fresh Water Stream (now Stamford Canal); and the ships' crews, sweating as they cleared the scrub on the Plain, were given time to breathe. Then the gridiron flag of the Honourable Company broke and floated in the breeze of the north-east monsoon.

Work began again, went on into the first days of February, under the protecting guns of the ships lying out in the bay. On Monday, February 1, the ships fired a royal salute as the state prahu of Tengku Long swept into sight. When he came close enough to be seen, there was little about the ungainly prince to remind onlookers of his father the autocratic old Sultan. It took all the powers of the strong-willed Temenggong to persuade him that this was no trap. Raffles, inviting him on board the *Indiana*, took him into his cabin, and no one knew what they discussed there.

During the next two days, work on the Plain mounted in tempo. Chinese had appeared from their plantations, and a hundred of them were added to the labour force. By the Friday, the Plain was al-

most cleared between the shore and the Temenggong's house. That evening a boat made a round of the ships, inviting the commanders and officers of the expedition to a ceremony to be held next day.

Shortly after noon on Saturday, February 6, Tengku Long came down the steps of the Temenggong's house. Timidly, feeling for the support of the bolder Temenggong, he walked along the red carpet laid between two ranks of the Company's sepoys and seamen, towards the tent where Raffles, surrounded by his officers, waited for him.

Under the authority of the Governor-General of Bengal and to the accompaniment of rolls of musketry fire, Raffles named Tengku Long Sultan Husein of Johore. Hesitating, watched by the many people assembled on the Plain, the newly-created Sultan put his seal to a Treaty, confirming the Temenggong's permission for the British to establish a factory at Singapore. The ceremony ended with the hoisting of the Union Jack, as the guns on ship and shore fired their salutes.

A banquet followed, and after it Sultan Husein and Temenggong Abdur Rahman, who were to be known officially as their Highnesses, withdrew with their followers to the Temenggong's house, doubtless to discuss the astonishing events which had overtaken them. Raffles, who had work to do elsewhere, went aboard the *Indiana* to write out instructions

for the conduct of the factory before he sailed.

In his tent by the beach, Farquhar, named as Singapore's first Resident, read the instructions as soon as they reached him. There were many, but these words were their core: "As the convenience and accommodation of the port is an object of considerable importance, you will direct your early attention to it, and to the formation of a good watering place for shipping. It is not necessary at present to subject the trade of the port to any duties."

Farquhar already had a copy of the careful survey report prepared by Captain Ross to help him, and his own son-in-law Francis Bernard had been appointed acting Master Attendant of the port. He gave the report to Bernard to study, and sent a party of troops out to St. John's Island with orders to inform passing merchantmen of Singapore's existence.

Then he turned to more pressing matters, defence and food. Some three weeks' rations had remained for the garrison troops when they arrived, but in the hurry of landing much had been spoilt. What was left was being stored in the brig *Ganges*, which had been warped into the basin of the river. For the civilians there was little to eat beyond the fruit of the island and the fish which the Orang Laut caught. Farquhar sent Captain Harris with his schooner *Enterprize* to Malacca. He was to bring

back bullocks and other livestock, if the Dutch would allow him to, and he was to tell the people of the town that they would receive good money for any food supplies they brought down.

For the defence of the factory he had about one hundred sepoys of the 20th Regiment: they were surly and mutinous, because their relief had been due before they left Penang, and they should have been on their way back to their homes in Bengal. The artillerymen were steady, but there were only thirty Europeans, and their light fieldpieces would make a pitiful showing against thick-timbered men-of-war. The Honourable Company's Cruiser *Nearchus* remained under his command, but her captain now reported that white ants had made her unseaworthy, and she must be beached for repairs. As to the bastions and forts which Raffles had told him to build, where was the money for their construction to come from? He had 10,425 Spanish dollars in the iron boxes of his Treasury, and, since Raffles had laid down that Singapore should be a free port, he could expect no revenue.

Crisis came on March 6. Captain Ross hurried down under full sail from Dutch Malacca. He had received information that the Dutch were about to attack and take Singapore.

Unable to make contact with Raffles, Farquhar sent a despatch prahu to Penang, calling on Governor

Bannerman for reinforcements. But the jealous Governor, alarmed at the possible rise of a port to rival his own, sent down an empty ship and 6,000 Spanish dollars for the depleted Treasury, advising Farquhar to withdraw before the "overpowering armament" of the Dutch.

By the time the *Mary Anne* arrived in Singapore on April 1, the crisis was over. 485 reinforcements of the 20th Regiment, from Raffles' Residency of Bencoolen, had landed; and any thoughts of mutiny remaining in the original one hundred was being sweated out of them.

By then, too, the Malacca people — despite Dutch gunboats and Malay pirates — had brought down food.

Already a settlement was spreading over the Plain. Asian traders, Chinese who arrived with bundles of merchandise wrapped up in matting, Indians who supplied the troops and their followers, had opened the first shops of a bazaar on a corner of the Plain near the river mouth. Between the river and Fresh Water Stream, the temporary huts of the garrison stretched out in long regular lines. The hill at the back of the Plain, known as Bukit Larangan (Forbidden Hill) to the Temenggong's villagers, had been cleared of trees, and Lieutenant Ralfe of the Artillery, who was also Executive Engineer, had built a road round it. Up that road had been hauled

the first, old, honey-combed guns sent down from Penang, six-pounder brass fieldpieces with elevating screws, to be placed in position to protect the Plain. Down by the beach Farquhar was building his Residency, and Bernard the house he would use as home and Master Attendant's office.

Farquhar had time now to turn to the port. On April 9 there were two big merchantmen in harbour and more than one hundred small Asian trading vessels. In the evening there came into the roads the first Siamese junk. The merchants of the bazaar went aboard to examine her cargo of fish, coarse rice, sugar, palm oil, and sundries.

Singapore stood on the verge of that great international trade which was passing her doorstep. It needed only a sign of confidence to turn it into the harbour.

II. 1819 – 1823

Raffles gave Singapore the sign of confidence it needed. He returned on May 31, 1819, with the firm conviction that the Dutch had given up all thought of a direct attack on the port; they would rely, he was sure, on a "paper war", and that would be a matter for the British Government to deal with. Also he brought with him the means for making the factory permanent: 5,000 planks, 5,000 flooring tiles, and a great quantity of nails for building; 200

parangs, 100 changkuls, two carts with spare wheels, and nine bullocks with their calves for public works; and, as if to silence all doubt, there were enough boxes of stationery for the administration to tie itself up in red tape for years to come.

Raffles himself, blue-eyed and earnest, radiated confidence. For three weeks he examined what had been done, made an "Arrangement" with the Sultan and Temenggong, and gave Farquhar instructions for the future.

The boundaries of the factory were laid down, being from Tanjong Mallang to Tanjong Katong, and inland the range of a cannon shot. The Plain, the area between the Singapore River and Fresh Water Stream, and inland as far as the Hill, was to be kept for Government purposes only. So the bazaar must go, and the Chinese and Malays move over to the swampy ground on the other side of the river. The European town would be beyond Fresh Water Stream, towards Kampong Glam.

But the theme to which he returned repeatedly was the convenience of the port for shipping; it must give way to all others. Watering place, landing stage, and warehouses for cargoes: these must be attended to without delay, as ships were already feeling the need of them.

Towards the end of June he sailed for Bencoolen, promising to return.

For three and a half years Farquhar, known by the fluff of hair round his bald pate, the walking-stick in his hand, and the dogs always at his heels, guided Singapore's progress with easy-going benevolence.

Farquhar, as Resident and Commandant, received his orders from Raffles in Fort Marlborough (Bencoolen) and from the Governor-General at Fort William, Calcutta. But he was so far away from them, and communication by sailing vessel so hazardous that he was virtually an independent governor. He conducted his own foreign affairs, sending a mission to Pahang, exchanging presents with the King of Siam and the "Arab chief of Cambojca", and giving asylum to five hundred Bugis men, women, and children who arrived bloody and desperate after their insurrection against the Dutch of Riouw. But the still-mounting political fray between the Dutch and the British over the occupation of Singapore was a matter for the courts of Europe, and he was ordered not to antagonise the Government of the Netherlands East Indies.

In internal matters, as a result of the treaties made by Raffles, he had to take into consideration the wishes of their Highnesses the Sultan and Temenggong. Both expected to take a share in the government; the Temenggong having considerable authority since he was in fact the Company's land-

lord, and his rule was absolute outside the five-mile coastal strip of the factory.

Farquhar kept under his immediate supervision the Treasury and matters of justice and defence. He had at first no revenue, and relied for cash on Indiamen returning from China, to whose commanders he gave bills on the Supreme Government. In May 1820 he introduced small port charges to pay for the Master Attendant's running expenses. Four months later, against the wishes of Raffles, he began the farm system, selling by auction licences for the retailing of opium and spirits and the running of gaming tables. Obtaining 1,485 Spanish dollars for the first quarter's sales, and 2,055 for the next, he was able to build up the Licence Fund. He not only used it to pay for such widely different purposes as a police force, keeping the streets clean, sending out an expedition against pirates, and the employment of grass cutters, but, when the Supreme Government clamped down on his public works spending, he was able to use his own fund to continue building.

It was remarkable that Farquhar could carry on his government with so few officers; the total amount of their salaries was less in a year than Bencoolen paid out in a month; the establishment pay for what would now be called his Secretariat was 130 Spanish dollars a month. Under him the duties

were split into civil and military. For the first year he had an Assistant Resident to help him in civil matters, but this was discontinued by the Supreme Government in 1820. The Cantonment Adjutant was his personal staff officer and his link with the military.

In civil affairs the two main departments were headed by the Master Attendant and the Storekeeper. The Master Attendant dealt with all matters concerned with the port, including the river and roads; captains of square-rigged ships and nequedahs of Asian vessels must report to him on arrival; he gave permission for them to enter and leave port, collected the mail they brought, supervised the lighters used to transport their cargoes, and arranged wooding, watering, and ballasting. The Stores Department was itself split up into the Commissariat Stores, which supplied the garrison troops and the European Hospital with rations, clothing, and equipment, and the Civil Stores, which stocked the Company's merchandise for sale to the public. This last activity represented the dying efforts of the old East India Company to make a profit out of goods shipped from England and India to the East, and it was doomed; the rust flaked off its iron, steel could be bought more cheaply in the bazaar, and bales of printed cottons were eaten to shreds by cockroaches.

The garrison was still made up of the main

body of the 20th Regiment Bengal Native Infantry, its two battalions changing over in the trooping season, and the detachment of Bengal Artillery, with its own light field guns, and the heavy garrison artillery which was coming in slowly from Bengal. The sepoys of the infantry carried out guards and parades and supplied labour for the defence works. The gunners, being more highly trained, were used on a variety of tasks. A European gunner was in charge of the party of sepoys on St. John's Island; he signalled the arrival of ships, and the signal was repeated on the flagstaff on Forbidden Hill. Another was in charge of the Engineer's Yard which held material for public works, including tar and grease for the Honourable Company's carts, and, when they had been procured after a serious fire, "Engines water, complete with trucks and pins."

Many departments and services which we know in their complicated form came into simple existence. Lieutenant Ralfe, the Artillery Officer, was responsible as Executive Engineer for public works, and had laid down fifteen miles of road by 1821, including High Street, North Bridge Road, and Hill Street; he also dealt with what are today municipal matters, such as sanitation, drains, markets, and water supply. European and Pauper Hospitals were soon needed and built, and were in the charge of Assistant Surgeon Montgomerie of the 20th Regi-

ment. Education began with a "missionary clergyman", the Reverend Milton, who established a school for the free education of Chinese and Malay children; when Farquhar made him a grant of 150 Spanish dollars, he was setting an example of Government-aided education which was to be followed for many years. Mail passed through the Master Attendant, and his office became the first Post Office, at which a stamped receipt was given for every letter posted. The Botanic Gardens had their origin in the Spice Plantation, which Farquhar planted on the slopes of the Hill from plants and seeds sent by Raffles from Bencoolen. There was a Survey Department which, though it had no instruments of its own, was busy surveying New Harbour, a stretch of sheltered water which was to be of the utmost importance to Singapore. For the supply of water to town and shipping a reservoir had been built on the bank of the river, and it was supplied by an aqueduct running down from a stream on the Hill.

This was the official half of Singapore, which Farquhar controlled from his Residency at the sea-end of High Street. His instructions went out in the Station Order Book with which all officials, civil and military, must make themselves acquainted.

The civilian community was numerically far bigger; in 1821 the population was estimated at 4,727, of whom 29 were Europeans, 2,851 Malays,

and just over a thousand Chinese. There were others, too, including Arabs, Indians, and those of mixed races, and their numbers were increasing daily. But they belong to the story of trade, which will be told in the next chapter.

The East India Company's settlement of Singapore was taking shape. But reading about its Government departments and institutions one gains the impression that they were separate entities which were not being drawn into a composite whole.

Farquhar with his paternal friendliness had seen the town through its early and difficult pioneering days. As Abdullah said: "There were continual disturbances between the Malacca Malays and the Chinese and Klings, and if they had not been afraid of Mr. Farquhar there would have been murders among them every day." But Farquhar was one of the old school of administrators, satisfied with the leisurely life of the established ports. And here was the most virile collection of merchants the East had yet known, waiting for the firm hand of an administrator to give aim and purpose to their energy. Once more Raffles returned to Singapore when he was most needed.

* * *

On October 10, 1822, nearly four years after he had first ventured into it, Raffles entered the Singapore River to stay in the house of his brother-in-

law, Captain Flint, who had superseded Bernard as Master Attendant. Those years had wrought a dreadful change in Raffles. Physically he was more bent, thin and pallid, while the nervous gestures he made were an indication of the searing headaches from which he suffered; the emotional horror of the deaths, on the fever-ridden coast of Bencoolen, of three of his four children, and the near death of his wife, was a shadow behind his pale blue eyes. During those years, too, ambition, which had been his driving force, had died; Singapore, his Singapore, was the one pearl of his own finding that remained bright in the East.

But the setting it had been given in his absence infuriated him; it was shoddy. The river, he saw as he came into it, had become by natural process the centre of the settlement. 130,689 tons of shipping entered or left the port that year of 1822, carrying 8½ million Spanish dollars worth of merchandise which passed in and out of the river. The growth of trade had exceeded even his wildest expectations, yet the facilities for dealing with it remained much the same as they had been four years before when trade was virtually non-existent.

The tidal marshes of the south bank, though now habited by Chinese with their raft houses and rickety dwellings, and by Indian boatmen whose lighters brought in the cargoes, were useless for com-

merce. Three-quarters of the north bank was taken up by the Temenggong's village, leaving only a space the size of a football pitch between village and sea for the landing of cargoes. Crowded into it was the double row of shop-houses of the Asian and godowns of the European merchants, some of whom had built landing piers out into the river.

The merchants who could not find space there had spilled out across the Plain, intended by Raffles as a spacious setting for well-planned Government buildings, over Fresh Water Stream and along the beach where the European town should have been, as far as the Rochore River where the annual Bugis trade ships moored.

Raffles' city of the future could not rise out of this muddle.

To clear the Plain and prepare a business centre with a long line of river frontage for the reception of the merchants he must move, were the first two problems to overcome. Only a man of inspiration could have seen that tangled mud-swamp of the southern bank becoming a crescent of continuous wharf, stepped down to meet the tides, with an open space above it for loading and unloading merchandise, a curving line of warehouses waiting to receive it, and they in turn having "back fronts" to a commercial town stretching out to Telok Ayer Bay.

Walk along Boat Quay today, dodging the piled-

up merchandise and the porters staggering with their loads between the wharf and the warehouses, and you will not only realise the immensity of Raffles' vision, but see that he was a man of action who turned his visions into fact.

And it all started one October morning in 1822. Every man who would offer himself for labour at one rupee a day was given parang or changkul and sent to the south bank to cut down the mangroves and tip the soil of a small hill into the creeks. While they worked, tree trunks were floated down the river to the edge of the mud bank and there set upright to form the wharf.

As to the shape of things to come, Raffles consulted an energetic Irishman, G. D. Coleman, "an architect by profession", a man who above all others was to influence the design of buildings in early Singapore. Lieutenant Philip Jackson, who had succeeded Henry Ralfe as artillery officer, was taken under Raffles' wing, appointed Assistant Engineer, and put in charge of the mounting public works programme. A Town Committee was formed and charged with the task of laying out the commercial town and the kampongs, with straight roads set at right angles, continuous open verandahs, spaces for police stations, and the main public buildings.

"Come," said Raffles in effect, "we have the chance of the century, let us build something we

can be proud of." And under his personal magnetism they, officials and civilians, gave themselves willingly, until suddenly in early December their plans came near to disaster.

Opposition by the people — both European and Asian — who lacked Raffles' vision had been mounting. Only a ruthless hand could carry the reconstruction to its end. And when the hand was most needed Raffles was struck down by the recurring illness which now laid him prostrate on his bed.

His doctors said there was only one chance to save his life; he must sail for Europe immediately. He refused. There was so much at stake. A bungalow was hurriedly built for him on the slopes of the Hill, above the flagstaff and the guns and between the small Christian cemetery and the graves, as he said, of the Malay kings who had ruled the ancient Singapore. His ashes he feared would join theirs. But he recovered, took control again, and by January 1, 1823, was ready to give effect to the Town Committee's recommendations.

The Town Committee had gone on working. Serious, conscientious Major Davis, the Cantonment Adjutant, young snub-nosed Samuel George Bonham with a lisp and a liking for good dinners and champagne who was one day to become Governor, and A. L. Johnston, accepted by all as the leading merchant of his day; they had held their meetings every

day, drawing into their discussions representatives of the Malays, Chinese, Arabs, Bugis, and Javanese to discuss their respective kampongs, while Assistant Surgeon Montgomerie, their secretary, took copious notes, and Lieutenant Jackson drew and redrew plans.

On their final plan — it can still be seen in Raffles Museum — Raffles acted. He promulgated laws and regulations by which Bonham, this time as Registrar of Lands, sold building plots in the new commercial centre, the European town, and the several kampongs. Meanwhile Bernard's police and prisoners were ejecting the occupants of, and pulling down, buildings which did not conform with the plan.

Raffles turned now from physical to more spiritual matters. He brought out wise laws which had as their basis his axiom, "Let all men be considered equal in the eyes of the law", and he thereby gave confidence to a people drawn from many races and many parts of the world where such laws did not hold. He called on the merchants to act as magistrates; and when they inveighed against slavery and gambling he acted immediately, outlawing both.

It was in education that Raffles gave something peculiar to himself. His memories of his youth when he had struggled to make up for the education he had missed; his deep, lasting regard for the

Asian peoples with whom he had worked during his Eastern service, particularly the Malays; these found expression in the Institution he founded, and which is now called by his name.

To build a house for a man, for his business and his family, and to give him an ordered way of life, these things Raffles had done to the best of his ability. But to ensure for him the income by which he would live and prosper was more difficult.

Raffles was not sure whether Singapore's future prosperity would depend on the soil or the port.

He visualised the whole island cleared of jungle and developing into a spice plantation; with this end in view he started Botanical and Experimental Gardens where the growing of nutmeg and clove trees could be demonstrated, and made a new agreement with the Sultan and Temenggong so that planters could make use of the inland hills.

For the port he made new regulations, and in them laid down the principle which the merchants were to guard so jealously: "the Port of Singapore is a free Port, and the trade thereof is open to ships and vessels of every nation free of duty, equally and alike to all."

On June 9, 1823, the *Hero of Malown* carried Raffles away from Singapore. From her stern he could take one last look at the pearl that gleamed

again. Then he and the ship vanished below the horizon of sea and time.

III. 1823 – 1834

At 6 a.m. on August 2, 1825, the ship *Malabar*, 380 tons, sailed eastwards from the Singapore roads. John Crawfurd, Resident, like a man going round his newly-bought estate for the first time, was to sail round the island and take formal possession of it in the name of the East India Company.

The days of Singapore's uncertainty were over. It was exactly a year since Crawfurd had negotiated a final treaty with the Sultan and Temenggong. In return for a down payment of 33,200 Spanish dollars and 1,300 a month for life to the Sultan, and 26,800 dollars down and 700 a month to the Temenggong, they had agreed to "cede in full sovereignty and property to the Honourable the English East India Company . . . for ever, the Island of Singapore . . . together with the adjacent seas, straits and islets, to the extent of ten geographical miles, from the coast . . ."

From that time their Highnesses were no more than private citizens while they lived within the settlement. They had no further claim to take part in the government of the island or to any share in its revenue.

It was *less* than a year since the news had been

received in Singapore that Britain and the Netherlands had settled their many differences in the East Indies. By treaty dated March 17, 1824, the Dutch withdrew all claim to Singapore. Further, the two countries agreed to a boundary between their spheres of interest in the archipelago. The Indies lying south and west of a line through the Straits of Malacca and Singapore went to the Dutch. At the centre of the British sphere to the north lay Singapore.

So it was with the assurance of permanent occupation that John Crawfurd sailed on his ten-day voyage, during which he took formal possession of various islands lying within the treaty limits. It took him four days to pass through the Johore Strait, and, except at Pulau Ubin which had recently been occupied by woodcutters, he saw no sign of habitation. The island's central feature, Bukit Timah, was visible all the way round, but the jungle surrounding it was so thick that no European and few Malays had reached it.

Only on the southern strip of coastline, on either side of the Singapore River, had the island changed. On the west bank the business town was packing ever more tightly round Commercial Square (now Raffles Place), the Chinese were spreading outwards along the shores of Telok Ayer Bay, and the Indians across the swamps towards the hills.

Eastwards, in Kampong Glam, the Arabs and Mohammedan Indians were filling the Rochore Plain, while the Bugis had crossed the Rochore River to find living space. J. T. Thomson's description completes the picture: "In the centre of the landscape was Government Hill, with its verdant lawns and snug bungalow; and at its base were the warehouses and mansions of the merchant princes. Behind there was to be seen the comely undulating background, alternately covered with the mighty forest trees, and gambier and pepper gardens."

It was a town now lighted by oil lamps, and it had its own newspaper, the *Singapore Chronicle,* started that year by Francis James Bernard, late acting Master Attendant and Superintendent of Police. Its population in 1824, as shown by the first census, was 10,000.

That census indicated that Chinese, 3,317, were rapidly catching up with the Malays, of whom there were 4,580. The smaller communities included 74 Europeans, 16 Armenians, 15 Arabs, 756 natives of India, and 1,925 Bugis.

Behind these figures lay a problem. Treaties in Europe and Singapore had cleared the way for the future of the port, but they could not give it a settled population; only women could do that, and there was a serious shortage of them. The Malays had a proportion of two women to one man, but

of the immigrants only the Bugis brought their womenfolk in any numbers.

Early administrators knew this lack of woman's gentle restraint to be a cause of the brutishness, murders, gang fights, and other forms of violence becoming more uncontrollable every year. This was particularly so with the Chinese who had only one woman to eight men; they tried to make up for the loss with opium and gambling, and were the most lawless community in town.

Slave women were by no means unknown. The first entry in the cash book of A. L. Johnston the merchant, in 1820, had been; "Paid subscription for release of female European slave, 10 dollars." The Bugis, seeing an open market, had brought in slave women until Raffles had broken a paying business with his anti-slavery laws.

An appreciated but unintended present of twenty-seven young and pretty slaves from the Sultan's harem was quickly taken up. No doubt their knowledge of their value in this he-man's town gave them the courage to escape, appear at the police station, and complain of being cruelly treated. Crawfurd did not send them back; it is noted that the police had first choice, while the others soon found homes in the town.

The Chinese tackled the problem with typical thoroughness. Those who came from China retain-

ed their ties with the homeland but took Malay wives in Singapore. The fortunate ones, returning to China, took their sons with them to be educated; their daughters they left behind under strict surveillance, forbidden to marry any but Chinese. Hence, though the original stock was mixed, a few generations were to produce a close-knit community from which Chinese immigrants were to find their wives.

* * *

The monsoons brought trade to Singapore and fortunes to the men who could buy and sell with sufficient margin to leave a profit for themselves. Their godowns filled and emptied with the change of the wind, and the ship-chandlers made *their* profit out of the sails, spars, and provisions needed by the trading ships.

Singapore had few natural assets. The spice plantations on the inland hills had yet to bear fruit, the gambier and pepper grown was infinitesimal, and the produce of the Chinese market gardens was disposed of in the markets, as were the products of the Indian chunam-burners and brick-makers. Chinese craftsmen, tin-smelters, and manufacturers of pearl barley, who were already making a name for themselves, relied on the materials and produce brought in by the ships.

So Singapore's was purely an entrepôt trade,

and the merchants depended for their livelihood on the ships that entered harbour. There were the tall and stately East Indiamen from the West, bringing opium and cotton goods from India, and from England iron, flour, glassware, and a multitude of manufactures, as well as beer for the men, and the latest fashion in hats for the European women. From the East came the junks "all glittering with white and red and green and black, their strange eyes staring", their holds bulging with raw silk, silk thread, joss sticks, paper umbrellas, and crackers from China, tortoiseshell, mother-o'-pearl, and sapan wood from Manila, and sugar, sugar-candy, and rice from Siam and Cochin-China. Neat and white were the Bugis ships which collected the produce of the Eastern archipelago, spices, coffee, and gold-dust, bringing it down on the north-east monsoon. Innumerable tiny Malay prahus edged in from the coasts stretching from Borneo to Bali, their gunwales awash, weighed down with the produce of the islands.

At Singapore they unloaded and then loaded their cargoes over the quay in the basin of the river. Most of this trade was done by barter; but at each transaction the middle-men of Singapore — or at least the astute among them — added more coins to their iron money-chests.

Singapore's trade was nation-wide, but two nations made a notable exception to the pattern.

The free-roving Americans, seeking no territorial advantage, came with empty holds, for their country was young and had little produce and few manufactures to offer. But they were welcomed in the East because they carried bullion to pay for their purchases. The other nation, Japan, was still shut off from the world. But despite the rigid grip of the Shogunate, her much-desired lacquer work and dainty tableware were finding their place by way of Chinese junks into the warehouses of Singapore.

But what brought the trading ships of the world to Singapore, instead of to the established ports of the Dutch, who had for so long monopolised the trade of the archipelago? It was not solely because Singapore was a free port. The Dutch, forced unwillingly to follow what British administrators had done by choice, had made Riouw a free port: but the Chinese there sent their produce, pepper, and gambier, surreptitiously to Singapore, and a visitor found the port of Riouw sleeping, with only one ship in the harbour and no one stirring on board, while the long wooden jetty was empty, except for men lazily mending a fishing net.

The difference lay in the outlook of Britain and Holland. Holland jealously guarded the monopoly of its Eastern possessions, tried to shroud them in a humbug of mystery, even keeping sailing records secret, as they had done in the 1600's when they

tried unsuccessfully to keep the British from reaching the Indies. Holland, like Spain and Portugal before it, drew all the riches of the East to itself, expecting the lands it had occupied to fill its treasury coffers. To further this policy they beat down Malay opposition with German, Prussian, and Belgian mercenaries.

England, on the other hand, striding rapidly forward in her industrial revolution, was bursting outwards. The industrialists were building their own canals, laying their own railway lines to carry Stephenson's newly-developed steam-locomotive, in their hurry to get their manufactures to the coasts where ships waited to take them to almost every port in the world. England wanted markets, free markets, and her fleet, its strength unequalled, sailed east and west not to enforce monopolies, but to keep open the sea routes over which her merchandise was carried. So while the Dutch withdrew behind artificial barriers, Britain and Singapore, having the common aim of freedom of trade, expanded together.

It is misleading to express the extent of Singapore's trade in terms of dollars because they fluctuated so much in value; but by 1829 exports and imports had reached four million sterling.

This was no mean achievement in ten years. Find what reasons for it you will, but you always

come back to the man in the godown, the Singapore merchant. He had not gained success by caution; craft, perhaps even guile he sometimes needed to beat his competitors, but he was an honourable person, and above all he had that sense of adventure which led to his taking tremendous risks without the flicker of an eyelid to show his concern. He would stake his fortune on a trading voyage, trusting to a fair wind, a sound hull, and the avoidance of reef, rock and storm. Sometimes he failed and went under, but more often the risk paid the dividends he needed for another bigger speculation.

The most serious risk he was taking by 1829 was the capture of his cargoes by pirates.

There had been pirates in the Eastern seas since trade began, long before the beginning of history. They had been widely dispersed; from their haunts on Mindanao, Sulu, Borneo, Celebes, Billiton, Lingga, the east coast of Sumatra, and southern Malaya, they had sallied out to the trade routes that lay nearest to them. But as trade gradually centred itself on Singapore, so the pirates closed in on it, their attacks coming closer and closer until they formed a predatory ring round the port.

* * *

In 1829 Singapore received its first visit by a Governor-General of Bengal. Lord Bentinck was not very welcome since he was acting on the posi-

tive orders of the Court of Directors to break up the costly administration of the Company's settlements in the Straits and introduce severe economies.

Three years before, in 1826, Penang, Malacca, and Singapore had been incorporated and had become known as the Straits Settlements. The seat of government was in Penang, and Singapore, the junior settlement, was governed by a Resident Councillor. Also in that year of 1826, by means of what was known as the Second Charter of Justice, a Court of Judicature was established which brought the Recorder to administer the King's law in Singapore.

So matters stood until June 29, 1830, when, following Bentinck's sweeping reforms, the Penang Government was dissolved. The Straits Settlements were placed under the direct authority of Bengal, and the ranks of Governor and Resident Councillor were abolished; the unfortunate result being that the Charter of Justice became inoperative. Criminals lay untried in the crowded prisons of Singapore, and trade was completely disrupted when firms of less repute, having no law to fear, refused to pay their debts.

By 1828 Singapore's population had reached 15,834, exclusive of its "floating population", a term which classed together the military and convicts! The convicts had been transferred from Bencoolen when it was handed over to the Dutch in 1825,

and Singapore was now an established convict station, receiving from India hundreds of its worst transported criminals. Their long lines of attap sheds covered the ground lying between what are now Stamford Road and Bras Basah Road.

The military consisted of a battalion of the 29th Madras Native Infantry and a detachment of the Bengal Artillery. The band of the 29th played regularly on the Plain, while the Artillery at Fort Fullerton provided their own form of entertainment by firing salutes at the least excuse, a practice which was stopped because the concussion broke windows in the near-by godowns.

The growth of population gave encouragement to other forms of sport and entertainment. In 1829 a meeting had been held in Edward Boustead's house to start a billiard club. In 1831 the first public entertainment had been held, when Signor Masoni charmed music lovers with his violin. In 1833—the year in which the population reached 20,000—there was the first mention of theatricals, but the players received such a slating from the press that no more was heard of them for some years. For the outdoor sportsmen there was shooting in the "backwoods" where pigeon, deer, and pig were plentiful, and for the more venturesome, tiger. 1834 brought in the first of the New Year's Day regattas, which became an annual event.

It would be interesting to know which is mentioned more often in Singapore's history, tigers or Keppel. They both appeared in 1831 and both from the sea, the tigers swimming across the Johore Strait to begin their attacks on jungle travellers, while Lieutenant Henry Keppel who came fresh from the Dindings Expedition in H.M.S. *Magicienne* was to appear in a different ship almost every visit, possibly because he put so many of them on unknown rocks and reefs.

But the most notable entertainment of the time must surely have been that noted by George Windsor Earl. "The Sumatras," he wrote, "contribute greatly to the comfort of the inhabitants by clearing the atmosphere, and blowing musquitos (*sic*) far into the interior of the Malay Peninsula." A phenomena we would be delighted to witness today.

These and other events were now discussed in an Exchange Room opened in the Square by Armstrong & Co. in 1831. It was mainly intended for the use of captains and supercargoes, but the local people collected there to read its newspapers, so that it became a general meeting place. Those who happened to be there on Thursday, January 2, 1834, must have discussed the issue of the *Singapore Chronicle* for that day; there was important news in it.

First, Samuel George Bonham, the boy who had sold the newly-drained marshlands under Raffles' supervision, announced his appointment as Acting Governor. The announcement is a reminder that some at least of Lord Bentinck's plans had gone by the board, the title of Governor having been restored so that the law could be administered. We learn, too, that Bonham, still lisping, but now stately and handsome and as popular as ever, governed from Singapore. Singapore had so quickly outstripped the ports of Penang and Malacca that it was henceforward to be the seat of government in the Straits Settlements.

The merchants in the Exchange Room might be pardoned if they boasted a little of their achievement, but no doubt they passed quickly to another item of news which was even more important. On April 12, 1834, the Honourable Company's monopoly of the China trade was to cease. As the paper reported, the Company had been instructed by the British Government to "close their Commercial Business and sell their property not retained by Government."

Between January and May 1833, fifteen Indiamen had set out from the Thames for their last voyage to China. By November 1834 they would all be home again, and no more would their black hulls and yellow gunports be seen in Singapore.

What would this mean to the port? that was the question the merchants asked. Jubilantly they agreed with the Editor of the *Chronicle* who was quite certain that the new free-traders from Britain would be too impatient to make the long voyage up through the China Seas to Canton. They would turn about at the port where they could dispose of their Western manufactures and collect Eastern produce — a new era of prosperity was opening up for Singapore.

How many that day noticed a small paragraph that was pushed almost out of sight? The building of a road across the island had just begun, the Bukit Timah Road, which would one day continue northwards into Malaya, and would bring far more riches to Singapore than the dazzling prospect of an open China trade.

CHAPTER TWO

AS GOOD AS THEIR BOND

"Their word in those days was as good as their bond, and the consequence was confidence."
J. T. THOMSON, on the early merchants.

I. 1834 – 1857

The first chest of tea to arrive from China after the East India Company's monopoly ended in April, 1834, was hailed with great ceremony. The merchants of Singapore saw themselves handling the bulk of the China tea-trade, at great profit to themselves. Over 6,000 chests were brought down on the north-east monsoon by junks that season and transhipped to vessels sailing to the West.

It seemed, then, that the Editor of the *Singapore Chronicle* had been right. But he was not. Down, down went Singapore's trade. Export and import figures slumped from 16 million Spanish dollars in 1833–34 to 12 million in 1835–36. The free-

traders were *not* using Singapore as an exchange mart; they preferred to take the longer voyage to China for the sake of the extra profit they could make. The direct ships, running between China and Europe, used the Straits of Sunda and did not come near Singapore. Those which did call, before entering the Straits of Malacca on their way to India, were in a hurry to beat their competitors and did not stay long enough for profitable business.

Yet Singapore had no existence apart from trade. Its population had mounted during the years of prosperity to reach 26,329 in 1834, nearly 30,000 in 1836. Nearly all were immigrants who had come to make a fortune if they could, or if not, a better living than they could make in their own country.

As the population went on rising, the amount of work for them decreased. The time came when men could be hired for three or four dollars a month, and those who could find no work became vagrants, begging at street corners, or desperate men who defied the law.

And yet it was probably the abundance of cheap labour that brought about Singapore's boom in planting, particularly of spices. As late as 1832, planting and agriculture were of no importance on the island; during the years following 1834 they seemed about to rival trade.

The lure of spices had drawn Europeans to the Indies ever since the Portuguese had set out to sail round Africa. Singapore was the first island in the Indies to be permanently British, and Raffles had had such faith in its soil and climate, that he had sent enthusiastic reports of the spices soon to be grown there. It was mainly on his evidence that Foreign Secretary Canning, speaking in the House of Commons in 1824, prophesied that Singapore after six years would produce spices sufficient for the total requirements of Great Britain and her colonies.

John Crawfurd, the Scots Resident, had made a more cautious statement in 1824: both soil and climate were suitable for coconut, mango, mangosteen, durian, pineapple, and especially gambier and pepper; but, he warned, the soil was not suitable for growing cotton, sugar-cane, indigo, cacao, mulberry, tobacco, clove, and nutmeg. There was soon to be ample opportunity to test his words, for within a few years after 1834 every crop he mentioned was being grown on the island.

Already the town was closely surrounded by a belt of Chinese market gardens. There the Chinese in short trousers and jackets of coarse nankeen, their queues hanging beneath their straw-coloured bamboo hats, worked barefooted among their beans and cucumbers, among the potato tops that never blossomed, and the cabbages which they treated for ringtail.

Farther out from town were the Chinese gambier and pepper plantations. There was an ugliness about the process of growing: the fires for the boiling pans used up the jungle, and the soil was made barren by the gambier, which caused the planters to move on across the island, leaving coarse lallang to cover up the wasted clearings.

Of a different order were the new plantations which now appeared. These planters had no need to slave, bent-backed, for every cent; they were men of substance who planted lavishly and with an eye for the beauty they would enjoy out of office hours. And if one crop failed—as many did—they had the resources to turn to another. During the following years symmetrical avenues of plants, with their blossom and fruit, took shape, giving pleasure to anyone with an urge to wander beyond the town limits.

It seemed as if these men were determined to try every crop that had ever been grown by man. Jozé d'Almeida, Portuguese physician and merchant, introduced cotton, sugar, coffee, and coconuts; Joseph Balestier, the American consul, began his sugar plantation out towards Serangoon in the area that still bears his name; he used an elephant to draw the plough and built canals to carry the canes to a steam-driven mill and the finished product out to ships in the roads. Tan Kim Seng opened an extensive plantation; Ho Ah Kay, better known as

Whampoa, started his where the Tanglin Barracks are now, and Seah Eu Chin took land stretching out several miles from the upper end of River Valley Road, and tried tea and nutmegs.

There was such enthusiasm that anyone with the smallest spot of land adjoining his house took to planting spice trees, particularly nutmegs. If their commercial value was doubtful, they at least did away with many a dull corner; for the nutmeg tree, as Lady Raffles described it, was "perhaps the most beautiful in the world; the outside covering, or shell, is of rich cream colour, and resembles a peach; this bursts, and shows the dark nut, encircled and chequered with mace of the brightest crimson . . ."

One garden, at the corner of Orchard Road and what is still known as Scotts Road, now well within the city, belonged to Captain William Scott, Harbour Master and Postmaster. The silver hair of the gentle Captain Scott was to be seen on most mornings as he roamed among the "purple cocoa, the graceful betel-nut, a maze of rambutans, dukus, mangosteens and durians, beside sea-cotton, arrow-root, and many more."

These men and their gardens belong to an age that has passed almost beyond our comprehension. Its peace and leisure can scarcely be recaptured.

* * *

It is strange that planting and agriculture should have flourished so luxuriantly just at this time, in the years following 1834, for it was the most unlikely period in Singapore's early history for any form of progress. Some of the potential labour force had been absorbed into the plantations to work for an almost starvation wage. The number of men without any form of income was becoming serious.

Had they lacked *any* form of organisation, there must have been trouble. As it was they were highly organised, and in the worst possible way.

First mention of secret societies in Singapore was in 1831, but their reputation was already established in China. Formed originally with an ideal, the overthrow of the foreign Manchu dynasty, their members hunted down, persecuted, and liable to decapitation, they had degenerated by the time they reached the Straits into bodies concerned with "intrigue, assistance in petty feuds, combination to extort money and to interfere with the course of justice." The Chinese brought with them their contempt for the existing Government of China, and in the secret societies they saw their chance to express an equal contempt for the East India Company's Government of Singapore.

The officers of the administration had no conception of the power that lay behind the societies.

None of them spoke Chinese and few had any but second-hand knowledge of China, so they were quite ready to accept the idea, carefully implanted by the members, that secret societies were merely benevolent organisations. They even, unknowingly, encouraged them, appointing Chinese "Captains" and others in authority who were clandestine society members.

So the societies grew in power until they were a menace to law and order. In the town they recruited their strength from the newly-arrived immigrants, forced shopkeepers, traders, prostitutes, and others to give protection money, murdered their rivals, and prevented the police from finding the culprits. In the jungle they could roam unhindered. In 1831 it was said that one society had over a thousand men in the interior with their own headquarters in an armed fort. From their jungle hideouts they made sorties into town in bands of fifty to a hundred, armed with spears, clubs, and axes, their faces blackened, to ransack some previously reconnoitred house, European or Asian, and retreat to the jungle with their spoils.

Lawlessness was not confined to the island. The pirates were growing bolder every year. Sailing in squadrons of twenty or thirty prahus carrying heavy guns, they closed in contemptuously on the settlement which made so little attempt to

protect its trade. Government and people appealed to India for help, telling of the atrocities that were occurring daily, and of people now being attacked in the harbour itself as they went out to visit ships in the roads.

But the Supreme Government had lost interest in the Straits Settlements at the same time as the Company lost the monopoly to China in 1834. Look to your own affairs, they said in effect, you have been granted a Charter of Justice and a Recorder to sit in court, and you have a police force. But the Recorder spent a deal of his time arguing with the Governor and Resident Councillor who sat with him, the police force was so inefficient that it barely touched the fringe of crime, and when pirates were apprehended they had to be released because the court had not been given Admiralty Jurisdiction.

The merchants had other difficulties to contend with: American ships debarred from entering port because of a ridiculous law dating back to the American War; attempts by the Supreme Government to impose port duties; increasingly severe measures by the Dutch to ban British goods from their territories; the almost complete cessation of the tea trade, then came failures in the bazaar as the big merchant houses, trying to bolster up trade

at any price, gave so much credit that it got out of hand.

At that crucial time, those free-traders on whom the Singapore merchants had pinned such hopes in 1834 dealt the port the severest blow of all. At Canton they operated under the most humiliating conditions. Open conflict had been avoided in the days of the East India Company's monopoly by the diplomacy of the staid and stolid Committee of Supra Cargoes, but the new free-traders, brusque adventurers, came spoiling for a showdown. The situation was aggravated by the bellicose attitude of such British firms as Jardine, Matheson & Co., founded in 1832, whose Dr. William Jardine was known by the Chinese as "that iron-headed old rat". A clash was inevitable.

In May, 1840, the first men-of-war of the China expedition began to collect in Singapore for what was to be called the "Opium War". Tents covered the Esplanade, and Governor Bonham, young no longer but as hospitable as ever, kept open house for the officers of the invasion force.

With no knowledge of how their future would be affected, the people of Singapore watched the fleet depart. Early in 1841 the Honourable Company's *Enterprize* brought news to Singapore of the cession of Hong Kong Island to the British. From that time Hong Kong began to take from

Singapore most of its remaining China trade. Capital, too, so badly needed in Singapore, began to flow to the new port.

* * *

Although trade was deteriorating and the lawless elements were endangering life and property, there was a quiet background of orderly progress in which the more influential citizens began to emerge as a responsible body. The Agricultural and Horticultural Society, formed in 1836, appealed to Government for an extension of the twenty-year leases granted to Chinese cultivators. In the following year, 1837, the Singapore Chamber of Commerce was formed with a committee made up of British, Chinese, Arab, and Armenian representatives; they made clear their intention of upholding their own integrity by expelling two Chinese members who had adulterated four cases of opium before selling them to a Jewish merchant. By 1837 a library existed, but it was of little significance until, in 1845, a group of subscribers, who paid thirty Spanish dollars to become Proprietors, started off "The Singapore Library", which was one day to become Raffles National Library.

The Chinese meanwhile had turned to a more practical form of institution, "a hospital for the sick of all nations". There was no doubt that it

was needed, for the unchecked flow of immigrants into Singapore—there was no form of quarantine —brought a stream of sick, disease-carriers and vagrants. The poor could not afford doctors—though a Chinese doctor was paid at the rate of only ten cents—and while they wasted away in dark corners from cholera, small-pox, and leprosy, the decrepits, "miserable and disgusting objects", swarmed at the street corners, begging.

An attap shed put up by Government, which was allotted a portion of the pork-farm and called the Pauper Hospital, barely alleviated the position. In 1831 sixty occupants, lepers among them, were crowded into it. In 1837, by which time the shed had been replaced by a small brick-built building, there were 154 patients packed bunk to bunk on its mud floors from which dust and dirt arose to cover their cooking pots; over the open latrines at one end, a plank gallery was the choice location for the European Seamen's ward.

From 1837, when the Pork Tax was abolished, only the most severe cases could be admitted, and the vagrants were thrown once more into the streets. It was seven years later, in 1844, that Tan Tock Seng came forward, roused the Chinese community to a sense of their destitute countrymen's need, and himself gave a donation of 5,000 dollars towards the cost of a new pauper hospital.

The foundation stone of the Tan Tock Seng Hospital was laid on Pearl's Hill in 1844. When it was finally occupied in 1849 it was found that the engineers had forgotten to supply water, and the inmates had to wash in the puddles outside. However, as the result of Tan Tock Seng's further generosity, and that of his sons, the hospital began to take in a thousand paupers a year.

During this period two newspapers that we know today started, *The Free Press* in 1835, and *The Straits Times* in 1845, while the *Chronicle*, which had seen the settlement through its early days, closed down.

Nowhere was the steady development more evident than in sport. Fives was started in 1836 by Dr. Montgomerie and played by the river mouth where cannon balls lay in neat pyramids outside the Company's Ordnance Store. Cricket was played on the Esplanade, in front of the compound houses where the City Hall now stands. New Year's Day sports were inaugurated in 1839. The Sporting Club, started in 1842 "to encourage the importation and improvement of horses in the Colony . . .", held its first race meeting—for gentlemen riders only—on February 23 and 25, 1843; and from 1844 sales of horses from Sydney became a regular occurrence in "the flower garden by the godowns", as the Chinese were pleased to call Commercial Square.

Places of worship were increasing. The Chinese and Hindus were building temples. The oldest existing church, the Armenian Church in Hill Street, was built to the design of the ubiquitous Coleman in 1835; the foundation stone of the first St. Andrew's Church was laid in the same year; and the Roman Catholics had their own meeting place. The first synagogue, which gave its name to Synagogue Street, was built in the 1840's.

So in religion, sport, health, culture, commerce, and agriculture the more responsible part of Singapore's population had by 1850 emerged from the wing of the East India Company's Government. They were ready now to take on that civic responsibility by which alone the town could reach maturity.

* * *

Many of the troubles which had beset Singapore from 1834 onwards had been at least partly removed. In particular the intention of the Supreme Government to impose port duties had been squashed by the firm opposition of the merchants in 1836; failures in the bazaar had been met by an agreement—not to be kept for very long—to trade on a cash basis; and lack of banking facilities had been eased by the opening of the Union Bank in 1840 and the Oriental Bank in 1846.

In tackling the two main problems, lawlessness and piracy, the names of two men had emerged as champions. As J. T. Thomson wrote; "It was Congalton who swept the Malay waters of pirates; it was Dunman who first gave security to householders in Singapore by raising and training an efficient police force"; exaggerations, of course, but these two men stood out in their determination to bring peace on sea and land.

Thomas Dunman was appointed Deputy Superintendent of Police in 1843, his force two years later being two clerks, five European constables, six jemadars, eleven duffadars, and one hundred and six jemadars, eleven duffadars, and one hundred and read and write, his interest in them, his knowledge of their families and affairs, brought them solidly behind him when he went into the tough places, seeking out criminals as no man had done before.

The story of Captain Samuel Congalton and the H. C. Paddle Steamer *Diana* is an epic which deserves to be told separately. Buckley describes their first meeting with pirates: "Captain Congalton in the little steamer *Diana* went ahead, and the pirates in six large prahus, seeing the smoke, thought it was a sailing ship on fire, so they left the Chinese junk they were attacking, and bore down on the steamer, firing on her as she approached. To their horror, the vessel came close up *against the wind*,

and then suddenly stopped opposite each prahu, and poured in a destructive fire, turning and backing against the wind, stretching the pirates in numbers on the decks. . ."

Steam was the answer to piracy, including the occasions when it was forced from a hosepipe to send scalded pirates hopping out of range. But if it foretold the end of piracy, it also foretold the beginning of a new era in trade.

Steamships were no novelty in Singapore by 1850. The first steamer had arrived here in 1827; Lord Bentinck, when he visited Singapore in 1829, came in a steamer; eighteen steamers passed through to take part in the first China War of 1840; and by that time there were some fifty steam vessels employed in Indian and South-east Asian waters. By 1845 regular steam communication had been set up with Bengal and Batavia, and on August 4 that year the *Lady Mary Wood* arrived in Singapore, thus opening the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company's Far Eastern service, and bringing mails—carried by the overland route across Egypt —forty-one days out of London.

The people of Singapore began to see their port as the mail packet centre for the East. But the new steamships, independent of the monsoons, would not accommodate themselves to existing port facilities. Their captains were not content to wait in

the roads while passengers, coal, and supplies were carried in leisurely fashion over several miles of water; they demanded wharves standing in deep water where they could draw alongside.

Fortunately New Harbour lay ready, waiting to be developed. There the P. & O. Company and the Borneo Company were building wharves, and William Cloughton was beginning the first dry dock, while a new labour force began its existence, grimed men who ran up and down planks carrying baskets of coal to the waiting, urgent steamers.

Meanwhile the contest between trade and planting had been irrevocably decided. The spice plantations, for various reasons of disease, adverse markets, and even tigers, lay neglected, and the Chinese gambier planters, having exhausted the soil of the island, were moving over to the mainland, where the Temenggong welcomed them to his undeveloped territory of Johore.

In trade, then, Singapore's future was to lie; by the industry and enterprise of the merchants, imports and exports had risen from 12 million Spanish dollars in the slump year of 1835–36 to about 60 million in 1857. In that year, with the adverse conditions of the last quarter of a century behind them, conscious of a desire for partnership in government, the people of Singapore entered into ten years of political struggle.

II. 1857 – 1867

The usually charming and aristocratic Governor Butterworth was at bay. It was in 1846 and the occasion was a sitting of the Court of Judicature in Singapore at which the Grand Jury was exercising its prerogative of stating the grievances of the people. Butterworth's temper mounted as the list grew longer. He had heard it all before; lack of Government interest in education, inadequacy or inefficiency of the police force, bridges falling down, drains overflowing. Colonel Butterworth's seat on the Bench, on the right of the Recorder, had always prevented him from answering. But this was too much. In a sudden burst of anger he said he had done all he could for the Settlement and that responsibility for inadequacies must rest with the Supreme Government in India.

That there was some truth in the Governor's words will become apparent, but the point of interest here is that he had been unable to silence the Grand Jury. The people of the settlement had clung tenaciously to their right to express their grievances in this way, ever since the first Grand Jury had been called in 1829.

They had another way of making their wishes known. To meet an emergency, say one of the many attempts by the Supreme Government to im-

pose port duties, taxes, or an unsuitable currency, they could call on the Sheriff to convene a public meeting; here they would thrash the matter out and usually ended by petitioning King and Parliament to support them against the Company.

But the voice of the people in 1857, though loud and often indignant, was inadequate. With it they could sometimes redress wrongs, but they could not influence future policy or legislation. In addressing the Supreme Government, they felt as if they were speaking to a preoccupied man with his back turned.

Singapore had been under the direct control of the Supreme Government since 1851, when the Straits Settlements had been transferred from the Presidency of Bengal. The East India Company having lost its former identity as a trading corporation, the Supreme Government was now concerned with the administration of some two million square miles of the peninsula of India.

The Indian Government had become a bureaucratic warren of innumerable divided and sub-divided departments, through which correspondence from its scattered cantonments must pass. And if some question needed the personal attention of the Governor-General, and he was away in the hills, what matter a delay of a year or two? During the military and administrative campaigns of recent years,

the Governors-General had lost personal contact with their minor Governors. As a consequence, the laws they enacted and enforced, good though they may have been in principle, made no allowance for the differing circumstances in cantonments and settlements lying as far apart as St. Helena in the Atlantic and Singapore in the East Indies.

The Governors appointed to the Straits Settlements had no enviable task. Of the three Governors since 1834, Bonham, Butterworth, and now Blundell, each was in his own way honestly desirous of doing his best for his territory. But the territory did not lend itself to a cohesive administration. Penang and Malacca were separate, jealous settlements, which would not be integrated; and more difficult still to administer, because it was the most potent, the most demanding, and quite unimpressed with gubernatorial dignity, was the thriving, boisterous port of Singapore with its diverse races, its Europeans, Armenians, Jews, Arabs, Malays, Chinese, Indians, Javanese, Balinese, Kaffirs, Parsees, Siamese, Boyanese, Bugis, Cochin-Chinese, and the innumerable mixtures which lay in between them.

Try as they would, the Governors could not force India's universal laws on these people; they would not fit into the Indian pattern. Bonham tempered the wind with champagne and dinner parties, Butterworth swore when he could not charm,

and Blundell dithered this way and that. But whatever they did they could not silence the people. If they let things slide the Grand Jury criticised them with impunity in open court; if they tried to enforce India's unpopular laws a Sheriff's meeting petitioned Parliament above their heads. It was their misfortune that, unlike their colleagues in India, they had no chain of Civil Servants behind which they could take shelter.

There was no Civil Service in the Straits. The patronage of the Straits Settlements was in the hands of the Governors, but they had to make do with the material available, army officers who happened to be on the spot, the few boys who reached them from Haileybury, the Company's training College in England, the uncovenanted servants, locally enlisted employees who, despite men like Congalton and Dunman, were looked down on by the regular service.

The few covenanted servants were unable to satisfy the needs of a growing, complex population, for they were seriously overworked. An example was the Resident Councillor in Singapore in 1856, who was Treasurer and Auditor of his own accounts, Accountant-General of the Court, Superintendent of Lands, Registrar of Shipping, Registrar of Imports and Exports, Vendor of Stamps, and President of the Municipal Commissioners.

That level — Municipal Commissioners — was the only point at which Government and people really met. By an Act of 1856 a Municipal Council had been established, but it could hardly be called a success from a Government point of view. In its first full year's accounts it showed a revenue of $56,688.72 and an expenditure of $62,799.26.

* * *

"We went," wrote W. H. Read of a visit to Government House in 1845, "on a deputation to Colonel Butterworth about a bridge. On leaving, the Colonel called me back and said, 'You will never have that bridge.' 'Sir,' I said, 'I am sorry to differ from you; we will have it.' And so we did."

In those few delightful words one of the people of his day expresses his own, and his fellow citizen's attitude to Government. They were very sure of themselves, these independent people.

The European merchants were usually the mouthpiece, but they could only speak with such assurance because they knew that they had the mass of the orderly citizens behind them; the big families of the d'Almeidas and Cranes, sprung from the pioneer settlers; Whampoa whose gardens were a delight to visitors and who was himself the voice of thousands; and Seah Eu Chin, who had a scholarly

knowledge of his countrymen and was one day to see his sons become influential men in the settlement.

The Chinese were deepening their stake in the port. The Taiping Rebellion of 1850 and the counter measures of the tottering Manchu dynasty sent men fleeing to Singapore who had no thought of returning to their homeland; and no more certain sign of their permanence could there have been than the arrival in 1852 of the first Chinese women, ready to share this new home with their menfolk. And from 1853 the Chinese could, and did, become naturalised.

The English still went back to England, but they were not lost to the settlement. Men like Edward Boustead, Alexander and James Guthrie, the Spottiswoodes, the Frasers, and others, were as ready to stand up to the East India Company's Court of Directors in London as they had been to confront the Company's Governor in Singapore.

The appearance of a petition originated by a Sheriff's meeting in Singapore was the sign for the ex-Singapore merchants to band together. They would watch carefully over its progress, and bombard Parliament and its ministers at the least sign of tardiness.

Singapore had other friends in London, too, apart from the retired merchants. Among them were John Crawfurd, the early Resident, Raja

PLATE 1

Sir Stamford Raffles (statue by Thomas Woolner, R.A.) gazes across the bustle of 20th-century Singapore towards the spot on the Singapore River where he first landed.

PLATE 2

Col. Orfeur Cavanagh, Governor of the Straits Settlements. 1861 – 7.

PLATE 3

Ho Ah Kay, better known as Whampoa, Singapore's first Chinese Legislative Councillor.

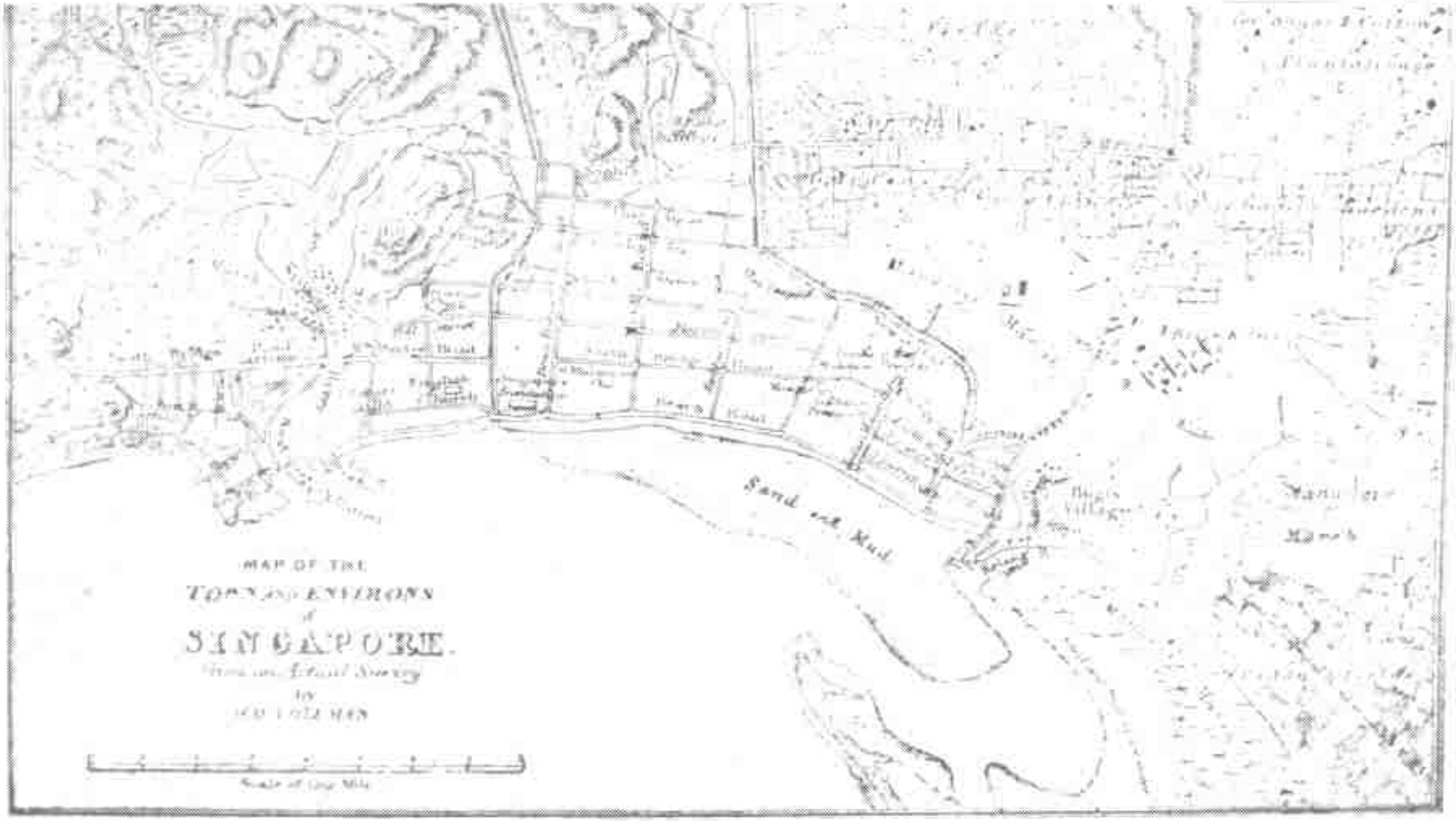

PLATE 4 Singapore Town Area (1835 – 8) (from a map by G. D. Coleman).

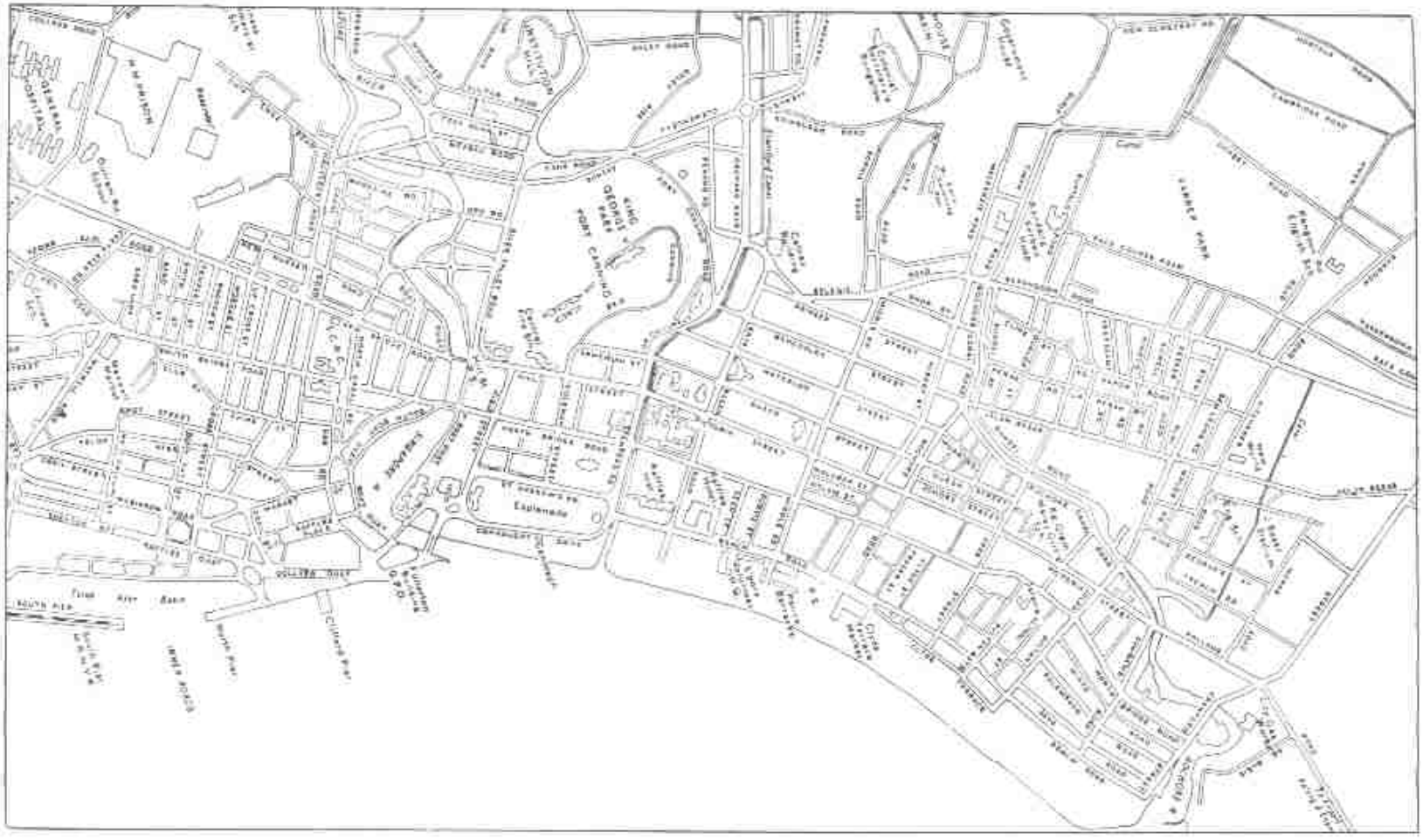

PLATE 5 Singapore City Area (1959).

PLATE 6

Mr. David Marshall, Singapore's first Chief Minister (6 April 1955 – 7 June 1956), addresses a public meeting outside the Assembly House.

PLATE 7

Mr. Lim Yew Hock, Singapore's second Chief Minister (8 June 1956 – 1 June 1959).

Mr. Lee Kuan Yew,
Singapore's first
Prime Minister.

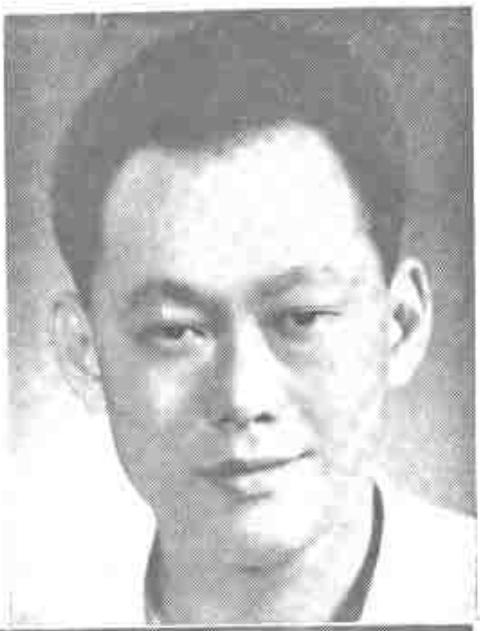

PLATE 8

The People's Action Party Government meets the people of Singapore. Mr. Lee Kuan Yew addressing the crowd from the steps of the City Hall.

Brooke of Sarawak, and Keppel who popped in and out of London, Singapore, and Hong Kong, still searching for shoals on which to wreck his latest man-of-war and steadily rising in rank.

The individuality that was stamped on the people of Singapore was shown in no better way than by their public-spirited acts. In 1851 Syed Ali Al-Junied, the Arab merchant, concerned at the suffering of the poor who were unable to obtain good drinking water, sank four wells at his own expense. In 1857 Tan Kim Seng offered 13,000 dollars towards bringing water into town from inland reservoirs. The people had formed the Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps after riots in 1854, to "seek not the glory of the battlefield . . . (but) to assist in protecting the lives and property of the public." They gave freely to educational and welfare institutions which received little but goodwill from Government. But the act which, probably above all others, marked a sense of their growing civic pride, was the building of the first Town Hall; its foundation stone had been laid in 1855.

No, these people were not to be fitted into the Indian pattern. Why should they? Their settlement stood alone and self-sufficient, halfway between Europe and China. It was fast becoming an international centre for mail distribution and for the new steam trade, and there were signs that Britain's

Eastern navy might soon be based on it. Also the island lay at the geographical centre of empire and foreign developments: the Australian continent was emerging; the French were concentrating on Cochin-China; Japan, throwing off its isolation after Commander Perry's expedition, had been open to trade since 1854.

It was an exciting new world, and the merchants of Singapore were quick to react to it. Indian control had become irksome.

By 1857 conversation in the clubs, in the Assembly Rooms, at John Little's, and *The Straits Times* Reading Room in the Square, centred round the word "Transfer". It needed now only a spark to turn the talk into a demand for the transfer of Singapore from the Honourable Company's Government of India to the care of the Colonial Office of the British Government.

"In May . . ." wrote Buckley, "rumours began to arise, in a vague uneasy way, about threatenings of coming trouble in India . . . On Sunday, 31st May, the opium steamer *Fiery Cross*, Captain Grant, arrived from Calcutta, and the first news reached Singapore of the Mutiny."

This was the spark, ignited in India itself, which was to flare out into a demand for Transfer.

* * *

James Bruce, eighth Earl of Elgin, British Com-

missioner and Plenipotentiary in China, strode up and down the verandah of the old Government House built by Raffles on the hill overlooking the town. He is said to have walked there all night, and it could be so, for he had a most difficult decision to make. Should he continue with his expedition to China, or should he intercept the transports, following him from the Cape of Good Hope, and divert them to India? How eagerly he must have scanned the bay into which he had sailed that day, hoping for another ship with news of the Mutiny, whether it was spreading or was under control.

At daylight he despatched a steamer to wait in the Straits of Sunda. As the transports came into sight they read the signals and turned northwards towards Bengal. Elgin's forces were in time to help the loyal forces put an end to the Mutiny.

But it was not the end as far as the Calcutta merchants were concerned. The Mutiny had made them nervous. The mild measures of the Governor-General, whom they now named "Clemency" Canning, angered them. They set up a demand that the Government of India be taken away from the East India Company and placed under the Crown.

Quick to seize an opportunity which fitted in so well with their own ideas, the Singapore merchants sent in the customary requisition to the Sheriff for a meeting. On September 15, 1857, in the

News Room in Commercial Square, the European inhabitants expressed their support for the Calcutta merchants. They went further.

As speaker after speaker took the floor, all the accumulated dissatisfaction with Indian control came into the open. It was time, they demanded, for a clean break with India, time for them to have a voice in their own administrative affairs; and since this could only happen if Singapore were a Crown Colony, then a Crown Colony Singapore must become.

Their petitions, addressed to the Houses of Parliament, went their way and were presented in March 1858. The strength of Singapore's friends in London ensured that the speakers were worthy of the cause.

Earl Granville presented the petition in the House of Lords, and Lord Bury, Keppel's nephew, in the Commons. It was a phrase in Lord Bury's speech that touched the heart of the matter: "Their population," he said of the Straits Settlements, "was not composed of conquered races but of bodies of men who had been attracted there by the security afforded by British rule . . ." It was immediately evident that Parliament favoured the petition.

There was jubilation in Singapore. The petitioners patted themselves on the back and thought how easy it all was. They heard the reading of Queen Victoria's Proclamation of September 1, in

which Her Majesty took over the direct government of India, as if it were something which hardly concerned them. They turned with a new pride to look at a certain change that was taking place in the settlement, unaware that this very change was to obstruct the machinery of Transfer and turn it into a ten-year struggle.

In January of 1858 a Colonel Collyer of the Madras Engineers had arrived to report on plans for the fortification of Singapore. In August he was appointed Chief Engineer, all the convicts were placed at his disposal and work began. Fort Fullerton at the mouth of the river was to be rebuilt to three times its size and its armament increased accordingly. Batteries, redoubts, barracks, and magazines began to appear on the hilltops. But the biggest change of all totally altered the appearance of Government Hill; this being the last time it can be so called, for the extensive fortifications being built on it were to be named Fort Canning.

With the hurrying to and fro of uniformed engineers, the loads of cut stone brought in from Pulau Ubin, the rising walls of the forts, and the appearance of sixty-eight-pounder garrison artillery, Singapore lost its peaceful air and entered a period of martial clamour. In March 1858 the Municipal Commissioners, not to be outdone, renamed many of the streets, bringing in the names of Mutiny

heroes, which has resulted in Outram, Neil, and Havelock Roads. As if it were part of the military scheme, the resignation of the civilian Governor Blundell was accepted, and Colonel Orfeur Cavanagh, former Town Major of Calcutta, arrived in August to take his place.

Military man though he was, his kind old face with its wisps of grey sideboards and the rimless spectacles set squarely on a pug nose, reveal another side to his nature. With his wooden leg, legacy of an old campaign, his love of military parades, when he sat astride his white charger, and the bag of copper coins he carried when he visited the schools, he went straight to the heart of the people.

It was in keeping with the times that he had to find a new official home; the old Government House went to make way for Fort Canning.

In November, 1859, Governor-General Canning considered the military aspect of Singapore while writing a minute to support the Transfer. His words were to have an ominous meaning in the years to come: "It is certain that the Settlements, if threatened by external danger, must be protected by the naval strength of Great Britain." To give point to his words, a coal depot for the Royal Navy was being built on Pulau Brani.

Defence preparations continued. In 1860 the Volunteers, considered the first official body of vol-

unteers to be raised in the British Empire, and certainly the first enrolled in India, were given the motto *Primus in Indis*. The regular garrison was enlarged and included the 40th Madras Native Infantry, the 11th Punjab Infantry, and a detachment of European Artillery. The Tanglin Barracks, attap huts for European infantry, rose out of deserted plantations, and as soon as Fort Canning was habitable, the European Artillerymen moved there from Pearl's Hill. It was then discovered that Pearl's Hill, being higher, blocked the field of fire; the Engineers promptly lopped the top off.

It was all very romantic and colourful; young military officers galloped their ponies round the Esplanade and bowed to the ladies on their evening stroll; military bands played twice a week on the Padang. Then, quite suddenly, the people of Singapore learnt that they were to pay for all these barracks, guns and men. The phrase "Military Contribution" entered the Singapore vocabulary. When the startled objections of the merchants were received in London, any further action on the Transfer was postponed while the India Office, the War Office, the Treasury, and the Colonial Office argued about who should pay and how much.

Meanwhile, the ordinary life of the settlement went on. In 1859 the first dry dock, to be known for years as "Cloughton's Mud Hole", was opened:

the first telegraph was laid, between Singapore and Batavia, but after greetings had passed between the merchants of both ports, it broke down and never operated again; a new Agri-Horticultural Society was formed and given the ground at Tanglin which has become the present magnificent Botanic Gardens; the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China opened; and the Cricket Club started on the Padang. In 1860 the census showed a population of over 80,000, and for the first time more than half were Chinese; and in that year Lloyd's surveyors were appointed in the port. 1861 saw the beginning of Robinson & Co., whose "Miss Foweraker of London" invited the ladies to showrooms "replete with a carefully selected stock of mantles, ribbons, bonnets, Lyons' and Spitalfield's silks, Organdie and Chantilly muslins, barege robes, balzerine ditto, opera cloaks. . ."; and some of these were doubtless displayed in the new St. Andrew's Church consecrated in the same year; Whampoa started an ice-factory which failed, surprisingly through lack of custom; and the Town Hall was completed to give accommodation to the solemnities of the Municipal Commissioners and the frivolity of the *Corps Dramatique*. The first Messageries Imperiales steamers came in 1862, a reminder that the French had occupied Saigon three years before; this was a complication to Singapore's trade which was probably dis-

cussed in the newly-established Singapore Club. In 1863 the Adelphi Hotel opened, the police went into uniform, and the famous American raider *Alabama* came in to refit; in that year too Hammer & Co. began to supply the shipping with water as they do now, and the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company was established, pioneer of the vast interlocking system of wharves and docks that today makes Singapore one of the great ports of the world.

So the list goes on; more banks, gas used for the first time, and Walter Mansfield is one of the first to give his address as Collyer Quay when it was finished in 1864. By 1865, 1,440 feet of wharves had been built at New Harbour.

Early in 1867, Governor Cavanagh held one more of his beloved parades, and then, on March 15, tapped his way on his wooden leg down the length of Johnston's Pier. He was the last of the Indian Governors. The great day was approaching.

Shortly after noon on April 1, the Hon'bles W. H. Read, Thomas Scott (of Guthrie & Co.) and Dr. Robert Little, citizens of Singapore and the first Unofficial Members of the Legislative Council — created only a few minutes before — sat down at a table in the Town Hall with the first of the Queen's Governors, Harry St. George Ord. The weary, disappointing struggle over the years was ended; the Order in Council constituting the Straits Settle-

ments a Colony of the Crown had been read, the gun salutes had died away, and the people filling the streets outside were dispersing. The Members of Council were about to pass the opening Acts of the new regime.

And in case there might be any doubts of the intention of the Unofficials really to represent the people, it might be as well to quote a departing Recorder who proposed the health of W. H. Read in 1866: "I shall not venture nor attempt to enumerate all the public services Mr. Read has rendered. But whether it be free trade or freemasonry; gasworks or gambling farm; a secret society which has just started up or a grand jury presentment to put it down; a screw-pile pier or railway; patent slips and docks; and lastly, but by no means least, the total and absolute transfer of the entire Straits Settlements from the cold embraces of poor old John Company (now, alas, no more!) to the fostering care of a Colonial Secretary . . ."

The Recorder's speech brings Singapore's history up to date. Now, in 1867, the people of Singapore were conscious of having a voice in Council. It only remains to be seen how well they were able to use it.

Chapter Three

THE RACE FOR LIVELIHOOD

> "Things now move a great deal too fast, and the race for livelihood is too keen . . ."
>
> *The Free Press*, 1885

I. 1867 – 1875

Harry St. George Ord was on trial. The merchants would judge him by his ability to remove obstacles from trade. They waited, wondering how he would deal with the problem of Malaya.

Sir Stamford Raffles had seen Singapore not only as an outlet for trade but as a point of contact with the Malays of the surrounding countries, particularly those of the peninsula. But after the departure of Raffles, Farquhar, and Crawfurd, any contact there had been was lost. Malaya became a dark continent, out of which stories came of gathering strife and bloodshed.

Johore had been partly opened up by the Chinese gambier planters. Beyond Johore lay an untapped market, a land where rice could be grown

and tin could be mined, and where farmers and miners needed the supplies which Singapore had in stock.

Before trade could begin, however, the Singapore merchants needed the support of the Administration. But the Governors of the Straits Settlements, acting under strict instructions from India, could give no encouragement. Now, under the new Government, the merchants expected better times, and they advised Ord how to bring them about. This was the worst thing they could have done.

Colonel Harry St. George Ord did not care for advice. Short and dumpy, his grey moustache drooping, seen habitually in his uniform of the Royal Engineers with a broad scarlet stripe down the leg, he had a good opinion of himself, and was most extravagant in his idea of what was due to him as Governor.

As to advice, he would have none of it. The Unofficial Members of his Legislative Council, on whom such great hopes had been placed, became an articulate but impotent body in constant opposition. Whampoa, who had been added to their number, overcame sleepiness during the long speeches by dabbing his nostrils with Chinese peppermint.

When the merchants complained of their difficulties in obtaining money for goods advanced to Malays and Chinese in the disturbed areas, they re-

ceived the answer that has gone down in Singapore's history: "If persons, knowing the risks they run, owing to the disturbed state of those countries, choose to hazard their lives and properties for the sake of the large profits which accompany successful trading, they must not expect the British Government to be answerable if their speculation proves unsuccessful."

Apart from a few trips up the coast in his Government yacht, Ord's only contact with Malaya was through Temenggong Abubakar of Johore, grandson of Raffles' friend Abdur Rahman. Abubakar had become prosperous through the energy of the Chinese cultivators in Johore, used his wealth to live in Singapore in affluent style with racehorses and carriages and a palace at Tyersall, and was content to take Ord's advice on the running of his territory. The family of the Sultan of Johore having degenerated into obscurity, Ord gained for Abubakar, in 1868, the recognition he desired as "Maharajah".

Knowing only that some mounting but inexplicable struggle was going on between the ruling families of Malaya, determined to avoid entanglement, Ord continued to ignore the pleas of the merchants. He concerned himself with internal affairs, particularly with strengthening the Colony's financial position. During this part of his administration the Singapore, Malacca, Riouw, and Johore opium

farms were amalgamated through a syndicate which established a uniform price for chandu. In 1871 King Chulalongkorn of Siam, travelling abroad from his country for the first time, visited Singapore. In the same year the first Japanese was shown on the census.

Also in the same year of 1871, Harry Ord went to England on leave. So unpopular had he become that the Press, commenting on his "restless, turbulent four years", hoped that he would not return. But he did, in 1872.

That he could go one year and return, as a matter of course, the next, is an indication that there had been a revolution in travel between Singapore and London. In 1867 the record passage for a ship had been 116 days; in 1870, Professor C. Northcote Parkinson states in *A Short History of Malaya*, "the *Shantung* steamed from Glasgow to Singapore in 42 days, stops included."

* * *

De Lesseps had begun work on the Suez Canal in 1859. On November 17, 1869, sixty-eight vessels, headed by the *Aigle*, with the French Empress Eugenie on board, passed from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea in procession, thus declaring the Canal formally open. In 1870 over 500 vessels passed through the Canal, but it was not until 1872 that traffic increased sufficiently to ensure its success.

Ships voyaging between Europe and the China Seas now gave up the route by the Cape of Good Hope and the Straits of Sunda and reverted to the age-old spice route; this took them through the Indian Ocean, the Straits of Malacca, and into Singapore's New Harbour.

Even by 1870 there had been mention of insufficient wharfage to deal with the traffic, and of godowns congested with merchandise. 61,831 tons of coal and 82,970 tons of general cargo were passing through New Harbour, being landed or shipped over the wharves at 25 cents a ton, treasure at 2½ per cent., opium at 10 cents a chest, and horses and cattle at 25 cents each.

Now to add to the press of traffic came the ships on the Suez route. In 1872 the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company paid its first dividend. Cloughton's "old mud hole", superseded by the Tanjong Pagar Company's Victoria Dock which had been opened in 1868, was used for storing cable for the new telegraph lines now connecting Singapore with other parts of the world. The Singapore Railway Company had been promoted to lay down a line between New Harbour and the town, and rails were being laid behind the wharves. The dock companies built feverishly, wharves expanded along the shore, more dry docks were planned, and still the ships came steaming in, impatient at the least delay.

Parallel with the increase in the ocean-going ships was the growth of coastal trade. Buyers and Robb were building steamers at Telok Ayer, with engines made by Riley Hargreaves (forerunners of United Engineers), for the Chinese merchants who, boldly seizing on a new and profitable venture, were becoming the first local steamship owners.

They were ready to take those risks which had brought them success, their captains were eager to seek out the coastal trade of the archipelago and peninsula, but they were frustrated by Governor Ord's refusal to give protection in Malaya. The situation had been bad enough before he went on leave. During his absence it took on a different aspect.

* * *

In the Selangor River, Chinese and Malay pirates attacked a British trading ship. Few people in the Colony had been unduly worried while the Malays of the peninsula had busied themselves killing each other, but this was another matter.

H.M.S. *Rinaldo*, carrying the Senior Naval Officer, steamed northwards, entered the Selangor River, and demanded the persons of the pirates. In the clash which followed, Malay forts at the mouth of the river opened fire. The *Rinaldo* destroyed them.

By the time Ord came back, the States of Selangor and Perak were raiding far beyond the bounds of their territories and seriously affecting the trade of the Colony. The situation could no longer be ignored. Ord went up and down the coast in his yacht, trying to patch up a peace. But he was not the man to unravel the intricacies of Malayan conflict.

Governor Ord has been blamed ever since for his failure to take decisive action. But it must not be forgotten that he was acting in accordance with his instructions from the Colonial Office. Neither can it be forgotten that 1873, the last year of his administration, was an extremely prosperous one for Singapore. Not only had Ord carried out his intention of putting the Colony's finances on a proper footing, but he had built up a surplus, which succeeding Governors were to exhaust in reversing his policy.

But well-ordered finances alone never brought any man popularity during his term of office. The last words from the Press about him were that his "inordinate greed of power and personal vanity (had) kept the community in a perpetual state of ferment." In October, 1873, Sir Harry St. George Ord left the Colony.

On November 4, 1873, there arrived in Singapore a man whose rank and titles suggested that he

meant business: Major-General Sir Andrew Clarke, R.E., K.C.M.G., Commander-in-Chief and Vice-Admiral of the Straits Settlement. He had need of all the authority he possessed to carry out the startling change of policy dictated to him by the Colonial Office. On their behalf, he was to "employ such influence as they possess with the Native Princes to rescue, if possible, those fertile and productive countries from the ruin which must befall them if the present disorders continue unchecked."

Governor Clarke lost no time. Along the drive to Singapore's newly-completed Government House (its gardens which are so beautiful today just beginning to take shape), hurried the men he called on for advice.

The knowledge of these men went far beyond the shores of the island, their sympathy with a suffering people made them remarkable in their age: William Pickering, in charge of Chinese Affairs, first European in the Administration to be able to speak to the Chinese in their own language; James W. Birch, Colonial Secretary, eager for an active life in the unknown lands of Malaya; Thomas Braddell, the Attorney-General, most learned Malay scholar of his day. They and a few others were chosen by Governor Clarke to help him with his mission; among them was a newly arrived colonial cadet, Frank Swettenham.

It was Pickering who went into Malaya to arrange a meeting between the Governor and the Malay chiefs and Chinese headmen of Perak. When he had done so, Clarke, with a retinue, sailed into the Perak River. With patience and charm he persuaded the chiefs to sign the Treaty of Pangkor on January 20, 1874, by which the Sultan of Perak agreed to "receive and provide a suitable residence for a British Officer to be called a Resident."

British entry into Malaya had begun—as Raffles, over half a century before, had wished it to begin.

* * *

As if it were preparing for its coming of age, Singapore, since the Transfer of 1867, had been shedding a great deal of its infant past. Much of the old familiar life of the Colony was passing away.

That military fervour which had clung to Singapore during the struggle for the Transfer had gone. The Madras Native Infantry had marched out, and female hearts had ceased to flutter around the Sepoy Lines, now occupied by the less romantic policemen. The first Scots regiment to be stationed here, the 80th of Foot, arrived in 1872 with kilts swinging and "still wearing the Scotch cap and heavy red tunic."

Colonel Collyer's forts, capping the near-by hills, were now a subject for derision. It was gen-

erally agreed that they stood no chance of withstanding a serious attack. The merchants had raised such strong objections to Fort Fullerton, on the grounds that it would draw enemy fire on to the most richly-stored warehouses of the business quarter, that it had been mostly demolished by 1873. In its place was rising the Post Office. Even the Volunteer Rifle Corps—its motto changed to *In Oriente Primus*—had begun to suffer from the reaction; the addition of a half-battery of field-artillery failed to revive interest, and its guns were handed over to Perak in 1868.

There were no more convicts; they had been transferred to the Andaman Islands in 1873. The ladies no longer thrilled to the sight of a manservant with "MURDER" branded on his forehead bringing them an early morning cup of tea, and the Public Works Department, established in 1872, had to look elsewhere for its labour.

Docks and harbour, too, had changed. There is no further mention of dock installations being guarded by night watchmen armed with cutlasses and rattles. The marshlands and plantations between New Harbour and Town were disappearing as the gap was closed by godowns. By 1875 a horse-drawn omnibus service ran over the route at fifteen-minute intervals, and there was a refreshment room at the harbour end.

In the Singapore River an often criticised, yet much loved practice had come to an end with the building of Cavanagh Bridge in 1869: there was no further need for the ferry sampans, dangerously propelled by grinning boys who were liable to give a ducking to anyone they disliked. Further out in the bay, the lazaretto had been built on St. John's Island—just too late for the cholera epidemic of 1873—with a cemetery suitably close on Peak Island: and the people of Singapore were no longer offended by the sight of the dead and dying in the odd dark corners of the town.

The Recorder had gone out with the Transfer, his title being changed to Chief Justice. At the same time the old public battles between Governor and presiding judge were brought to an end; the judicature had been separated from the executive and the Governor no longer sat on the bench. But at least the Governor was freed from one source of annoyance: in 1873, after an unsuccessful fight by the people, their time-honoured channel for grievances, the Grand Jury, was abolished.

Even crime was said to be less exciting. Night prowlers from the jungle disapproved of the streets being lit by gas, and pitched battles were a thing of the past. Piracy, except for the sudden upsurge off the Malayan coasts, almost died out between 1855 and 1875.

There were a number of lesser changes. The fearsome sight of liverish, yellow-skinned European civilians from Bengal was no longer common, since from 1859 Singapore was no longer considered a health resort. From the time of the Transfer the many varied, and often spurious, coins dropped out of reckoning; though some ingenuity was still required to recognise the Hong Kong dollar and the silver dollars of Spain, Mexico, Peru, and Bolivia which became legal tender. The proprietors no longer owned the Singapore Library, having handed it over to Government in 1874; its name had been changed to the Raffles Library and Museum, and there had been revolution within its constitution, for "carefully selected novels" were now included on its shelves.

There is a sense of loss among the people whose names have come down to us. Whampoa, after his many years as the best-known and most hospitable Chinese in the Colony, is old, withdrawn from business, and pottering about in the garden which he still loves to display. Seah Eu Chin had retired from active business in 1864, when he was sixty, and spends his time in retirement, poring over volumes of Chinese literature. Tan Kim Seng, who gave that large sum of money towards Singapore's water supply, had died in 1864, aged 59. Syed Ali bin Mohammed Al-Junied, who built the wells to give

water to the poor, had died in 1858. Dr. d'Almeida, pioneer planter, had died in 1850, but his nineteen or twenty children — apparently he was not quite sure — were now forming their own large families. Thomas Dunman, leaving the police in 1871, has turned from criminals to coconut palms; and Congalton, the pirate hunter, in active service right up to the last, had died in 1870.

The next generation takes up the story in a life which seems to have lost much of its colour and adventure, to be almost prosaically dull. Yet in this year of 1875, Henry Wickham is in Brazil, on the other side of the world, surreptitiously collecting the seeds of the rubber tree which next year he will take home to London's Kew Gardens, there to be nurtured before being sent on to Singapore. And on the 2nd day of November, in the village of Pasir Salak in Malaya, an armed mob, shouting "Amok! Amok!", rushes to the bathhouse by the river. In a moment their spears are thrust through the bamboo shelter into the white body of the Resident, James W. Birch. His murder means that Britain must either withdraw from Malaya or enforce peace with strength. And Singapore is vitally concerned in the issue.

II. 1875 – 1895

Following the murder of Birch in 1875, Britain made a show of strength that was never again needed.

Twenty thousand troops, collected hurriedly from India and Hong Kong by means of the new telegraph service, entered Malaya and put down disorder. From then onwards the Residential system, guided as well as difficult communications would allow from Government headquarters in Singapore, grew in strength and influence until the huge potential wealth of the country was released.

Under the new conditions which assured the safety of their persons and property, thousands of Chinese hurried in to the mines. Tin was carried down the rivers without interference to the coast where steamers waited for it. Later the slow river traffic was supplanted by railways, and on either side of them coffee plantations appeared. Year after year, the rails moved closer to Singapore, the storehouse which supplied Malaya's needs and collected her exports.

The pendulum of trade was swinging in favour of Singapore. The swing was too late for the old generation, retreating to its books and gardens; but the young men saw it gathering speed, bringing with it boundless opportunity.

Into the roads came the coastal traffic, tramp steamers laden with the produce of Malaya and the archipelago. They unloaded into lighters which then pulled into the river to Boat Quay or crossed Telok Ayer Bay to New Harbour.

There, packed bow to stern were the ocean-going cargo ships and their more aristocratic sisters the mail and passenger liners from all parts of the world. Among them were the crack steamers of the Messageries Imperiales (biggest and most comfortable on the Eastern run), the German mail steamers which had a post office on board and fired a mail gun on arrival, those of the Nippon Yusen Kaisha, subsidised by the Japanese Government, and all these apart from the, by-this-time almost commonplace, P. & O. mail ships, by whose arrival and departure their agent could set his watch.

To deal with this traffic there were, by 1878, 2,450 men employed daily by the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company, and they worked not only by day but under the glare of electric lights at night. The Victoria Dock having been found inadequate, the Albert Dock was opened in 1879. Two years later came the first suggestion of dredging out the "lagoon" behind the wharves, a suggestion that was to grow one day into that huge undertaking, the Empire Dock.

The Tanjong Pagar Company was not alone in New Harbour. The older New Harbour Dock Company still competed, though it was becoming less important, while the Borneo Company and the P. & O. Company had their own wharves.

All the passengers who disembarked, nearly all the mail, and about 85 per cent. of the cargo unloaded in New Harbour, were destined for the town. Descriptions by two writers show how the scene changed. "For the first stage out from New Harbour the road is built through a muddy and dismal mangrove swamp . . . and weather-beaten Malay houses standing on posts over the soft and slimy mud, or perhaps over a thin sheet of murky water": so wrote Mr. Hornaday, an American traveller who saw it in 1877. In 1888 Mrs. Caddy, also on a visit, wrote of a tramway "which is laid down round the level coast road from the principal steam wharves to the further end of the town".

Not to be outdone by private enterprise, Government had put into operation the bold scheme whereby millions of tons of earth were moved from the surrounding hills and used to build the present Anson and Robinson Roads across Telok Ayer Bay. The bay, too, was gradually reclaimed, adding eighteen acres of valuable ground to the commercial part of the town, forcing shipbuilders to move or be left high and dry, and completely changing the appearance of Singapore from the sea.

Steam-driven trams, the private venture of the Singapore Tramway Company, ran over two sectors, one from New Harbour to Collyer Quay, and the other from Collyer Quay out to Rochore. Most

people still preferred the old hack-gharries with their tired, bone-thin ponies, but these began to suffer from the competition of the ricksha which reached Singapore in 1880 from Japan by way of Shanghai. At a time when everybody was too busy making money to stop and count the cost, there was a good trade in horses and carriages; Lambert & Co. were building fine coaches at their factory in Orchard Road, and sales of Sydney horses, though removed from Raffles Place because of the increase in traffic, took place in Abram's Horse Repository. One citizen, dissatisfied with the existing forms of transport, imported a curious machine with three wheels and no multiplication power, which was driven by foot treadles and hand levers.

A railway across the island from Singapore to Kranji had been proposed in 1871, and a company formed to build it. From then it is shrouded in mystery until Mrs. Caddy was on her way to visit the Sultan of Johore. Seeing a curious sight on the Kranji side of the Strait, she asked for an explanation. She was told that the railway had in fact been constructed, but of wooden sleepers, and that the ants of Kranji, being a most virulent tribe, had made short work of them. On the trial run, the story went on, the engine had fallen into the resulting hole, and there it had been left.

Almost inevitably, this was a time of public building. The General Hospital, after being moved from Pearl's Hill to Armenian Street, and from Kandang Kerbau to the old Sepoy Lines, came to rest in its present location when the new building was opened in 1882. The old jail, later the Magistrate's Court, was pulled down in 1884, and the present Central Police Station built in its place. To protect the buildings, the Fire Brigade, which had relied on volunteers, became professional.

There was even money to spare for making the town more beautiful and for remembering its past. The line of angsana trees along the Esplanade had decayed and was replaced, the Esplanade itself being widened by reclamation from the sea to almost double its original width of eighty yards. In its centre, on June 27, 1887, Raffles' statue was unveiled.

In sport particularly the new generation showed its zest for life. Never before in such a short time had so many sports and entertainments been introduced: lawn tennis championships in 1875, and lawn bowls also in the 70's; the Yacht Club in 1881; amateur theatricals, after a spell out of favour, revived in 1882, and the Art Club gave its first exhibition; the Recreation Club, using the "lower end" of the Esplanade, started cricket in 1883, and tennis the following year; also in 1884

the Ladies Lawn Tennis Club started at Dhoby Ghaut with seven courts, and the Straits Chinese Recreation Club was established for tennis, cricket, and athletics; in 1885 the Amateur Club extended its activities and became the Amateur Dramatic and Musical Society; in 1886 came polo; in 1887 the Straits Chinese Recreation Club opened its first club house, and the Photographic Society was instituted. And so on into the 1890's when golf, hockey, and swimming clubs were added to the list.

As if Singapore were not already replete, there came three new outlets for trade: Eastern handcrafts, tin smelting, and rubber.

In England there arose a demand—encouraged by the Aesthetic Movement of William Morris—for the beautiful crafts of the East. The present London store, Liberty's of Regent Street, opened in 1875 to fulfil the demand. While men of culture controlled the fashion it added grace to many an English home; but it degenerated until people with money but no taste festooned their big London houses with Eastern pottery and silks with complete disregard to their setting. However, it was good for trade, and Singapore was not slow to take advantage of it.

In 1887 the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company leased part of their Pulau Brani property to the Straits Trading Company (Sword and Muhling-

haus). On the site was built the tin smelting works which was to grow until it could absorb the whole of Malaya's output and form Singapore's first major industry.

What was to become Singapore's other major industry was started by Henry Ridley, who came to Singapore in 1888 as Director of Forests and Gardens. Flourishing in the Botanic Gardens he found rubber trees grown from the seeds obtained from Brazil. Since then "Rubber" Ridley had been trying to persuade planters to grow rubber, but he had so far only reached the stage of gentle ridicule as he stuffed seeds into the pocket of anyone who would have them.

Surely, one would say, these must be a robust, contented people!

* * *

But clouds of future trouble were building up, almost unrecognised, beyond the shores of the island. The mail steamers, German, Dutch, French, Japanese, were seen only in the light of the custom they brought. Yet each represented a foreign national interest, a government which was aware that Singapore was one of the richest ports in the British Empire. Not one of them could challenge the Empire's sea power yet—but the time might come.

No pattern can be given to a number of isolated events which occurred about 1888: Japanese coal was being stored on the wharves of New Harbour, at least one Japanese shop was opened in the town, and Prince Komatsu of Japan passed through on a mission to Siam; the King of Siam paid a second visit to Singapore; the French of Indo-China raised a new import tariff aimed against imperial preference in the British Empire, with the result that Singapore—though it was a free port—became liable to the maximum duties; a Chinese flotilla visited Singapore; the new Reuter's service reported crisis after crisis with Russia, and the British Government took up two P. & O. ships in the East, equipping them as armed cruisers as a precautionary measure; the Russian Volunteer Fleet was calling at Singapore on its way from Odessa to Vladivostock; the Admiralty Dock Scheme, a suggestion for building a dock in New Harbour big enough to take warships of the British fleet, was discussed openly; Britain's China Fleet staged a sham attack on Singapore with five warships; and then, on July 17, 1889, French and Russian transports were forbidden to enter the port without a permit.

It was all very puzzling. But the main impact of events seemed to be away to the north, where Russia was closing in on China and demanding territorial concessions, while Japan, anxious to forestall

her, was making those preparations in Korea which would lead to the Sino-Japanese war of 1894.

In Singapore the Chinese community, reading between the lines of international intrigue, were anxious for their country's well being. In 1889 they held celebrations for the marriage and accession of the Emperor Kuang Hsu. At the same time there was famine in north China, and the Straits public and Government gave freely to the distressed people.

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Returning, slightly bewildered, to Singapore, and probing beneath the façade of prosperity, one is surprised to find that the people are anything but contented.

Those new forms of transport, so useful for taking people to and from their work, were also taking them farther and farther out of the centre of the town. The era in which everyone knew everyone else and their business was gone, and they began not even to know their neighbours. The telephone and telegraph, soon considered indispensable, were impersonal instruments of communication; the Telephone Exchange, opened as a private venture in 1881, became the property of the Oriental Telephone Company in 1882, and its fifty-line switchboard, connecting most of the larger firms

in town, did away with the old meeting places in Raffles Place and Battery Road.

The big firms were becoming bigger, their "Tuan Besars", taken miles away by coach to their country houses, were no longer men to be tapped on the shoulder and spoken to casually in the street. Probably the biggest change in their offices took place in 1891, when the Post Office issued a "Pro Forma Time Table" which gave the dates of arrival and departure of the main-line mail steamers and their connecting packets. The mail departments of business houses became orderly and precise; gone were those frantic hours when all hands worked to catch an unexpected mail, and ended with a stroll round the corner for a friendly bottle of beer.

"It may be," wrote Edwin A. Brown, "that life in the Colony has become much more strenuous than it used to be, and that after a day's work people do not feel inclined for further effort." "A few formal dinners during the year," commented a reproving editor, "for civility's sake disposes of all that is considered due to Society . . . . Kindly actions, friendly deeds, and charitable thoughts become gradually less year by year . . . ."

Not only was the population breaking up into social groups, but the communities were drawing away from each other. The Straits Chinese and the Eurasians were an example.

The Straits Chinese had been rapidly increasing since 1881, when their number stood at about 10,000. The days had passed when Chinese immigrants took Malay and other native-born women as wives; marrying only the descendants of those early unions, they had evolved their "pure" race. So conscious were they of being apart, that they were already dividing into social levels, and their upper classes had considered wearing stockings to distinguish themselves from the lower orders.

Care has been taken to avoid the use of the term "Eurasian", for neither the word nor the idea came into clear being until the 1870's. It was mainly because of the withdrawal of the Straits Chinese into a separate, strong community that the people who now began to call themselves Eurasians also became—in self-defence—a separate community. There had always been Eurasians in the Colony, fine men among them who had taken active part in public affairs, but it was only now that they began to assert themselves as a people.

Mrs. Caddy, on her visit to Government House in 1888, was taken there in the Governor's carriage, accompanied by servants wearing turbans and scarlet liveries. At Government House an army of servants, many of them in white muslin with red head-dresses and girdles, were on the steps to receive her. Her picture of graciousness seems far removed

from blind singing girls, bought in China, shipped to Singapore, and taught to sing for money in the streets, only to have it taken away from them by their harridan owners before being beaten and thrust onto filthy mattresses to be the sport of any night prowler with a few cents to spare. Yet the two things existed, side by side, in the same year.

Far removed from those two backgrounds of freedom and squalor were the daughters of the old Chinese families. Yet change was entering their cloistered homes. The old families were being supplanted by young vigorous men from the Middle Kingdom, and under their influence the daughters brought up in "pernicious bondage" were demanding their freedom.

Before leaving the ladies one must mention the heroine of 1875, Mrs. Lamb, and her action at the prison gate. The prison at that time was full of the most daring and vicious criminals. "One day several hundreds of the Chinese prisoners broke out and killed the Superintendent, Captain Dent, and rushed the main gates in Bras Bassah Road . . . . Mrs. Lamb, the wife of the gaoler, secured the door in the nick of time, and then defended the gate with a long sword. She slashed and cut at the feet and legs at the bottom of the gateway and thus prevented the escape of the Chinese. . . ."

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It was at this critical stage in shifting relationships, lacking the confidence given by solidarity, that the people—there were nearly 185,000 of them in 1891—entered the lean years of 1890–95. Trade slumped, and with it available finances, and the dollar itself sank to a dangerously low level. There was an air of despondency. The steam tramways went out of business; in the country worn-out tapioca estates were grown over by blukar; small business firms collapsed; and the New Oriental Bank failed with liabilities of 5½ million dollars.

In contrast to this grim picture, Malaya was blooming. "Since 1890," wrote Sir Frank Swettenham in 1895 concerning Perak, "the revenue has increased 40 per cent., and by the end of this year will probably be 75 per cent. The production of tin has increased by over 50 per cent.; the export of padi (unhusked rice) is nearly twenty times what it was in 1890, and that of sugar is more than double. The value of the Customs revenue has doubled, and of the land more than trebled. The railway receipts last year were three times, and this year will be nearly eight times, as large as in 1890 . . . while the trade of the State has increased from a value of $17,000,000 to nearly $27,000,000 . . . ."

That was only one State. And the railways of Malaya were reaching out towards Singapore. The huge potential trade of Malaya was waiting to

pass through Singapore, but Singapore was not ready to receive it.

The port stood on the crossways of the trade routes, like an undersized bungalow for an oversized family. Its front and back doors stood wide open, and into it and through it passed a constant stream of people, dumping their belongings and goods, until the walls bulged with an excess of men and merchandise.

Singapore must expand, and expand quickly. Its future rested with that generation which had passed through prosperity, social change, and depression. The question was, had they the resilience and fortitude to recover in time to keep Singapore in its position as the premier port of South-east Asia?

Chapter Four

IN ORIENTE PRIMUS

In Oriente Primus.
The motto of the Volunteers.

I. 1895 – 1914

Though trade began to improve from 1895 money was still scarce, and seemed likely to become scarcer still when the demand for Military Contribution appeared once more on the agenda of the Legislative Council. Early in 1895, as their only means of protest against the levy of £100,000 for defence costs, the Unofficial Members of the Council, the Justices of the Peace, and the Members of the Chinese Advisory Board, all resigned. It was a fine gesture, but it did nothing to set Singapore on the road to recovery.

There were some who thought they would have an easy return ride to prosperity on the back of the wakening Malayan tiger. But on July 1,

1896, the protected states of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, and Pahang were drawn under one administration to be known as the Federated Malay States, and with the forceful Frank Swettenham as the first Resident-General, any hopes the Singapore merchants may have had of treating Malaya as their own private trading reserve vanished. If Singapore wished to continue to be the import and export warehouse of the peninsula, it must equip itself for the privilege.

Official and commercial Singapore examined the prospect without enthusiasm.

The shipping facilities at New Harbour could no longer meet requirements. Ships in need of repairs lined up to enter dry dock or limped off to another port, while those with cargoes had to wait their turn at the wharves and lose money in the waiting. Behind the wharves the godowns were so congested that consignees could not obtain possession of their merchandise. And behind the godowns were the ox-drawn carts, some carrying cargoes for transhipment, others trying to get out of the wheel-locked mass and reach the dock gates.

Responsibility for this state of affairs lay squarely with the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company. It had absorbed the Borneo Company's wharf, Jardine's wharf, and finally, in 1899, the entire property of the New Harbour Dock Company, its only con-

siderable rival. The Company had become so big, its property so far in excess of nominal capital, that in 1899 a new company was formed for the express purpose of buying out the old for 3,000,000 dollars.

The P. & O. Company still maintained its own wharf, and Chinese shipowners went to any lengths to avoid paying the mounting dock charges, but otherwise the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company's monopoly in New Harbour was complete. It was too powerful to be prodded into action from outside, and any scheme which its engineers and managers might initiate was strangled by internal dissention.

By the turn of the century there was still no improvement. In 1904, driven to desperation, the local manager put up a plan which involved the expenditure of over 12,000,000 dollars. This plan, like its predecessors, was held up by the shocked London Consulting Committee, representing the big shareholders. They wanted to know where the money was to come from.

Apart from the congestion in the docks, there was chaos on the roads leading to town. In an age when the world was turning to steam trains, electric trams, and petrol-driven vehicles, cargoes were still transported to the riverside warehouses in those creaking carts with iron-bound wheels, their drivers dozing happily behind the rumps of dawdling oxen.

* * *

The caution of the Government and businessmen of Singapore was nowhere apparent in Malaya. While Singapore and Johore communicated by antiquated horse-drawn mail coach, Malaya's railway system extended from Prai (Penang) in the north, down through Taiping and Kuala Lumpur to Seremban.

Round about the middle 90's, having seen the result of rubber planted on a big scale, the planters of the States had stopped laughing at Henry Ridley. From that time the seeds from the Botanic Gardens in Singapore, which Ridley had been unable to give away, were in such demand that would-be rubber planters had to wait their turn. In the early 1900's, individual planting gave way to big-company speculation, as plantations were bought up, merged, and enlarged.

What did this mean to Singapore? Very little during the five or six years during which the trees were growing to maturity. But in 1898, over 16,000,000 dollars worth of that other staple commodity, tin, had been exported, and most of it had come from Malaya. Imagination could not grasp what tin and rubber exports together might soon amount to —but only if Government and merchants could regain the confidence they had lost, and, by rebuilding

their port and reorganising their transport facilities, meet the challenge of their day.

* * *

Sir Frank Swettenham, who had come down from Malaya to take office as Governor, did not initiate recovery, but he sounded a hopeful note. "You have in Singapore," he said on his departure in 1903, "a city of 200,000 inhabitants, which will one day be a million, and a port reckoned by the tonnage of its shipping as the seventh largest in the world. That is something to begin with. Then you have a magnificent natural harbour (Telok Ayer Bay) on which nothing has yet been spent, but which, if it were protected by works, could afford 1,300 acres of sheltered anchorage. You have wharves and docks which have already fame beyond these shores, and are capable of vast improvement . . . ."

The improvement began with Sir John Anderson, one of Singapore's greatest Governors, who arrived in 1904. It was his declared intention to bring light and air to the overcrowded quarter of the town. He certainly did so, and began with the wharf and dock area of Keppel Harbour (as New Harbour had been renamed in 1900).

It was in the year of his appointment that the London Consulting Committee of the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company received their Singapore manager's desperate proposal to spend over $12 mil-

lion dollars on improvements. The Committee questioned the plan; the Singapore manager resigned; Anderson set the telegraph ticking to London. When the London Consulting Committee, with a singular lack of caution, asked the Colonial Office about a loan and invited their representative to a meeting, the quiet of their deliberations was shattered by the explosive word "Expropriation".

It was too late for the London Directors to change their policy of obstruction. The scene moved to Singapore. In January 1905, Governor Anderson offered the Company 240 dollars a share; in March a Bill for expropriation passed its second reading in the Legislative Council; in April the Bill was passed; on July 1, the docks and wharves of Keppel Harbour came under the control of Government. Schemes much more extensive than any dreamed of by the old company took shape, and Keppel Harbour entered into a period of expansion which the Singapore Harbour Board continues today.

Behind the wharves chaos disappeared under the firm authority of Government. Motor lorries carried the cargoes to town; in 1903 the railway from the docks to Kranji was built; in 1905 electric trams began to run; in 1908 the Telok Ayer Basin, with a breakwater and sheltered wharves was built; in 1909 the Johore section of the Malay States Railways was completed to join up with the trunk line to Prai.

The dam which had held back trade during the years of adversity had been breached. Trade swept in now without hindrance, its volume swelling.

There were three major industries now, and all flourished. Tin was well established and held first place. Rubber, potentially second in importance, was at first a disappointment to the merchants of Singapore.

Malaya's exports of rubber rose from nothing in 1901 to 8,792 tons in 1911, and were mounting rapidly every year as the new plantations came into production. But most of the rubber was grown on estates owned by London Companies, and it merely passed through Singapore to be bought and sold on the London Rubber Market. This irritated the Singapore merchants. Theirs was the natural mart, they insisted, close to the source of supply, whence the rubber could be distributed to purchasers in any part of the world.

To substantiate their claim they could point out that they now had the assets and resources necessary for an international market. Currency had been stabilised by the issue in 1903 of the new Straits dollar, and in 1906 of dollar notes, while in that year the value of the Straits dollar had been fixed at 2*s.* 4*d.* International banking facilities were increasing with the opening of branches of the Nederlandsche Indische Handlesbank in 1901, the International

Banking Corporation (affiliated to the National City Bank of New York) in 1903, the Banque de l'Indo-Chine in 1904, and the Bank of Taiwan (Formosa) in 1912. Insurance companies were now ready to cover the transport of rubber from plantation to factory, including the Commercial Union Assurance Company, already established in the block at the corner of Robinson Road and Telegraph Street. Above all the merchants could command almost unlimited credit facilities, the result of a reputation for unassailable integrity handed down to them by the pioneers.

The British and Chinese merchants had grown too independent to accept outside control. Chief among them was Guthrie & Co., with a history almost as old as the port itself. They with others started to sell rubber in Singapore in 1908. By 1910, Guthrie's averaged 75 pikuls a month, and by 1911 90 pikuls, the best price received being 640 dollars a pikul. The amounts were small but it was a start.

Determined to extend their operations despite the ridicule and opposition of the financiers of Mincing Lane in London, the merchants founded the Singapore Chamber of Commerce Rubber Association (S.C.C.R.A.) in 1911 to encourage local auctions. Buyers came in from the consumer countries, including even at that early stage the Dunlop Rubber Company; and, as they diverted

increasing amounts of rubber to their own market, the merchants of Singapore made themselves known to the world.

Singapore's third industry, the storage and distribution of oil in bulk, gave rise to the nest of gleaming squat tanks that can be seen today on Pulau Bukum. Refused permission to store either kerosene or petroleum in the vicinity of the port, Syme & Co. began to form the tank depot there before 1900. Its first bulk stocks of kerosene were imported from Russia, and used for lighting and cooking. They were quickly replaced by Dutch supplies of kerosene, petroleum, benzine, and lubricating oils from the newly-opened Dutch oilfields in Borneo and Sumatra. From 1902, when Dutch and British interests were merged under the Asiatic Petroleum Company, Pulau Bukum became a centre of supply for the whole of the East. "Shell" brand petrol was already popular in Singapore for the motor vehicles which were now increasing year by year, while the tins in which it was distributed were in great demand for building houses in shanty towns.

The merchants had regained their confidence; within their reach was an accumulation of trade which had never before been known; opportunity was theirs once more and they were stepping out boldly to take it.

* * *

Improvement in the town was keeping pace with the prosperity of the twentieth century.

There was a sudden awareness that health was a vital part of the welfare of the community. The (later King Edward VII) Medical School, opened in 1905, was to give the Colony the services of locally-trained doctors. That there was to be a considerable amount of work for them was demonstrated by Singapore's first health survey held in 1906. It disclosed the appalling conditions under which the poor lived, and which had been largely responsible for the last and worst epidemic of cholera when 759 people had died. Improvements followed the survey; apart from enforced health regulations, improvements were made to the General Hospital in 1907, a Municipal Nurse appointed in 1910 to advise mothers on childbirth, and the first midwives licensed in 1911. In the same year, following 127 deaths from malaria, 10,000 dollars was voted for an anti-malarial campaign, and work began on surveys of the breeding grounds of mosquitoes.

To deal with the added work the Municipality began to divide into a complication of departments. The Engineer's Department split up, one section for road and sewers, another for water when the Kallang Reservoir was built in 1900, and high-level reservoirs were used to feed the town. Lighting

became a separate department, and that itself subdivided to take charge of gas, the Municipality having bought out the Gas Company in 1900, and electricity which was installed in 1906.

In 1900 senior police officers had been criticised for "sitting in an office under a punkah, answering frivolous enquiries and minutes about petty police details", but under a newly-appointed officer from the London Metropolitan Police, the Criminal Registration Department opened in 1901, the finger-print system in 1903, and when the Detective Branch was reorganised in 1904, the post of Chinese Sub-Inspector was created. Owing to the increase in motor-vehicles, a Traffic Department became necessary; its members must have hoped fervently in 1908 that all 214 persons licensed to drive a steamroller that year would not manage to get hold of one on the same day.

* * *

There were jobs for all in this new and vigorous Singapore, and the people came in to fill them. The population had risen to over 250,000 by 1911, when it was noted that there were forty-eight races represented, speaking fifty-four languages.

All but one race of the immigrants followed the custom of leaving their womenfolk behind in the country from which they came. The exception was the Japanese, who between 1871 and 1911, had

increased from one lonely immigrant to 1,409; in the latter year their numbers were 513 males and 896 females, a curious disproportion which had been regularly maintained. Equally curious was the effect the Japanese women had on a particular section of the community.

One does not think of Japanese women of the time as having any exceptional freedom. Yet the Chinese *nyonya*, who for a quarter of a century had been pressing for release from her dull, closely-chaperoned existence, pointed them out with envy as women who enjoyed both freedom and education.

It was in fact only the older, more conservative Chinese who still tried to keep their daughters in ignorance of the world about them. The young men who came searching for wives among the Straits-born Chinese were impatient with tradition.

After their marriage they no longer spent their evenings at home; they went out to their clubs. The Straits-born among them knew no other government but British and were on the whole content, but the China-born—especially the Cantonese —were not. Their heads would have been forfeit had they spoken a word about reform in their own country, but here they could declaim bitterly against the repressive Manchu regime, which dealt so savagely with the least sign of unrest. They were joined in their clubs by the young scholars who had

been to Western universities, and who had come back burning to set reform afoot in China.

Singapore was one of the hotbeds of "overseas" Chinese which nurtured revolution. Many of them had fallen under the spell of Sun Yat-sen, sole survivor of an eighteen-man revolutionary society in Canton which had been ruthlessly exterminated. He had come among them disguised by spectacles and in the dress of a pedlar, preaching the need for rebellion in China. His followers here had their great moment in December 1911, when the P. & O. *Devanha*, China bound, put into Singapore and Dr. Sun stepped ashore. The revolution in China was in full swing, and Sun Yat-sen was on his way to guide the destiny of the ancient empire.

The German population of Singapore had been increasing steadily in recent years, but in 1911 their number (which had been 236 in 1901) dropped to 181. The only comment in Singapore was to bewail the loss to the Philharmonic Society, most of whose players had been German. Few people saw any serious threat behind German moves in the East.

Why should they? The British Empire had reached the zenith of its power. Britain was the industrial leader of the world, her trade secure from one end of it to the other, her navy. . . but at that point a few perplexed citizens of Singapore stopped to consider.

Britain, reversing the old Palmerston tradition of standing aloof and avoiding entanglement with any nation, had signed the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902, revised in 1905 and again in 1911. It was after the first revision that those few uneasy observers in Singapore had seen the practical results of the Alliance: British battleships, withdrawn from the China Station, were passing through on their way westwards, leaving Eastern waters to the Japanese. Britain had begun her retreat from Asia; and a retreat once begun is often difficult to arrest, more difficult still to reverse.

The Germans, on the other hand, strident and arrogant, as they were in Europe, were pressing eastwards. "The only tragic features of affairs in the Straits," commented the London *Daily Mail* in 1906, "are the destructive invasion of privileged German traders." German goods flooded the Singapore market. With the merchandise came German commercial agents, and they were followed by consuls, warships, and expeditionary forces.

Those mail-steamers mentioned earlier in this chapter had meaning now: the Germans were at last strong enough to challenge the British Empire. In 1914, many people were asking what would happen to Singapore if conflict came. Then in Europe Germany began her brutal attack on unoffending Belgium.

News of Britain's declaration of war on Germany on August 4, reached Singapore on the following day. Within a few hours two hundred men of the Singapore Volunteer Corps, including the Chinese and Malay contingents, marched out of the Drill Hall to take up their station in the military headquarters at Fort Canning.

II. 1914–1921

"The Port of Singapore is a Free Port, and the trade thereof is open to the ships and vessels of every nation free of duty, equally and alike to all." The economy of Singapore had been built up on Raffles' declaration. But it could only operate in peace time. In war there would be controls on shipping, restrictions on trade, and no one yet knew where they would end; the leaping prosperity of the last ten years might well be overtaken by disaster.

The troubled uncertainty of the people was made worse by their having no clear-cut allegiance. To the two hundred men of the Singapore Volunteer Corps marching to Fort Canning, to the four thousand odd English, Scots, and Irish in their business houses, clubs, and homes, the issue was as clear as it had been to the Germans of military age who had left Singapore the day before the declaration of war. There were others, too, particularly among the Straits-born Chinese and the Eurasians, who pro-

claimed immediately their whole-hearted support of Britain. But the other 200,000 or so came from lands which had no interest in the conflict, or had not yet declared on which side they stood.

Of Western people alone there were in Singapore at the time: Americans, Austrians, Belgians, Bohemians, Britons, Bulgarians, Danes, Dutch, Finlanders, French, Germans, Greeks, Hungarians, Italians, Moldavians, Norwegians, Poles, Portuguese, Roumanians, Russians, Spaniards, Swedes, Swiss, and Turks. Who could tell into which camp they would all be drawn?

Some of the uncertainty was removed during the first few days after Government's notification of a state of war. Local forces were placed under the Army Act and mobilised; German ships in the harbour were seized and their crews brought ashore; German inhabitants were made to sign internment papers; the movement of foodstuffs was regulated; export business was brought to a halt; the tin market was suspended; and all immigration of Chinese and Indian labour prohibited.

By August 10, this little flurry of activity was over. Local shipping began to move in and out of the roads, and Keppel Harbour was busy again with the ocean-going liners.

On August 23 the Japanese, the only serious unknown quantity in the East, declared for Britain.

There followed a burst of excitement as the German cruiser *Emden* appeared in the Bay of Bengal on September 21, and began her short career of destruction of British shipping; some six weeks later, after a daring raid on Penang, she was intercepted at the Cocos Islands by H.M. Australian Ship *Sydney* and went ashore a blazing wreck.

There did not really seem to be much else to do about the war, except to wave good-bye to the British Regiment, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, and to the first Malayan contingent for the New Armies which sailed on November 11. The only regular troops left were the Indian Regiment, the 5th Light Infantry (which was itself preparing to sail to Hong Kong), and a few Royal Garrison Artillery and Royal Engineers. The Volunteers, augmented by the newly-formed Volunteer Rifles and the Veterans Company, manned the forts, and undertook garrison duties.

To a town which relied largely on the sea routes between her port and Europe being open, only one danger remained — the German Navy. When the German fleet under Admiral von Spee was destroyed at the Falklands on December 9, 1914, even that menace was removed.

Singapore settled down to the calm which had been only momentarily disturbed; until at 3 p.m. on February 15, 1915, the first shot was fired at the

Quarter Guard of Normanton Barracks. The mutiny had begun.

* * *

It was believed later, though there was no hint of it at the time, that German agents had made good use of their stay in Singapore. Subversion had undermined the loyalty of the 5th Light Infantry, a regiment of old standing in the Indian Army, and one that had stood firm in the Indian Mutiny of 1857.

In secret they had evolved their plan to rise at 8 p.m. on the 15th, murder their officers in cold blood as they dined in mess, and end with an orgy of murder and loot. Singapore by that night would have been a shambles, if the order to move had not been put forward and the men's ammunition collected a day earlier than expected.

Forced to precipitate their action, they rose at 3 p.m., attacked the Quarter Guard and gained possession of the ammunition. They killed two British officers on the spot, but the remainder, collecting officers and men of the Malay States Volunteer Rifles on the way—and one woman, Mrs. Cotton, the wife of Major Cotton—reached the bungalow of the Colonel of the 5th, which, under his command, they hurriedly fortified. Surrounded and attacked, the telephone wires cut, they defended themselves.

Meanwhile two large parties of mutineers, splaying out from the barracks, began their career of murder. Every Englishman or Englishwoman they came across on their several routes to town, or could hunt out of their bungalows, they shot and left to die.

But the continued resistance of the Colonel and his besieged party—continuously supplied with cups of tea by Mrs. Cotton—had vitally upset the programme of mutiny. The large number of mutineers needed to contain them had been unable to add their weight to the attack on the town.

The insurrection had in fact failed in its main purpose. Martial law was declared at 6.30 p.m., by dusk the entire European community had received the alarm, and European women and children were being collected and sent out to the *Ipoh* and other steamers which were quickly put at their disposal, including the *Recorder* by the Telegraph Company, the *Nile* by the P. & O. Company, and the *Penang* by the Straits Steamship Company. Government forces comprising police and volunteers, a landing party from H.M.S. *Cadmus* in harbour, and 150 men of the Johore Forces brought down on the mail train by H. H. the Sultan of Johore in person, took up strategic positions.

On the morning of the 16th, after a night of desultory sniping, these forces moved against muti-

neer strongholds. They occupied Alexandra and Tanglin Barracks, and relieved under heavy fire the besieged bungalow, shortly after it had withstood a dawn attack. Heavily outnumbered, the relief and bungalow parties retired to Keppel Harbour, Mrs. Cotton, tired but cheerful, being taken on to Government House.

During that day, two hundred European special constables and 190 Japanese raised by the Japanese Consul were given arms by the military authorities, old Volunteer Snider rifles, with heavy curved bayonets and cartridges of such size and weight that elephants and not men were said to be their objective. From the 17th to the 20th, Allied cruisers, answering the urgent appeal of Government, began to arrive; 190 men with two machine guns landed from the French cruiser *Montcalm*, 151 men from the Japanese cruisers *Otawa* and *Tsushima*, 40 men from the Russian cruiser *Orel*, while six companies of the Territorial Forces of Rangoon arrived in the S. S. *Edavana*.

They were in time only for the mopping-up operations. By the 18th, Government forces had retaken Normanton Barracks, and the European women and children were returning to their homes. The scattered remnants of the mutineers had fled into the jungle. By the 22nd, of the 815 men of the 5th Light Infantry, 614 had surrendered or had been

captured and 52 were casualties, leaving only 149 to be accounted for.

At a summary court martial held on February 23, the death sentence was passed on 41 mutineers, and sentence carried out in full public view at Outram Road Gaol by a succession of firing parties.

* * *

Although Singapore's progress had been checked by war, the harbour docks and wharves continued to expand. Telok Ayer Basin, inlet for the coastal shipping, was joined to the deep-sea wharves of Keppel Harbour by an embankment carrying a road thirty-six feet wide and a railway which connected with the main line into Malaya. The huge rebuilding scheme at Tanjong Pagar was rounded off with the completion of Empire Dock, which was opened in 1917.

The long-distance shipping had changed in character. Gone were the German flags, once such a common sight; the Australian mail route no longer included Singapore; and even the long connection with the P. & O. Company was broken, as the ships of their subsidiary company, the B.I., came to collect mails in an unfamiliar dress, stripped and ready for battle.

But the ships continued to arrive, bringing British manufactures for distribution, taking back urgently needed supplies of tin, rubber, and oil, and

running the blockade of Germany's mounting submarine offensive. Many of the ships, many of the crews—among them sailors signed on in Singapore —never returned; that was a price that had to be borne.

It was a price, too, paid by the men who went willingly from their safe posts in Singapore to enter the armed fortress of England and disperse to the several battlefields: a Maxwell wounded in Mesopotamia and another killed on the Aisne; a Dunman blown up with his tank; a planter drowned in the North Sea by the explosion of a mine. Each casualty list meant a friend gone, or bereavement to another family, or the loss to a mercantile house of a young man who had so often hurried from his desk to the playing field on the Esplanade.

There was another way in which the people of Singapore could contribute—and they did so, handsomely. When the various war funds opened, men like Dr. Lim Boon Keng worked hard to get the Chinese community to subscribe, and Tan Jiak Kim made such splendid contributions as 18,000 dollars to the Prince of Wales Relief Fund and 19,200 dollars to the cost of a fighter aircraft which carried his name.

And so by way of trade, personal valour, and generosity, the people of Singapore made their not inconsiderable contribution to the war effort of the

allies. Of equal importance was the way in which their port was used to restrict the war potential of the enemy; and that was made possible by Singapore's age-old position commanding the sea-routes between East and West.

Soon after the outbreak of war, measures had been taken to prevent Germany from continuing to benefit from interests built up in the East. Behn, Meyer & Co., a German firm established in 1840, were appointed liquidators of all German interests in the Colony, and German names disappeared from the commerce of Singapore.

But this was not enough. Using her extra-territorial rights in countries such as China and Siam, Germany continued to trade through firms masked by assumed names. To close the gap, laws were passed in Singapore to prohibit the transit of tainted cargoes. From that time Singapore might have taken on the motto of its own volunteers, *In Oriente Primus*, for it was the base from which His Majesty's vessels quartered the trade routes, demanding ships' manifests and certificates of origin, until Germany's pipe-line from the East was blocked of all but a meagre trickle.

News of the Armistice reached Singapore at 8 p.m. on November 11, 1918. The following day, amid festivities and rejoicing, a public proclamation of the Allied victory was made on the Esplanade.

And perhaps no better example can be found of the many races who helped to make victory certain, than the fact that the proclamation was read in Malay, Chinese, Hindustani, Punjabi, Tamil, Arabic, and Sinhalese, in order to convey it fully to the assembled people.

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Celebrations of another kind were already being prepared. A committee had been sitting since March to suggest ways of celebrating the centenary on February 6, 1919, and of honouring Singapore's founder. They agreed that there could be no better tribute to Raffles than to remember his interest in education and to lay "securely the foundations upon which a university may in course of time be established".

It was a good time to pause and consider. In the quiet of peace Singapore's progress through four years of war and a hundred years of history could be judged by her shipping, trade, and population. Over six million tons of shipping entered the port annually; the value of imports and exports in the last full year (1917) for which returns were available was one hundred and nineteen million sterling; the population was estimated at 305,000.

The war, it was said, had left Singapore in a position of "unexampled commercial prosperity". So it was in a mood of exaltation that the people

entered with a will into the celebrations of Centenary Day.

They had to be up early for the first event. Raffles' statue had been moved from its lonely position in the middle of the Esplanade to its present one beside the river mouth. At 7.30 a.m., Governor Young drew aside the green and gold curtains, and it was seen that Raffles' eyes looked towards a point on the river bank very close to his place of landing a hundred years before. As he departed, the Governor of twentieth-century Singapore paused for a moment and saluted the Governor of former days, the man who had brought the island port into being.

* * *

Centenary Day closed with fireworks. Most of the 300,000 odd inhabitants, especially the school children who had paraded on the Race Course with such happy pride, went tired to bed, with no thoughts but those of well-being for the future of Singapore. But a few were uneasy, and there was good reason for their disquiet. International tension was rising in the East.

Britain had withdrawn her authority from the Far East before the war. Now, strained by the four years of effort, a million of her younger men dead, she showed no signs of wishing to take on the responsibility again. America became the domi-

nant power, but she was a nervous matron, clucking over her brood of islands across the Pacific, alert for a sign that Japan would try to snatch them from her. Japan, rising over-quickly to a power she had not yet learnt to use wisely, was asserting her right to do as she wished in eastern Asia. The two forces watched each other suspiciously. They filled the space Britain had left, and Britain, unable now to overawe them both, had to choose between her two former allies.

Despite the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Britain's ties with America made the choice inevitable. When she had made it, Japan's easily aroused antagonism turned against her, threatening the Empire's lines of communication which ran east and west through Singapore.

Only a battle-fleet equal in strength to Japan's could give security. But the British people would never allow their battle-fleet to be long out of touch with home waters, and their economy would not stand its duplication. There was one alternative, to build a naval base in the East capable of accommodating the fleet should the need arise to send it there in an emergency.

In 1921, with that alternative accepted as its policy, the Committee of Imperial Defence met in London to decide the location of the base. Singapore's strategic advantage had been so well demon-

strated that their choice of it was inevitable. On June 16, 1921, as pens were put to paper in an office in Whitehall, Singapore moved out of the shadows of South-east Asia and stood in the full glare of the spotlights of the world.

Chapter Five

TILL THEY RIPEN

> "Colonies are like fruits that cling to the tree only till they ripen."
>
> Turgot.

I. 1921 – 1942

It is difficult to keep the Singapore we know in perspective for the period 1921–42, the years of its rise and fall as a naval base. The naval powers of the world, meeting at Washington in late 1921, became aware of it, and saw it not as a town of living people, but as a point of great potential strength in the East.

Life went on in the Colony in much the same way. But we seem to lose contact with the homely affairs of the town for twenty-one years. The people disappear behind a sea-mist of international politics.

At the Washington Conference the three great naval powers of the world, Britain, America, and

Japan, agreed to a naval ratio in capital ships of 5 : 5 : 3, and Britain and America agreed not to build naval bases within striking distance of Japan. From that time Pearl Harbour and Singapore became the naval outposts by which the West hoped to contain the growing strength of Japan.

But Japan had no intention of being contained. Its people were inflamed by the Hideyoshi dream of Eastern conquest and Asian domination. And with the withdrawal of Western forces, the way lay open for the Japanese to strike at many desirable territories.

Anxious for her own Eastern territories, Britain turned her attention to Singapore, the only base from which she could sustain them. In February 1923 the Cabinet gave its approval for the Naval Base to be sited on the north-east coast of the island in the Johore Strait; in May, 11 million pounds appeared in the British Naval estimates, and work began.

Construction of a more peaceful nature was nearing completion a mile or two to the westwards. The Johore Strait, known to mariners since the most ancient times, was no longer in fact a strait: its waters were being divided by the Causeway, joining the island to the mainland. On September

17, 1923, railway goods traffic began to cross it, and the line was open from Singapore to Bangkok.

Once more Singapore had need of this and all the other transport facilities at her disposal. The First World War had hastened a revolution in locomotive power from animals to motor vehicles, and this in turn was leading to an even greater demand for tin, rubber, and oil.

In 1925, exports of tin from Malaya reached the value of almost 100 million dollars, and rubber well over 250 million dollars, while mounting supplies of oil were coming in from the Netherlands East Indies to be stored on Pulau Bukum. Yet, fortunate as Singapore was to have supplies of each, the merchants could not keep pace with demand. It was a glorious opportunity, but it had its debit side: those three commodities would be among the first vital necessities of a nation going to war, and war in that year of 1925 did not seem to be very far away.

The Red Army marching east from Moscow had reached the Pacific seaboard, and made anything but a peaceful showing. It had brought with it something new in Asian affairs, the strength of an idea. It had scores to settle with Britain and America, its traditional enemy was Japan, and its political commissars had already expressed their intention of using China as a tool. China had tried

once more to rid herself of foreign interference, and having failed was more divided than ever. Sun Yat-sen had fled again, this time into the arms of a Soviet emissary who was ready with many promises. America, who seventy-two years before had forced Japan out of isolation, was now busy driving her back into it. But the Japanese were not to be driven. Not by an inch would they ease their hold on Manchuria, and their troops, under the guise of police, were spreading into China.

Aware of Britain's vital interest in these Eastern affairs, one looks back to the shores of the Johore Strait expecting to see a naval base there. The fact that the jungle has not been cleared from the site is fitting testimony that Britain has become a democracy. The first and short-lived Labour Government, coming to power in 1924, and putting education for the young and tobacco for the old before empire and imperial designs, "decided not to proceed further with the Singapore scheme". The first act of the Conservatives, returning later in 1924, had been to give authority for the work on the Naval Base to continue, but argument of a different nature still held it back.

The military officers responsible for planning the Naval Base could not agree on the means of defending it, the constitution of what was to become known as the Fortress.

It was anticipated that no enemy could successfully advance through Malaya and that any attack on the Base would come from the sea. The question was, which was the best form of resistance, the traditional fortress guns of the Army, or the war-planes of the much younger and relatively untried Air Force? The argument was to last for ten years and seriously delay defence plans. However, as a temporary measure, it was decided in 1926 to erect the first heavy gun batteries—on the south of the island pointing out to sea.

Even this operation was not carried out smoothly. By 1927 Government was showing its reluctance to alienate land for defence purposes. The siting of batteries and the layout of barracks was postponed.

Meanwhile work had continued, though slowly, on the Naval Base itself. By March 1929 the site had been cleared, the floating dock had been towed into position, and the construction of the first dry dock had begun.

Within three months it seemed as if all argument and endeavour had been wasted. The second Labour Government, brought to office in June, took the initiative in encouraging general world disarmament. At the Naval Disarmament Conference held in London in 1930 they announced

that as a gesture of good faith all work on the Singapore Base had been suspended.

* * *

The installations were not to lie idle long enough to rust. When that last brave gesture of 1930 had failed and the world armament race had gathered speed, work began again on the Base.

The military development of most interest—because it more closely concerned the commerce of Singapore—was progress in the air. Britain's Royal Air Force had made its first appearance here in 1924, but it did not settle permanently until 1928, when four Supermarine Southampton flying-boats reached their prepared anchorage at Seletar, close to the Naval Base.

Amy Johnson, touching down here in 1930 on her solo flight from England to Australia, introduced the era of civil aircraft. In 1931 Singapore's first civil aerodrome was started. By 1933 the Royal Singapore Flying Club had been formed and was co-operating with the Volunteers in a mock attack on the 1st Battalion the Wiltshire Regiment and the Johore Military Forces.

Many of the men engaged were to remember that day of mock battle, for it took place where the Jurong Line was to be, the scene of a bloody defeat. And the men who were to inflict it were

coming closer. In that year of 1933 the Japanese, having already occupied Manchuria, moved south across the Great Wall into northern China.

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The Japanese were arrogant now, as the Germans had been twenty years before. And there was another point of similarity. In 1914 cheap German goods had swamped the market at Singapore; now it was Japanese goods which were being unloaded in such quantities that the merchants were asking Government to introduce a quota system.

What these and other signs foretold was becoming increasingly obvious. The British Government in 1932 had given orders for work on the Naval Base to be accelerated. By 1933 the rogue elephants, Germany and Italy in Europe, Japan in the East, were breaking away from the peaceful but nervous herd, and were trumpeting defiance. Japan, giving up all pretence after her troops had arranged the Peking incident of 1937, was at open war with China.

Waking at last to the inevitable, Britain had begun to rearm. Her plans for the Eastern sphere of operations were the same, and now it was stated clearly that Singapore would be the keystone on which the defence of India, Australia, and New Zealand would rest. This was no pleasant pros-

pect for Singapore since it was becoming increasingly evident that the British battle-fleet must remain in home waters to counter the naval strengths of Germany and Italy.

* * *

160 million dollars had been spent on the Naval Base by 1938, when the King George VI Dock was opened by the Governor and a telegram of congratulations was read from His Majesty. The defenders of the Fortress, the Army and Air Force, still faced the sea in traditional style, as the defenders of the island had always stood since Raffles had sited the first block house.

But in that year of 1938, General Dobbie, General Officer Commanding, issued his warning that an attack on Singapore through Malaya was not only possible but a serious potential danger. The war machine began to turn slowly, much too slowly, to cover its rear and extend its defence into the hitherto unconsidered jungle lands of Malaya stretching up to Siam's southern border.

By 1938 the Japanese were well on their way to Siam. By May, they had landed troops at Amoy, 300 miles north of Hong Kong; by February 1939, they were on Hainan Island, about the same distance south of Hong Kong, and a little over a thousand miles from Singapore, with nothing but a

narrow strip of water, and a narrower strip of French Indo-China, separating them from Siam's eastern border.

The Japanese thrust towards Singapore.

In September 1939, the war in Europe began, and in June 1940 news came to the East of Dunkirk and the fall of France. Three months later

the Japanese occupied France's northern Indo-China. Only the weak, unpredictable barrier of Siam separated the Japanese advance forces from the thin screen of British troops sent northwards to guard Singapore.

And Singapore the Japanese must take if they were to achieve their Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: the Naval Base—fleet or no fleet—was the strongest threat they faced from the south, and the port was the richest prize in South-east Asia.

* * *

The slump of 1931–32 was past, forgotten by the merchants of Singapore as they took full advantage of the boom of 1940. Malaya alone, in the previous year, had produced 38 per cent. of the world's rubber, 58 per cent. of its tin; her total exports were valued at over a thousand million dollars. And the world was at Singapore's doorstep demanding more rubber, more tin, more oil.

In all the times of plenty in Singapore, nothing had been known to approach the halcyon days of 1940. To the civil population, war seemed remote, an unpardonable interruption. The British and local governments encouraged this view. Running counter to the military authorities, who were feverishly seeking labour to build up the fixed defences on the island and now on the mainland, they insisted

that economic effort was more imperative than defence; it earned foreign currency so badly needed.

So there was little difference to be seen in the everyday life of Singapore. A few innovations had however been introduced. Strikes by this time were not unusual: in 1938, the employees of the Singapore Traction Company, the cargo porters of Tanjong Pagar Labour Company, and the night-soil men of the Municipality, all went on strike. Owners of wireless sets could tune in to the medium transmitter of the Malaya Broadcasting Corporation. The new Supreme Court was being built at an estimated cost of over 1½ million dollars. And at least two Government employees were supremely unconcerned with the frightful possibility of war; Jambul and Puteh were two berok monkeys who were replacing less agile naturalists in collecting specimens from the tops of tall trees.

For over a century, Singapore's position at the meeting place of the sea-lanes had been unquestioned; now its importance as a centre for air traffic was established. On the local routes, Wearnes Air Services operated daily from Singapore, reaching Penang through Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh in three and a half hours. Imperial Airways, Qantas Empire Airways, Royal Dutch Airways, and Royal Dutch Indies Airways used Kallang airport two miles from town and the seaplane base beside it, so

that Singapore lay at the hub of radiating air-lanes stretching to all parts of the world.

Aircraft were the greatest boon of the century to Singapore, until one moonlight night in December 1941 when they became its greatest curse.

* * *

The Japanese struck at 4 a.m. in the morning of December 8. Some seventeen naval bombers from the Japanese base in southern Indo-China approached the fully-illuminated town without warning. Most of their bombs were dropped on Tengah and Seletar airfields, the object of their attack, but some fell on the congested area of the town, causing about 200 Asian casualties. It was the first intimation to the people of Singapore that war had begun.

They did not know as they waited for the dawn that the Japanese had already landed at Singora and Patani in the north, and that British and Indian troops were retreating southwards from Kota Bharu. News was yet to arrive that far away in Pearl Harbour an American fleet had been virtually annihilated, and that morning mists over the Philippines were alone postponing the complete destruction of General MacArthur's air force. By the time the people of Singapore sat down to break-

fast, every one of Hong Kong's aircraft had been destroyed on the ground. Before they had dinner that evening many had seen "Z" Force steam out to sea, the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* with their screen of four destroyers, going to their fate.

The days which followed, while the battle was fought and lost in Malaya, have no place here: they were too full of valour and of tragedy for justice to be done to them. The indestructible British square, the thin red line, these things had no meaning in the jungle; a stand to the last man here, a forlorn counter-attack there, were always followed by news of continued retreat, and the broken units of battered formations filed back to Singapore Island, until the only two remaining pipers of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders played out the remnants of their own battalion, and followed it across the Causeway. At 8.15 a.m. on January 31, demolition charges blew a breach in the Causeway. The defenders of the so-called fortress of Singapore looked over the narrow Johore Strait to the tangled jungle which hid their adversaries.

Behind that screen of jungle, the Japanese 5th and 18th Divisions and the Imperial Guards Division took up the positions allotted to them by General Yamashita, and got ready to attack the north-west corner of the island in accordance with a plan prepared in Tokyo long before war began.

On February 1, their guns opened fire on the island but did not reach their full intensity until dawn of the 8th.

All that day the bombardment went on, bombers flew overhead, and machine guns spattered over the water, until 10.30 p.m. when Japanese landing craft moved out of the shadows of the jungle into the Strait. In complete darkness, they landed on the island between Sungei Buloh and Sungei Murai, and overran the three defending battalions of the 22nd Australian Brigade.

By the morning of February 13, the civilian population of Singapore knew that the battle for the island was all but lost. Around them was the last tight perimeter, a zigzag line twenty-eight miles long through the outer suburbs on to which the troops of a beaten army had been withdrawing all night.

There was no place of safety for the non-combatants: troops, guns, lorries, and stores were so close among them that every street had become a legitimate target, not only for the unopposed Japanese aircraft but for the guns which closed in every hour. The people now wondered if the battle was about to commence for the town which was falling about them.

The rubble of bombed buildings blocked the streets, blackened ruins smouldered on from day

to day, broken telegraph poles, and tangled wires formed inextricable barriers. For a time the people had answered the call of the Civil Defence Volunteers to uncover and bury the dead, but now the dead lay rotting, the injured formed long queues at the overcrowded hospitals, and the unharmed awaited their turn, crowded into their top-heavy tenements.

Even with its pre-war population of some 550,000, the suffering of these people would have been ghastly, but during recent weeks their number, swollen by refugees, had nearly doubled, to reach—though no one attempted to count them—a million. Swettenham's prophecy had been fulfilled, but under the most tragic conditions.

The 500,000,000-dollar Naval Base had already been demolished by the retreating army, together with all the military installations, equipment and stores which it had been possible to destroy. But Singapore's three main sources of trade and industry must also be denied to the enemy. The bewildered people watched as teams of military and Government officials, aided by Chinese and Indian volunteers, turned stocks of rubber into molten flames and destroyed the tin-smelting works on Pulau Brani, while the pall of black smoke rising out to sea meant the British Navy was putting an end to Pulau Bukum's stock of oil.

There was one small but gallant section of the Asian community who on that day of February 13 had no thought of profit or trade. The men of the 1st Malaya Brigade were digging themselves in at the Pasir Panjang Ridge, vital to the western sector of the perimeter. For two hours the Japanese pounded the ridge with artillery, air, and mortar fire. Then through the short scrub of the knife-backed ridge advanced the victorious Japanese 18th Division.

All that day the Japanese threw the full weight of their attack against the Brigade. All that day it held firm.

"Garrisons of posts held their ground and many of them were wiped out almost to a man," General Percival was to write. "It was only when it was weakened by heavy losses that the Regiment was forced to give ground." By dusk the Japanese held the Gap, but by then, also, the scrub was weighed down by the dead of both sides, and the brown soil of the ridge was stained red with the blood of an Asian people who had fought gallantly against overwhelming odds.

We might remember this for a moment when we go lightly out to the Gap to watch the sunset over the dark Malayan hills.

* * *

The end was in sight. On the 14th, while the perimeter bent in slowly but inevitably towards his headquarters on Fort Canning, General Percival and his commanders listened to the Municipal Water Engineer. Water, he told them, under the constant shelling of mains, could not last more than forty-eight hours. Next day, the 15th, it was evident that the water could not last another twenty-four hours. And water was life for the million people of Singapore.

To General Percival there were only two alternatives: counter-attack and break out of the closing ring, or capitulate. Gravely his commanders told him that their formations were beyond the ability to counter-attack.

At 5.15 p.m., on the 15th, General Percival, under the white flag of truce, stood before the Commander of the Japanese 25th Army in the manager's office of the Ford Motor Factory on the Bukit Timah Road. General Yamashita demanded unconditional surrender. At 8.30 p.m. that evening the British Army in Singapore laid down its arms.

One last message Percival sent out to his Supreme Commander announcing the surrender. Then a curtain of silence fell between Singapore and the Western world.

II. 1942 ONWARDS

Following the Japanese invasion of 1942, Singapore's trade with the Western world ceased abruptly. This might not have been fatal had it been possible to intensify her trade with eastern Asia. But Japanese naval supremacy, on which such a trade would depend, lasted a bare six months. From May 1942 the Co-Prosperity Sphere began to shrink. It was as if a mighty hand had lifted Singapore bodily from its position in the centre of the saucer of the world and placed it uncertain and tottering on the rim.

The effect on Singapore's economy was disastrous. All food, most of it rice, had been imported, and it had been paid for by the profit made out of trade. Now there was no trade, no profit, no rice.

On top of poverty and hunger came oppression. The Japanese ruled by terror, making men spy on each other, causing family to lay information against family, until no one could trust his neighbour. To prevent a common front the Japanese stirred up the latent mistrust of the communities, set race against race, and dealt most harshly with the Chinese.

The people had no natural leaders left to guide them. The British were confined behind barbed wire, guarded day and night by machine guns. Many of the Asian leaders of the pre-war regime, the philan-

thropists, the legislators, and the magistrates vanished.

While their elders suffered, remembering a time when they had boasted of their freedom, children grew up knowing no other life but that of hunger and hardship.

* * *

The first British convoy to reach Singapore after the capitulation of Japan arrived on the morning of September 5, 1945. By noon troops were landing and entering the hushed expectant town. Shortly after 2 p.m. a party of officers stood to attention in front of the Town Hall while one of their number, having climbed to the roof, lowered the rising-sun flag of Japan and raised the Union Jack.

Behind Keppel Harbour, blasted and twisted and blocked by sunken ships, a group of small boys, wide-eyed and tensed to run, watched disembarking British troops have their first meal ashore. When the troops, as is the way with British soldiers, offered them food from their own plentiful store, the children stood back, afraid. But when the soldiers threw away their empty tins of bully-beef, then the children ran for them, squabbling for the chance to rub a finger round the tin and lick off any morsel of food they could find.

These children did not know or had forgotten what kindness was. But in a harsh world they had learnt the art of self-preservation.

After the fighting troops—who rounded up the 70,000 odd Japanese—came officers practised in colonial government. The period of the British Military Administration then began.

The 208 days of Military Administration gave the people a breathing space. They came out into the sunlight again, stretched their arms with the luxury of freedom and spoke to their neighbours without fear. After their period of suffering they expected things to be done for them.

And that was just what the military authorities did. Using their organised lines of communication they brought in food, clothing, and medical supplies for distribution, petrol to get transport moving again, mains to build up the shattered water supply, and machinery for the gas-works and power stations. They began to clear the harbour and docks ready for trade to begin, and they used their trained forces to restore law and order. On the day of their return, broadcasting started again, and on the following day, when many of the pre-war staff of the Municipality presented themselves ready for duty, a start was made on providing the essential services of the town.

Slowly, hesitantly, like a great turbine which has rusted and is now oiled and cared for again, the town came to life. The shops took down their shutters and removed Japanese signs. The street hawkers came out with their trays, bells, gongs, and particular calls. On September 7, *The Straits Times* appeared as a one-page morning paper, on the 12th, the Museum and local banks opened their doors, on the 16th, trolley buses ran a skeleton service, on the 17th, the Post Office began to accept letters and sent them free for two days because there were no stamps, on the 18th, the Cable Office opened, on the 25th, twenty-one schools admitted pupils, and on the 29th, the railway service began to operate.

As the Military Administration came to an end in March 1946, it may have seemed as if Singapore was to pick up the threads of pre-war days. But this was not to be. Never again would the people of Singapore and the British administrators fit into the same relative positions. Difficult days lay ahead with the return of civil administration.

* * *

With the return, on April 1, 1946, we must say good-bye to the old familiar Straits Settlements. The ports of Singapore, Penang, and Malacca had often quarrelled, as three healthy brothers will quarrel, but they had grown up together, three champions of freedom in trade. Now, in accordance with ad-

ministrative changes, they separated, Penang and Malacca being joined to a proposed Union of the Malay States. Singapore (with Christmas Island and the Cocos-Keeling Islands) was constituted a Crown Colony.

The Union, never to become operative, was changed to the Federation of Malaya, but the effect was the same: Kuala Lumpur, the capital, took over Singapore's status as the centre of political gravity. Malaya, as a producing country, and Singapore, as a trading island, were to go their separate ways, the Causeway between them controlled at either end by customs and immigration authorities.

To co-ordinate the policies of the divided administration the post of Commissioner-General was created. Malcolm MacDonald, with his headquarters in Singapore, was the first to hold office.

The constitution of the Colony of Singapore provided for a Governor and Commander-in-Chief, an Executive Council, a Legislative Council, and a Supreme Court with unlimited civil and criminal jurisdiction. The fabric of government was familiar, but it no longer had its former air of established authority.

This was hardly surprising since the British Empire in Asia no longer had confidence in itself. The vast number of sailors, soldiers, and airmen seen on the island since Singapore had become the head-

quarters of United Kingdom Armed Forces in the Far East had hidden the fact that Britain's retreat from Asia, already mentioned about the period of the First World War, had never been halted. Since the end of the Second World War, Labour Ministers, pleased to free their Government of expensive imperial luxuries, and America, committed to the breaking up of empires generally, had hurried the process.

These influences were alone sufficient to make the British administrators in Singapore unsure of their footing. And the administrators themselves had changed. The days of the bold, self-reliant administrator had gone, his place taken by a Civil Servant who must refer decisions to the meticulous departmental control of Whitehall.

The time was reminiscent of the last days of the East India Company when the Supreme Government of India tried to mould Singapore into one small cog of its bureaucratic machine. History had turned full circle in just under a hundred years. Even the interference with trade and the freedom of the port was repeating itself. It may have been very necessary for the democratic world to cut rubber supplies to Communist China and Russia in 1951, but it was a dangerous policy to curtail Singapore's exports and to mix politics with trade. From the time such controls were imposed, Singa-

pore no longer fitted Sir Stamford Raffles' idea of a free port.

As they had been in the 1850's, so in the 1950's the people of Singapore were roused to opposition. It was of no use the Government pointing to the good it was doing — and it was doing a great deal of good. In 1951 it could show very substantial progress in housing provided by the Improvement Trust, in the University founded two years before, and schools being built under the Five Year Plan, and in the medical services on which more than 12 million dollars was being spent that year. It could speak with emotion of Singapore being raised to the status of a City in that year of 1951, and of the City Council marking its new stature by introducing the largest budget in the history of Singapore, an expenditure of 86 million dollars. It could show that the Naval, Military and Air Force establishments were bringing wealth and employment. And, lastly, it could show that 1951 was a record trading year with imports worth 3,625 million dollars and exports 4,095 million dollars.

But the simple days of warships and gold had gone forever. Words and ideas began to mean more, and these were not the prerogative of Government.

They were not even the prerogative of the merchants, European and Asian, who had demand-

ed the Transfer in 1857. The people, which by 1951 meant a million Asians, had become articulate. They could express themselves through their guilds, their labour forces, their trade unions; and many of their spokesmen, leaders of their own choosing, were Asian orators trained in the professions.

Most of them had been through the Japanese Occupation. They accepted that British rule was preferable. But, on the other hand, they felt that Britain had failed them. They were resentful. Communist propaganda seeping through the Colony fanned their resentment. Indians, politically conscious, were settling among them with tales of how they had won their country back from the British. They were close neighbours of the Indonesians freeing themselves from Dutch control, and they followed the struggle in Indo-China which led to the expulsion of the French. The fighting in Malaya which broke out in 1948 did not spread to Singapore, but the partisans obtained arms, supplies, and money from the Colony, and Communism would certainly have become militant in Singapore had it not been for the strenuous efforts of the police force.

Unsettled by the disturbance around them, the people of Singapore began to press for their own independence. They were surprised, perhaps, to

find Government quite willing to meet them. In fact from 1946, progress in constitutional reform was steadily increasing the responsibility of the unofficial and elected elements of the Legislative Council, until by 1951, sixteen of the twenty-five members were Unofficials, nine of them elected by the constituencies. The non-communal appeal of the elections was most striking: there were Chinese, English, Eurasian, Indian, and Ceylonese among those elected, and the first woman took her seat on the Council. In that year, too, the Governor expressed the attitude of his administration in his budget speech: "In deciding what to provide for the people and in choosing the means of paying for those services. . . the final judgement lies with the people."

There was to be no Dien-Bien-Phu in Singapore. Instead an Order in Council of 1955 brought into being a new constitution for the Colony. It provided for government by a Council of Ministers and a Legislative Assembly in which twenty-five of the thirty-two members were elected by the people.

The first Chief Minister to lead the elected party was the vigorous orator David Marshall. A forceful character, flamboyant in dress, he fell trying to bring about the popular demand for independence in too short a time. He was succeeded as

Chief Minister by Lim Yew Hock, a shrewd politician, who embodied the quiet purpose and determination of the Chinese people.

Yet another Minister, the dynamic Lee Kuan Yew, the first Prime Minister of Singapore, was to rise to power on the votes of a restless populace before Turgot's fruit ripened.

By 1958 the end of Singapore's history as a Colony was in sight. The leaders changed and the political scene shifted daily, but the will of the people had become clear—there must be created a new country, *The State of Singapore*. Able men of Singapore and London met; the one side demanding, the other understanding; and they hammered out their differences until a statutory instrument, the Singapore (Constitution) Order in Council, 1958, was laid before the British Parliament on November 27. Eight months later the Governor and Commander-in-Chief, Singapore, put himself out of office and ended colonial rule on the island with a proclamation to come into operation the following day, June 3, 1959. The State of Singapore had been created.

The new Head of State—to be known by the Malay title of Yang di-Pertuan Negara—was appointed by the Queen, and was to be chosen from among persons born in Malaya (which here included Singapore); but the members of the governing

body, the Assembly, were to be elected by the citizens of Singapore. It was to have fifty-one Members, one of them the Speaker. The Prime Minister was to be the Member who commanded a majority in the Assembly.

In the first fully-elected Government, Lee Kuan Yew had an overwhelming majority, and he, with his Cabinet of Ministers, began the difficult task of guiding a State recently emerged from colonial rule. Internal self-government with all its complexities in a cosmopolitan city was his responsibility. But not this alone. Defence—with the continued occupation of bases on the island—and the most part of external affairs, was to be controlled by the Government of the United Kingdom, through the holder of a newly-created post, the United Kingdom Commissioner. And this left in the hands of the Prime Minister two responsibilities which Sir Stamford Raffles, one hundred and forty years before, had said should grow up together, trade and cultural relations with other countries.

This then was what the Government of Singapore had become since the days when William Farquhar, the first Resident, had strolled leisurely about the "factory" with his stick and his dogs. "As the convenience and accommodation of the port is an object of considerable importance," Raffles had told him, "you will direct your early attention to it. . . "

Trade is still the function of the City and port, the basic means of livelihood of its 1¼ million inhabitants.

The convenience of the port now included the miles of docks, wharves, and harbours administered by the Singapore Harbour Board and the Master Attendant, the new international airport at Paya Lebar, the complicated network of radio and submarine cable links to all parts of the world, and the many other services which go to make up a great port.

Trade, during the years which had passed since a single Chinese junk had called once a year, had risen to astronomical figures. In 1955, exports of rubber had reached 526,657 tons worth 1,384 million dollars, petroleum products, now in second place, over 3 million tons worth 374 million dollars, and tin 33,322 tons worth 202 million dollars. They, together with other imports and exports (but not including trade with the Federation of Malaya) gave a total turnover of more than five thousand million Malayan dollars.

The statistics of people and trade tell their own story of the rise of Singapore since the day Sir Stamford Raffles and the Temenggong Abdur Rahman met under the clump of coconut palms. On that night of January 29, 1819, the camp fires of the East India Company's sepoys first lighted up the Singapore River; now the fires of political change

have been lit but have not yet settled to a steady glow.

Chief among those who will soon have Singapore's destiny in their hands are the children we met when the British troops returned to Singapore in 1945. Will they know what Disraeli once said of a nation, that it is "a work of art and a work of time"? The City has been built up brick upon brick by succeeding generations. It lies now with this new generation to ensure that Singapore becomes one of the great city states which have left their mark on the history of the world.

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