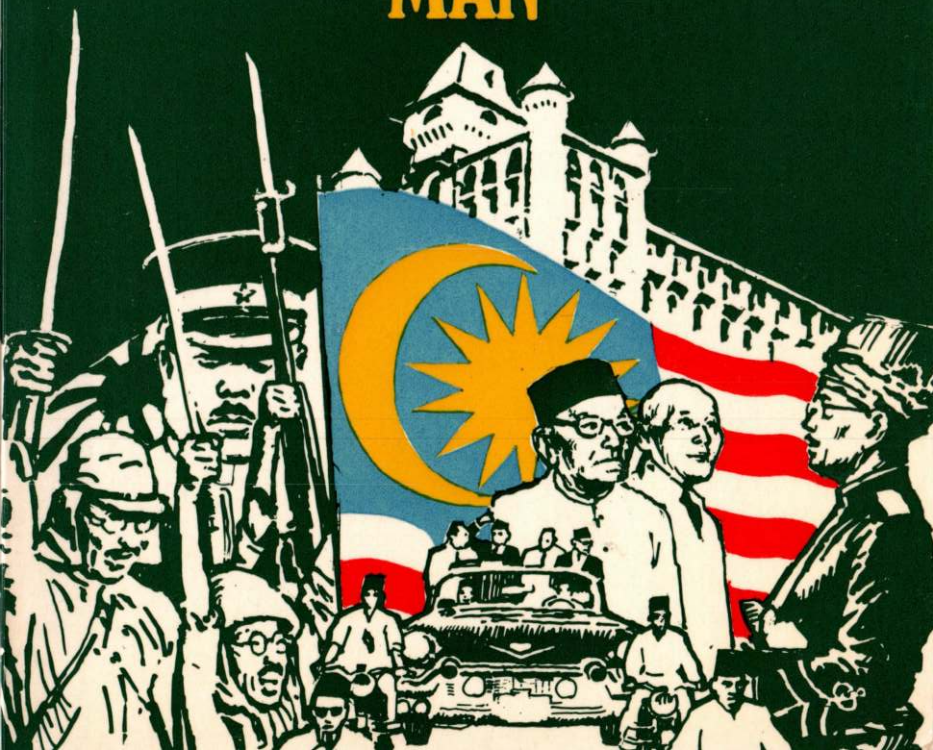


THIO CHAN BEE

EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF AN ORDINARY MAN



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OF AN
ORDINARY MAN**

THIO CHAN BEE

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INTRODUCTION

I am sorry that I did not know Thio Chan Bee when he was a 'young rascal', for he must have been an attractive representative of that species of human beings. But I have enjoyed the pleasure of his friendship through more than a quarter of a century since.

At times he and I worked closely together to help certain causes in Malaya and Singapore, including the crucial one in the late 1940s and early 1950s of developing mutually trustful, genial, co-operative relations between the Malays, Chinese, Indians and other racial communities there. As a result of the wise efforts of several individuals – and especially of the Malay leader Dato Onn bin Ja'afar and the Chinese leader Tan Cheng-Lock in Malaya (as Thio Chan Bee describes in some of his chapters) – that aim was gradually achieved. This was largely a result of the protracted and sometimes very difficult discussions in the little-known Communities Liaison Committee throughout 1949 and 1950.

As a consequence Malaya (now West Malaysia) has been almost continuously since it gained independence seventeen years ago a model of a united, peaceful and harmonious multi-racial nation, from which other peoples in regions all round the world where inter-racial tensions are creating dangerous situations could learn a great deal.

The official documents which will reveal much of the story from 1946 onwards are still not released for publication; but Thio Chan Bee relates in this book those parts of it with which

he was familiar, and in which he played a very significant role. That was only one of the fine causes to which he gave important aid in South-East Asia and beyond.

He has always striven unobtrusively and confidentially, with no selfish motive, but a desire to serve his fellow men to the utmost of his ability, a quiet yet great ability. His deep Christian faith and his communication through prayer and meditation with God have inspired his thoughts and actions, as he recounts in his often very moving book. It throws beams of light on several important events during the last few decades and is a distinct contribution to contemporary history.

MALCOLM MACDONALD

FOREWORD

This book by a distinguished educationist who devoted several decades to inspiring the young, and who subsequently took part in public life in the unfamiliar role of a politician, is to be welcomed, because his first-hand account of important events in which he took an active part should correct any wrong impressions created by books written by persons with imperfect understanding of this part of the world.

The author of this highly readable and amusing book is a citizen of the world. Ever since the end of the last war he has striven to build a bridge between Malays and non-Malays in both Singapore and Malaysia, and it is well that he has written down his experiences, so that members of the public are made aware of the efforts that have been and are being made behind the scenes by responsible persons who have the good of the two territories at heart.

Apart from Dr Thio's efforts in bridging the gap that separates the two major races, the account of his personal life should also serve as an inspiration to many a young man and woman. After his father's failure in business in Sumatra, his family had to break up, he himself going to live with a relative in Singapore. There by dint of hard work he distinguished himself in school and luckily for the cause of education, he elected to remain at his *alma mater* as a teacher, rising to the position of headmaster at one of the most famous of schools in Singapore, and finally becoming Education Secretary to the Methodist Mission.

Readers will find that Dr Thio is a devout Christian who believes in the power of prayer. But those who are privileged to know him in the flesh know that he is no bigot, but a man of sense, and for all his seriousness, a man bubbling over with good humour, with a perpetual twinkle in his eye, fun to be with, and one who believes passionately in the efficacy of human effort and who is prepared to go to endless trouble to make this world a happier place for all, regardless of race and religion.

Long may he be spared to serve his fellow men.

TUN MOHAMED SUFFIAN

*Lord President's Chambers
Kuala Lumpur*

PREFACE

When the author proposed for the hand of a young lady teacher from a conservative Chinese family, her father insisted on a personal interview before giving his decision.

The young suitor went through a nerve-racking cross-examination. At the end of it, the father gave the mother a frank assessment of their prospective son-in-law: 'Only an ordinary man!'

And Mr Ong Kim-Lian was right. As a prosperous merchant in Singapore, he had opportunities to marry his favourite daughter to a graduate from a British or American university, or the son of a banker or merchant magnate. To his great surprise and disappointment, his daughter had stubbornly chosen a struggling schoolteacher who might never be able to provide her with the material comforts of life.

However, towards the end of his days, Mr Ong Kim-Lian was somewhat mollified, for he saw that his son-in-law, though an ordinary man, had learned the secret of extraordinary living.

This book is neither an autobiography nor a history of Malaysia or Singapore. It is rather a selection of adventures from the life of an Asian schoolmaster, some of which have had far-reaching consequences.

Some of the characters mentioned in this book are still alive. Others have gone but have left corroborative evidence of the historic events described herein.

I would like to express my gratitude to the many friends who

have encouraged me to record these adventures, particularly to the following:

To Mr Malcolm MacDonald and Tun Mohamed Suffian for the Introduction and Foreword respectively,

To Mr Garth Lean and Miss Mary Meekings for editing the manuscript for publication,

To Messrs Graham Turner, James Hore-Ruthven, Myron Whitney, Professor Neville Haile, Air Vice-Marshal (Retd) D. N. K. Blair-Oliphant, Tun Tan Siew Sin and the late Tan Sri Syed Jaafar Albar for their suggestions and criticisms,

To Mr Sim Boon Howe and other volunteer friends who typed the manuscript,

To my wife, Ong Hay Way, and daughter, Professor Eunice Thio (Mrs Ang Kheng Leng) for their encouragement and patience.

THIO CHAN BEE

April 15, 1977

YOUNG RASCALS

I have always had a soft spot in my heart for young rascals. They remind me of what I was at their age.

When I look back over the years to my boyhood in Northern Sumatra, for example, I recall several incidents where I enjoyed deceiving my elders.

My great-uncle, Twa Peh, had studied in Amoy, China, and became a Christian. Although a Presbyterian, he helped the Methodists to establish their first school and church in Sumatra. He insisted that every member of his large family should attend church regularly. There were three services every Sunday – the Sunday School in English, the morning service in English and Indonesian Malay, and the evening service in the Fukien Chinese dialect; and my uncle's eldest son, Chan-Seng, and I had to be present at all three. We decided we could not sit through three dreary sermons but, as we dared not disobey my great-uncle, we worked out a plan whereby we could please ourselves and satisfy him as well.

Every Sunday evening we made sure that great-uncle and aunt saw us enter the church hall with them. We always sat in the back pews nearest the main entrance. We had noticed that the evening service invariably began with a hymn, followed by an opening prayer. After about fifty minutes, it ended with another hymn followed by the benediction.

When the congregation bowed their heads and closed their eyes for the opening prayer, my cousin and I would quickly slip out of our seats and leave the church. Then we would

spend about fifty minutes playing with our friends within hearing distance of the church. As soon as we heard the strains of the closing hymn, we would move swiftly to the church doorway. Then during the benediction, we would return silently to our seats and stand respectfully waiting for great-uncle and aunt to pass along the aisle on their way out. We received no complaints.

My great-uncle's elder sister, Twa Kor, was an earnest Buddhist. One morning she placed her offerings of fried and boiled chicken, duck, fresh fruits and sweetmeats on the family altar as an act of worship to our ancestral spirits. I was a frequent visitor to her home to play with her second son. Unknown to her, I was specially drawn to a plump leg of chicken. I snatched it, dived behind the crimson embroidered cloth covering the lower portion of the altar table, and in that hiding place thoroughly enjoyed the stolen titbit.

On another occasion, I visited the home of a schoolmate and discovered that his eldest sister had money in a secret hiding place. I arranged matters so that when the money disappeared, suspicion fell on my schoolmate, who was given a painful beating by his mother. I regretted seeing him being wrongly punished, but I did not have either the courage or decency to confess.

Of course, there were many wholesome forms of recreation of which the older folks approved and which we young people enjoyed thoroughly and my boyhood days in Sumatra were among the happiest in my life, but they soon came to an end. My father's business suddenly crashed. Our home was broken up. My two brothers, three sisters and I found ourselves homeless and dependent on the charity of others. We could not even stay together in one house. My elder brother and I joined my father in Singapore to continue our education, while our three sisters and the youngest brother went with my mother to live with relatives in Java. I suffered many of the hardships and

privations of the poor, and became embittered against society. Every morning my brother and I had to sweep the floor, clean up the drains, dust the doormats and wipe the benches of a billiard hall before we could have our breakfast of half a loaf of bread and a cup of black coffee. A large cast-off wooden box became my desk, and I studied by the light of a small oil lamp with a piece of cardboard to keep the heat away from my eyes. We could not afford to buy chairs. I had to be content with a bamboo stool and bend low over my books.

The contrast between the early carefree days of my boyhood spent in a happy home, among loving members of the same family, and my new life with grudging distant relatives in the strange city of Singapore, was so great that I often felt depressed and longed to return to my uncle's home in Sumatra. However, I was determined to continue my education. So day after day I studied doggedly, like a person serving a penal sentence, waiting for the day of release.

One night, in my loneliness, I decided to test whether God and Jesus, about whom I had so often heard in church, were real. I remembered a hymn from my Sunday School days which began with the words, 'What a friend we have in Jesus'. Was this theory, fiction, or fact? I read parts of the New Testament daily with a new purpose – to find reality. One evening, there came a persistent thought, a kind of silent whisper into my mind, 'Cheer up, my boy. Life will not always be like this. Carry on.'

Encouraged, I persevered in my studies. The desire to be rid of poverty was the driving force of my life. I looked forward to the time when I could earn enough to bring together my mother, my two brothers and three sisters, and in a new home restore them to a happy life that had been terminated seven years before.

In school my hard work produced results. Though the youngest in my class and grade, I topped the examination pass

list successively for three years – at the Straits Settlements Government Standard Seven Examination, the Cambridge Junior Local and Senior Local Examinations. Towards the end of my last year the Principal urged our class, the seniors of 1920, to take up teaching as a profession and join the staff of our *alma mater*, the Anglo-Chinese School, Singapore.

As a result of his appeal, three of us, the school athletic champion, the class artist, and I decided to make teaching our life career. So, early in the following year, we reported for duty as student teachers in our old school. The lady supervisor of the Junior School looked us over from head to toe, considered our school records, and appointed the athletic champion to be a relief student teacher, while the artist and I became full time class masters in charge of primary pupils. And what pupils! Their ages ranged from eleven to twenty-two years, and one of them was a married man with two children. And I was sixteen years old – and their class teacher!

I realised that I could not hope to maintain discipline over grown-up students by force. I decided to be frank with them and told them I could help them to learn faster if they would co-operate with me in maintaining an atmosphere of systematic work. This policy of frankness and agreement on common goals seemed to work, and at the end of the year I was put in charge of a similar class.

In those years my chief aim as a teacher was to produce ambitious, industrious and outstanding young intellectuals who could excel in life's competitive race. I regarded students without any ambition as birds without wings. They would never be able to rise and fly to higher levels of achievement. Determination and ambition, I stressed repeatedly, must be the main-spring of those who wished to succeed.

My success formula was simple: 'Aspiration and Inspiration plus Perspiration plus Perseverance = Success'. And this formula did produce outstanding results.

The Special III-B Class of 1924 was an example. Applying my formula, we succeeded – twenty-five out of thirty-two were double promoted. The Principal was so delighted with the results that he asked me to follow up my pupils. Thus I became their class master for the next two years. At the end of the first year, the two top boys of my class topped all the candidates, numbering about one hundred and forty, from all the classes in that grade. The first boy was thereupon double promoted. In the following year, the second boy from that same class topped the pass list, and he too obtained a double promotion. In the third year, the third boy of this group also topped the pass list.

Our relationship became more and more friendly so that gradually we became like older brother and young brothers. They were never tired of listening to stories of great men and women of the past. I encouraged them to read widely beyond the normal range of students of their age. They joined the public library and read non-fiction meant for adults. In subsequent years I rejoiced to see many of them rise to positions of leadership in their different professions.

And yet there was something missing in my formula for success. I became aware of this deficiency through an extraordinary chain of circumstances. It was my practice on Sundays to conduct a Sunday School class to which boys from both government and mission schools were welcome. Sometimes as many as forty to fifty students attended this class.

One Sunday morning, I announced the subject of my talk for the following Sunday. On the blackboard I wrote in large letters the word: 'Ambition'. Below that I wrote the words of Paul in the first verse of the third chapter of his first letter to Timothy: 'This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work'. And below the text I added these words: 'Birds without *wings* cannot fly. Students without *ambition* cannot rise.'

I told my students that on the following Sunday I would share with them the secret of success in life. They should not miss it.

After the Sunday School class, a friend I met outside the church lent me a book by A. J. Russell, entitled *One Thing I Know*. When I reached home I glanced through some of the pages, and was about to put down the book when I was astonished to see on the page facing me the very words I had written on the blackboard that morning:

'And Paul said to Timothy, "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work".'

But the author added the verses following, and these I had overlooked!

'A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous . . . not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he falls into the condemnation of the devil. . . .'

Russell went on to explain how, in his own experience, ambition had led him astray. Ambition, he said, was really plain selfishness or 'avarice on human stilts', greed in a more subtle form. In the pursuit of his ambition, Russell had become an utterly selfish man. However, after he had attained his goal, he found that the success he had sought so long had turned into a glowworm in his hand. It shone, but it was still a worm. Besides, the glow did not last. The worm remained! He therefore warned his readers against making the same mistake. Ambition should never be the main motivation in life.

To me, the coincidence was too startling to be ignored. I read on. I realised that the subject I had announced that morning had been based on my own selfish interpretation of Paul's advice to Timothy.

My confidence in my favourite formula for success was

shattered. I decided that there was a special message for me. So I continued reading the book. Then I came to the part where the writer held a silent dialogue with God in his mind and heart. He had received the thought, 'No man can do My work unless he is wholly Mine'. He realised that if he sincerely wished to have God's power and superior wisdom, he must be willing also to accept God's control over his life.

At first I rejected Russell's interpretation of ambition. I justified myself by arguing as follows:

There was no scope for an Asian like myself to develop his talents in a British Colony. I planned one day to emigrate to China. My ambition to go to China was surely not selfish. Furthermore, I rationalised, when I had achieved my ambition, I would be able to do much good for my fellowmen! I had drawn up a Five Year Plan for my future; also a Ten Year Plan.

A thought then flashed back, 'How do you know that your Five Year Plan will be workable? Do you really know what is going to happen in the next five years?' (I admitted that I did not.) 'If your boss in China were to ask you to do something wrong, would you do it? If you agree to do it, then you would have a troubled conscience. If you don't, then he would sack you! And what of your ambition then?' (I saw the point.)

Another thought came, 'Why don't you put your trust in My greater wisdom and power? If I have loved you and helped you all these years, since you were a boy in school, can you not trust Me to lead you in the years ahead?'

Looking back I realised that God had truly been my strength and help through many difficult situations. He had become real to me through many personal experiences.

Then came the thought, 'You blamed your father for breaking your mother's heart and the family home through his own weaknesses. But you have the same weaknesses. Unless you have My help and power to control them, you may repeat the same tragedy in your own family life.'

That really shook me. Was it true? Yes, it was.

The silent dialogue went on. 'What is the difference between two pails of water, one with a big hole and another with a small one? Eventually, both will be empty, except that the one with the big hole becomes empty faster. Therefore, absolute surrender of the self for Me to control with My superior wisdom, love and power, is the only way in life that will be completely satisfying to you to the very end.'

I struggled against that thought. I argued. I rationalised. I loved my ambition – my Five Year Plan and my Ten Year Plan – very, very much. But the challenging thoughts persisted.

At last, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, on Sunday, 6 May 1934, I realised my deep need and made my decision. I said to Him that if He would give me His power over my weaknesses, and His superior wisdom and guidance regarding my future, then I would let Him guide me without any reservation whatsoever.

After I had made that agreement with God a new kind of peace, joy and power filled my mind and heart. He seemed to say to me, 'I will honour this agreement and friendship with you'.

That decision was the beginning of a new and adventurous journey.

In the past, my prayers to God usually had been one-way monologues. I had asked Him for help, for advice, for guidance, and then I had said, 'Amen!' and hung up the receiver of my spiritual radiophone. I did not wait quietly for His advice or instruction. Thus I had given God absolutely no chance to give me the wise guidance I needed.

I now decided that my line of communication with God must remain unbroken. The secret was the two-way prayer, the two-way dialogue, in the silence of one's mind and heart. Where His guidance seemed to be clear and strong, I would obey. Where it was not clear, I would wait. Where no thoughts

came but only my own, I would wait. Thoughts that were selfish, dishonest, impure and lacking in love for others could not possibly come from God. I rejected them.

After such an experience, the Sunday School lesson on ambition had to be drastically changed. And so it was a revised formula of success that I discussed with my students – one that could sustain a person throughout his life, up hill and down into the valley.

Towards the end of 1937, I heard unofficially that a certain group of high-spirited and mischievous boys would be promoted to my class in January. I was warned by several of my fellow teachers that I would have a miserable time trying to discipline them. One colleague even advised me to see the Principal and ask for a transfer to another class.

However, having been a mischievous boy myself, I decided that I would welcome this class and not be put off by other people's fears.

I had heard that this group of boys had been very troublesome for two years, and had received a record number of thrashings from the Principal, Mr T. W. Hinch, a kind-hearted though stern-faced Britisher with a brush moustache like Charlie Chaplin's.

However, they were unrepentant and defiant. They still made life miserable for several teachers. One teacher, who lost his fountain pen, rightly suspected that the culprit must have been one of the boys in this class! They were very intelligent boys, but when bright students go wrong, they usually manage to cover up their tracks skilfully.

Fortunately I had learned the secret of a new approach. 'If we want the world, the school and the class to be better, let us begin with ourselves.' That was the challenge I put to them. Soon the teacher who had lost his fountain pen was surprised when a boy went up to him one day and said, 'Sir, I am sorry, but I took your pen'.

The concentrated energy of this active and intelligent group of students gradually turned from mischief making to serious study. They also decided that they would print and publish the first class magazine. They also suggested to me a method of helping the weaker students in their class. If the seating of the boys could be so arranged that two bright students were placed in each row, then the bright ones could help the others during their spare time. I carried out their suggestion.

When the results of the Overseas Senior Cambridge Examinations were announced in the following year, it was found that the seniors of 1938 had helped to achieve two academic records, namely, the largest number of Grade I passes and the highest percentage of passes in the history of the school. Thus a problem class of rebellious students had become a record-breaking team of highly responsible student leaders.

Even after leaving school, they were still thinking of how they could help their *alma mater*. They asked me if I would assist them in reviving the school Old Boys' Association, which had been dormant for nearly ten years. They said that they would do all the routine work of addressing envelopes and informing other old boys. I went to one prominent old boy, Mr Tan Chin Tuan, who was a banker, and explained the situation. We invited him to be the President of the revived Anglo-Chinese School Old Boys' Association. He agreed on condition that I should serve as the Secretary of the Association. Thus the Singapore A.C.S. Old Boys' Association was revived with the enthusiastic support of the seniors of 1938. From that year it has grown from strength to strength.

The new approach had proved its effectiveness in school life. Would it be equally effective among adults in the world of business, public affairs and politics?

DARK CLOUDS OVER THE PACIFIC

One morning the thought came to me that there was one person I should contact. He was a Japanese schoolmaster, Mr Matao Otaguro, whose goodwill towards his enemies surpassed that of the leaders of his nation.

In the years before Pearl Harbour, he appeared to most of us in Singapore as just a quiet, bespectacled schoolmaster on the staff of the Japanese Elementary School in Waterloo Street.

But when the Japanese forces invaded South-East Asia in December, 1941, he returned to Singapore in the uniform of a high ranking civilian officer of the Japanese Imperial Army. His responsibility was to help the Indian nationalist leader, Subhas Chandra Bose, recruit and organise an Indian National Army from among the British Indian soldiers who had surrendered to the Japanese. This army was to assist the Japanese forces in the invasion of India.

During the First World War of 1914-18, Japan had been a staunch ally of Britain. Consequently, after that war, members of the Japanese community in Singapore were regarded with respect by both Asians and Europeans. Also, Japan was the only Asian nation which had risen to the position of a world power. As a people, moreover, the Japanese were outwardly more polite. They were efficient as owners of the popular ten-cent stores, well stocked with cheap toys, attractive crockery and glassware, inexpensive textiles and decorative lacquer ornaments.

In addition to the small businessmen, there were the

respectable and dignified Japanese doctors and dentists who provided professional services at comparatively low rates. And the Japanese photographers with their neat and modern studios were to be found in practically every town in South-East Asia. To thousands of labourers and schoolchildren, the Japanese were popular as the ubiquitous street vendors supplying cheap cakes, sweets, iced drinks and the refreshing *ayer batu kacang*, a nutritious dish of boiled red beans and syrup, topped with shredded ice.

And then in 1931-2, the Japanese army invaded Manchuria and set up the puppet kingdom of Manchukuo. This was an act of aggression which shocked the world and spoiled Japan's image everywhere.

In particular it hurt the feelings of the Chinese. In Singapore, the Overseas Chinese were disillusioned and angry, and some of their leaders organised a boycott of all Japanese goods and enterprises. Later, Chinese toughs tried to smash up the Japanese ten-cent stores and intimidated their customers.

The British in Singapore were in an embarrassing position. They were officially allies of the Japanese, and yet they could not condone the invasion of Manchuria. However, law and order in Singapore had to be maintained. So anti-Japanese demonstrations and boycotts were declared unlawful.

Nevertheless Sino-Japanese tension continued to increase. Having conquered Manchuria, the Japanese forces advanced southward, practically unchecked. The hopeless struggles of the Chinese were reported daily in the local papers and further aroused the emotions of the Overseas Chinese who formed about 75 per cent of the population of Singapore.

It was during this period that I first met Matao Otaguro.

One evening, he appeared at a Sunday service in a church attended mainly by English-speaking Overseas Chinese. He spoke on the words of Paul in his letter to the Corinthians (I Cor. 13), exhorting his listeners to practise faith, hope and

love in their relations with one another. He appealed to the Chinese community to try to understand the predicament of the Japanese in Singapore and show faith, hope and understanding towards them despite the unfortunate incidents in Manchuria.

He spoke in vain. The congregation appeared uneasy and unresponsive. But the sincerity of that Japanese schoolmaster was evident. Inwardly I felt challenged. While disagreeing with him, I admired his courage and conviction.

For a long time after that incident my mind frequently went back to the scene where he had stood alone among the Overseas Chinese, pleading for goodwill and understanding among the people in Singapore. Subsequently I heard that his wife had died and that in sorrow he had given up his one man crusade for inter-racial goodwill. I felt sorry for him. But what could an ordinary man like myself do in such a situation?

However, after the discovery which came my way on 6 May 1934, a new factor had come into my life, changing completely my outlook and attitude towards my fellow men. I had been given the thought to rebuild bridges in human relationships, beginning first with my own colleagues in school and with Matao Otaguro. I decided to make discreet enquiries regarding his whereabouts. I learned that he lived in a cul-de-sac off Middle Road, where a large number of Japanese resided. He had married again.

Since it was dangerous for me to call on him personally, I sent him a letter through a Japanese student in my school. He replied inviting me to visit his home for tea with him and his wife! This was most unexpected – and not a very pleasant prospect either. It was risky for a Chinese to call on a Japanese in an area frequented by Chinese thugs.

Nevertheless the thought came to me that I should not reject his offer of friendship.

Mr and Mrs Otaguro received me very courteously and

served me tea and cakes in the Japanese manner. I explained that I had not forgotten what he had said in the Straits Chinese Methodist Church a few years before, and that I had had the persistent thought to contact him and help him to rebuild bridges of goodwill between our peoples.

He appreciated what I had said, and we agreed to keep in touch with each other and wait for a more opportune time.

Unfortunately the international scene worsened with each passing year. Then, one day in the latter part of 1941, the local press reported that all Japanese residents in Singapore had been ordered by the Japanese government to return to Japan. This was ominous. A curtain of silence dropped between Otaguro and myself.

On the night of 7 December 1941, the people of Singapore rested from their day's activities with little fear for their future.

Then suddenly, in the early hours of the morning, my wife and I were literally shaken out of our slumber by the sound of exploding bombs. After each series of explosions, we could feel the ground trembling beneath us, while the windows rattled violently.

'What's that?' my wife asked apprehensively.

'I think the Japanese have attacked Singapore,' I replied. 'They have decided on war, not peace.'

I looked at my bedside alarm clock. It was about 4.30 a.m. We heard our neighbours talking excitedly. Then we went out to the verandah of our house overlooking Bukit Timah Road, the canal, and Dunearn Road beyond. These two roads were the highways linking the island of Singapore with the mainland State of Johore and the Malay Peninsula. We were surprised to see the street lights still shining brightly, although the air raid sirens had already sounded and searchlights were piercing the sky.

We tuned in to Radio Singapore and heard that indeed Singapore had been bombed. Japanese planes had also raided

Kota Bahru, Hong Kong, Manila and Pearl Harbour in far away Hawaii. Later we learned of the near total destruction of the powerful American Pacific fleet based there.

After the excitement of this first air raid in Singapore, most of the workers in the city were not in the mood to work, preferring to exchange news and views. I was then a presiding examiner at the Cambridge School Certificate Examination Centre at St Joseph's Institution. Teachers, invigilators and students were all at the centre ready to carry on with the examination. Some of the candidates asked me what they should do if another raid were to occur during the examination. My reply was that, unless official instructions were received to the contrary, all the candidates must carry on as if nothing unusual had occurred. Thus, throughout the examination which lasted about 10 days, in spite of wailing sirens and bombings, the students and teachers carried on as usual. On every parcel of examination scripts I wrote some comments for the examiners at Cambridge in England, describing the difficulties under which the candidates had answered their questions.

Morale was high despite the disastrous events of the first day of the war in the Pacific.

The next day produced another shock. The pride of the British Navy in the Far East, *HMS Prince of Wales* and *HMS Repulse*, had been attacked by the Japanese dare-devil pilots and both battleships had sunk with their guns blazing.

Singapore radio broadcasts and local newspapers sought to minimise the importance of the naval disaster and exhorted the people to remain strong, loyal and confident that better days were ahead. Massive re-inforcements were coming, so we were told. Singapore as the Gibraltar of the East could be held by the British indefinitely. We were thus comforted and reassured.

Unfortunately the Japanese knew that the defences of Singapore were incomplete, and that the whole of the northern

portion of Singapore island was unfortified and open to a surprise attack from the mainland. Those responsible for the fortification of Singapore had assumed wrongly that any serious invasion must come from the seaward side of the island.

Day by day news came of the rapid advance of the Japanese troops from Kota Bahru in northern Malaya southward, down the Malay Peninsula towards Singapore. We gathered from press reports that the British forces, depending on conventional methods of warfare and the maintenance of their rear lines of communication for re-inforcements and supplies, were unable to cope with the enemy forces trained in jungle warfare. Ipoh, the capital of the State of Perak, fell round about Christmas Day, and Kampar, the mining town, at the end of the year. Kuala Lumpur, the federal capital of Malaya, however, was still behind the British defence line.

About this time, I received an unexpected visitor. He was a leading citizen who was held in high esteem by the British Governor and senior Government officials. He told me privately that much as we had all hoped that the British would be able to repel the Japanese invaders, the latest signs were disturbing. Although the public utterances of British officials were meant to boost the morale of the civilian population, in private many of them were apprehensive and were sending away their women and children.

Therefore, my friend said, he too had to make plans for the safety of his family. Since he regarded me as one of his close friends, he wished me to consider this proposal: he would make the necessary arrangements to enable my wife and only daughter to go with his wife and three children to Australia. He would bear all the expenses of the journey and throughout the war, until we ourselves could rejoin our families.

I told my wife about his wonderfully generous offer, but there were complications. Firstly, she did not want to leave me

behind. I had had a series of ear operations, and she was the only one who could give my ear its daily dressing. Also, according to Chinese custom it would not be proper for her to leave behind her old father and mother, because filial piety was very important in the eyes of the Chinese. Nevertheless, we went to see her parents to ask for their views. They too were not sure what we should do.

When we returned home, we prayed for God's guidance. The thought came to me that if I was among the first to send my wife and daughter out of Singapore, such action would demoralise our friends who had looked to us for advice. My wife agreed. She felt that she would not be able to endure a prolonged separation from husband and parents in a foreign country. So we decided to thank our friend for his kind offer, and explain why we were not able to take advantage of it.

Then news came that Kuala Lumpur had fallen, and the British forces had retreated further southward. There was now real panic among both Europeans and Asians in Singapore. People began to apply feverishly for passports and reservations on ships to Australia, India, Europe and the then Dutch East Indies. At this juncture my wife and I wondered if we had not made a big mistake.

In late January 1942, we heard that the British troops had retreated to within about a hundred miles of Singapore. My sister, wife and daughter now began to reproach me for having been too concerned for the feelings and welfare of others but not for members of my own family.

Their words hurt me deeply. Were they right? Had I been wrong? As more gloomy news came in over the radio, I talked to God as to a Father. 'Dear God, we decided to depend on You for security, for guidance, for practically everything, and now things have turned out very badly for us. If ever my wife and daughter were injured or ill-treated by the Japanese, my

faith in You would become a laughing stock to others. Please don't fail us in our time of need, and protect us all so that out of this fiery trial our faith may emerge strengthened.'

Would this cry for help be answered?

3

THE SIEGE AND FALL OF SINGAPORE

The Japanese planes were now bombing Singapore repeatedly, and there was great difficulty in travelling to and from the city. Many had decided that if they could not escape by sea, then they would go to the countryside to avoid the shelling of the city.

The government was already evacuating a continuous stream of people, mostly European civilians, in the troopships that had brought in reinforcements. Hopeful rumours were spread that the Americans were on the way to relieve Singapore. Not realising how disastrous the Pearl Harbour losses had been to the American Navy, we hoped against hope for the early arrival of the relief forces that were really non-existent.

The end of January drew near, and the British forces had retreated towards Johore Bahru, the last town on the mainland of Malaya still in British hands. Then on 1 or 2 February, we heard that the British forces had been withdrawn completely from Johore Bahru, and the Causeway itself had been blown up to prevent the Japanese from making an overland attack on the island fortress of Singapore. The Gibraltar of the East was now in a state of siege.

From the verandah of my home on the first floor, we could see the British troops marching into Singapore city, sometimes in formation and sometimes just stragglers, dirty, bedraggled and weary. Fortunately, the Japanese had decided not to press on into Singapore immediately. The citizens of Singapore now knew that there was no hope whatsoever of a British counter

offensive for a considerable period of time. Meanwhile, what could they expect? A long siege? The rapidity of the Japanese advance had eroded our confidence in the impregnability of the fortress of Singapore.

'Still we must never give up hope,' we said, comforting one another.

Among those who remained, determined to continue the resistance, were the young Chinese patriots who had been hostile to Japan ever since the invasion of Manchuria. They had organised themselves into a reckless force of guerillas and had offered their services to the British authorities. The government welcomed them, realising that they needed all the local help they could get.

One of those known to be hostile to the Japanese was my eldest brother-in-law, Ong Kiat-Soo. He was one of the leaders appointed by the British government in Singapore to rally those Chinese volunteer workers. He would be a marked man, if the Japanese succeeded in taking over Singapore. He would be among the very first on the death list. But what about other members of his immediate family and his relatives? The prospect before us was particularly hazardous and grim.

The blowing up of part of the Johore Causeway had meant cutting off the water supply of Singapore from its main source in Johore. Henceforth we had to depend on the limited supply in two small reservoirs within the island. Many friends again called on me and urged us to run away from Singapore while there was still time. A number of them planned immediately to leave for Java. They revived in us fears of what would happen to the civilian population of Singapore, particularly to the women and children, once the Japanese soldiers had full control of the island. Again I regretted having declined the kind offer of our friend.

In desperation, we now made plans to flee to Java, although we wondered whether Java would be safer than Singapore. I

made enquiries about obtaining a visa and was told that the Dutch Consul-General had already flown to Java! Meanwhile, the Singapore government had announced that women and children, and also men not in the essential services, could leave Singapore by whatever means available. Everything was now in a state of confusion.

On the other hand, several friends advised us that it was too late to think of leaving Singapore, since all possible routes of escape, by land, sea and air, were already under the control of the Japanese forces.

We consulted our neighbours and found that they too were bewildered. Our good friends living about half a mile away, Mr Seah Eck-Jim and family, however, decided that they would remain in Singapore.

His son-in-law, Dr Choo Joo-Kong, had driven with his family all the way from Kuantan on the east coast down to Singapore, seeking safety from the advancing Japanese forces. If they succeeded in crossing the Straits, only three-quarters of a mile wide, then it would be dangerous for us to remain where we were in the Bukit Timah Road area. We would be on the main road along which the Japanese forces would advance and fight their way into the city. He therefore suggested that we all take refuge in the Tan Tock Seng Hospital compound, about three miles away, which the Japanese might regard as a protected place.

The British authorities had asked my eldest brother-in-law, Ong Kiat-Soo, and his colleagues to try to escape to Java and join the British forces again, perhaps in Australia or India. He told us and my father-in-law that he would have to leave his wife and children behind. My father-in-law then suggested that we should prepare an alternative hiding place in the rural area, so that if it should be more dangerous to stay in the city, then we would all go to a relative's coconut estate. We agreed and sent some clothes to the house of this relative. My father-in-law

had an attap house hastily erected, and also constructed an underground air raid shelter in anticipation of a long siege.

One evening, we noticed that the Japanese bombardment had become more intense and continuous. The shells shrieked throughout the night. The next morning, on 9 February, we heard that the Japanese had succeeded in establishing a foothold in the north-western swampy area of Singapore.

The next day the news was even worse. We heard that fighting had extended right down to the tenth mile of Bukit Timah Road itself. On the following day, 11 February, the strategic Bukit Timah (Tin Hill) was lost to the Japanese, and fighting was taking place only about three miles from where we lived at the fourth mile of Bukit Timah Road.

Our house faced the main road, and we could see tired and hungry British soldiers making their way towards the city. Their mud-splattered uniforms showed that they had been fighting in swampy areas. Drenched with perspiration, grim and pale, many were munching loaves of bread obtained from the roadside coffee shops. We felt sorry for them, but there was nothing we could do. They were retreating to Tanglin Barracks or to some other military camp in the city.

Still reports were circulating among the city folks that the 'Yankees' were coming and might arrive in time to save Singapore. Thus hope alternated with despair as we looked at the signs of retreat all around us.

Then we saw several British field guns rolling down Bukit Timah Road and lining up in front of our house at the fourth mile! The gunners pointed the guns northwestward, towards Bukit Timah village. We also noticed from our first floor verandah that the water flowing down Bukit Timah canal had turned pinkish in colour. Blood must have been shed in the upper part of the canal – the scene of heavy fighting between the British forces and the Chinese Dalco guerillas on one side, and the Japanese soldiers on the other. We realised that if we

remained longer in our home, we would soon be in the midst of front-line fighting and caught in the cross-fire. Fortunately our car and our driver were still with us. We went quickly to the home of our friend, Seah Eck-Jim, and consulted with him and his son-in-law, Dr Choo. We agreed that there was now no time to lose, and that we should all move out of our homes and seek refuge in the Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

We quickly packed some clothes, foodstuffs, blankets and two small mattresses, and loaded them on top of our small Austin. In addition to our Malay driver, there were five of us – my wife, daughter, sister, an old maidservant and myself.

We took a last look around our home and decided to pray together. We did not know whether we would ever come back safe and sound, and whether the home would be in ruins. We prayed that God might spare us so that we could continue to serve Him. Our daughter took a glass of tea and shared it with all of us. And then she broke down and wept.

Before we left, my wife spoke to an Indian night-watchman working for a neighbour two doors away, and asked him to help look after our home. She promised that we would reward him when we returned. He readily agreed, and we could see that he would do his best. He often said that my wife was the only neighbour who had treated him and his two motherless daughters with kindness.

And so, on the afternoon of 11 February 1942, all loaded up in one small car, we proceeded towards Tan Tock Seng Hospital, off Moulmein Road, about two-and-a-half miles away. While we were going through the hospital grounds, the air raid sirens wailed, and soon after came the loud roar of enemy planes and the rat-a-tat of their guns. We stopped the car and dashed into a low building near by for cover. It was the outdoor clinic of the hospital. And there, together with other refugees, we squatted on the floor with no other protection than a tiled roof and wooden walls. The air raid lasted

quite some time, and as we sat there, huddled together miserably with our bundles of belongings around us, I remembered a picture I had seen of the refugees in Spain during the Spanish Civil War. So now we had joined the refugees of the world.

A British medical officer came in and saw us. He was very surprised and asked why we were there. I explained that we were on our way to join some friends nearby. Then Dr Choo appeared and suggested that as it was getting late we should spend the night in the home of a doctor inside the hospital grounds. So, as soon as the air raid was over, we went to the home of this doctor, which was in a small wooden building with walls so thin that they could give little or no protection from any shrapnel. Japanese guns were now shelling British positions near the hospital and some shells fell within the hospital area. Now and again Japanese planes roared overhead, spraying suspected British hide-outs with bullets.

That night most of us had very little sleep. We huddled together under two small wooden tables with two mattresses on top in the hope that at least they would give us some slight protection against loose shrapnel.

Throughout the night the shelling and bombing continued with increasing intensity. We could follow the sound of the shells from the time they were fired to the time they crashed on or near their targets. We were in the line of fire, but the targets fortunately were behind the hospital. We went through that sleepless and miserable night wondering if we would ever see daylight again. Any one of those shells could have crashed into the flimsy house.

However, the next day dawned, and we were still alive. Dr Choo dropped in to tell us that my former student, Dr Lim Tay Boh, an economics lecturer at Raffles College, and his wife, also a good friend of ours, had invited us to stay with them temporarily in Martaban Road, until we could decide

where to go next. We were glad and grateful for the unexpected shelter of a solid two-storey building in a row of about ten such houses. Mr and Mrs Seah Eck-Jim and family were three doors away in the home of their son-in-law, Mr Kwok Ah-Low, a civil engineer with the City Council.

It was now 12 February 1942, only three days away from the traditional Chinese New Year. In normal circumstances, this would have been celebrated as a great festival for Chinese all over the world, with much visiting among relatives and friends, and particularly by the younger people who pay their respects to their elders. In return children expect to be rewarded with *Ang pows*, gifts of money in red packets. There would be a great deal of cracker firing to drive the devils away and to bring in another year of peace and prosperity. But now nobody looked forward to celebrating the Chinese New Year. Everyone hoped that he would not be among the next batch of casualties. We heard too that Japanese soldiers had reached the reservoir, barely one mile away from us. That meant the loss of Singapore's water supply.

Still, though homeless refugees, we were in cheerful company, and as we lay under the bedsteads or tables, on the ground floor, we chatted and tried to comfort one another. Our daily food consisted of bread and boiled rice with tinned sardines or corned beef, for which we were most thankful.

The shelling was now continuous and gave no respite to the people of Singapore. When we moved about, we ran the risk of being hit by shrapnel or stray bullets.

On the morning of 14 February, we were surprised and shocked to see a large number of British soldiers with rifles and trucks coming down Martaban Road. They began digging trenches along the road. Then they sat or lay down wearily along the five foot wide pavement which stretched along the front of our block of terrace houses. Some of the soldiers knocked at our door and asked for water. Mrs Lim Tay Boh

gave them not only water but tea, coffee and biscuits. Some looked at us through the windows with compassion in their eyes.

At last one of them said, 'Why are you still here? Why have you not gone further into the city?' I think they knew that once the Japanese launched their next assault, we would be in the midst of the front-line fighting, and if the British were to retreat further we would be caught in the cross-fire of both sides. We faced almost certain death by remaining where we were. But what could we do? We could not retreat any further, because we would be retreating into more dangerous and more densely populated areas. We had decided to stay put and trust in God for protection. It was a desperate situation but we saw no better alternative. Then the Japanese planes flew low, and this time they machine-gunned the British soldiers hiding in the trenches in front of our house. At any moment we thought the bullets would strike some of us too. But, no, we were still unscathed.

On Sunday, 15 February, we found that the water from our taps had been reduced to a mere trickle. The Japanese had cut off our water supply. How long could the fighting go on? We sensed that the stage had been reached when, for the sake of the civilian population and the thousands of refugees who had come down from the Malay Peninsula, the British military command should come to terms with the Japanese forces.

Late in the afternoon, there was a sudden slackening of the enemy gunfire. Also the Japanese planes seemed to have decided to give us a little rest. We wondered why. We observed that the British soldiers outside our house were talking agitatedly among themselves. And then a neighbour in the back lane shouted, 'The British have surrendered. Come out. It's safe now.' We rushed into the back lane and saw others there. All were excited and somewhat relieved, but now we were concerned over the fate of the British soldiers.

Outside, on the main road, the soldiers must have heard the news too. They emerged from their trenches, looking subdued. We tried to cheer them up. They could not be blamed, we said. Without any air support and without water, there was no other way out. Then the British officer lined up the soldiers and addressed them. They had behaved right through like honourable men, he said. They must continue to do so, and maintain their discipline and courage. They even cleaned up Martaban Road! They then marched away in good order, leaving our road empty and desolate, temporarily a no-man's land.

Householders used their back doors but not their front doors, and walked in the back lanes, enjoying their temporary freedom. At least the war was over for them, and they were still alive! There would be no more shelling and bombing by the Japanese. Also the people in the city had been spared the sufferings and casualties of street-to-street fighting, and destruction of life and property.

Daylight turned swiftly into dusk and then into darkness, and somebody shouted, 'Hey! This is Chinese New Year Day. Where are our firecrackers?'

What a Chinese New Year it was! The year ahead was dark and unknown.

NARROW ESCAPES

The morning after the surrender, we had our first close look at the invaders. One of the women folk looking out through the window shouted excitedly, 'The Japanese soldiers are here. Come and have a look. Why! They are just like boy scouts!'

We rushed to the two front windows and saw that they truly looked like boy scouts or jungle scouts. They wore loose jungle green shirts, baggy trousers, thick rubber shoes, light green puttees, and untidy cloth caps with sweat-stained flaps covering the napes of their necks and sometimes their ears as well. They were a rough looking lot, some with overgrown beards and moustaches. They each carried a hand towel with which they wiped their faces and close-shaven heads every now and then.

There were several groups of them, apparently on an inspection tour. They surveyed the scene in Martaban Road and the freshly dug roadside trenches. There was a youngish looking soldier standing close to a bearded officer who was distinguished by his leather-topped boots and Samurai type of long sword. The young soldier spoke to one of our neighbours, and I realised with a start that he was speaking in English. Being anxious to know the whereabouts of Matao Otaguro, the Japanese schoolmaster whom I had known before the war, I approached the young soldier, who turned out to be a junior civilian interpreter. I asked if he knew Matao Otaguro, formerly a schoolteacher teaching in the Japanese Elementary School in Singapore. 'Oh, yes,' he replied, 'I know Mr Otaguro.

He was my teacher. Yes, he is somewhere with the Japanese forces in Singapore.'

And then my wife called out, 'Why don't you invite him to come into the house. Talk inside rather than outside.' The bearded Japanese officer came nearer, apparently curious to know what we had been talking about. The civilian officer explained and introduced me as a friend of Matao Otaguro. They accepted the invitation to come indoors.

My wife felt that these two unexpected visitors would appreciate some refreshments; so she arranged for cold drinks and pineapple cubes to be served. The Japanese officer appreciated this gesture of hospitality. He looked around and saw that there were a number of young women in the house. He asked who they were. We explained that they were our wives, sisters and daughters. Something was on his mind. He then asked for a piece of paper. Dr Lim Tay Boh gave him an old municipal water bill, and the Japanese officer scribbled on the back something in Japanese characters. Then he produced a small wooden seal from his trouser pocket and stamped the paper with his seal. He then passed it on to the civilian officer to give us and explain the importance of that piece of paper. The civilian interpreter, translating, said that his officer was grateful for our hospitality and that the slip of paper was to certify that Dr Lim Tay Boh and his family were good people and that they should be given protection by members of the Japanese Imperial Army. Dr Lim was surprised but thanked the officer.

It struck me that since our family would be going back to our home in Bukit Timah Road, we too would need a protection certificate. I explained to the Japanese interpreter our position and asked if we could have another certificate to enable us to get back to our home. The Japanese officer gladly obliged us. He wrote in Japanese that we were good and peace-loving citizens who had been kind to him, and requested the

Japanese forces to give us the necessary protection and permission to return home. He signed the letter, indicated his rank as an officer in the engineering corps, and then stamped it with his special red seal. We thanked him for his certificate, and then he rose, bowed politely and bade us 'Sayonara!' We never saw these good Samaritans again.

Meanwhile Dr Choo Joo-Kong had obtained from the Tan Tock Seng Hospital a special arm-band for himself, marked with a Red Cross and a red seal in Japanese, which enabled him to drive about freely. He had then driven to his father-in-law's home in Keng Chin Road, off Bukit Timah Road. What he saw there alarmed him. Groups of plunderers were roaming from house to house, looting on a big scale. All were non-Chinese. No Chinese dared to go about freely, because they were the special targets of the Japanese soldiers. Their kinsfolk in China were the ones who had fought the Japanese, and in Singapore the Overseas Chinese had given the British the most help in its defence.

Dr Choo drove back to Martaban Road and urged us to return to our homes because the looting was on such a scale that if we did not go back quickly, there would soon be nothing left. He explained that he would first take his family in his car, then come back for his father-in-law's family, and finally take my family back with him. No private cars had been allowed by the Japanese sentries to go through their net around the city, except those driven by persons with special red arm-bands like the doctor's.

While we were loading our bundles into Dr Choo's car, Dr Lim Tay Boh, returning from the market in Balestier Road, informed us that the Japanese Military Command had posted notices in the market ordering all men folk to assemble in Jalan Besar and bring with them two or three days' supply of food. Those of good character would be issued with travelling passes.

We had to make a quick decision. I reasoned that since our home was in the Bukit Timah area and we were already going back with Dr Choo Joo-Kong, we should have our character examination done in the military camp nearest our home. The doctor agreed and so we crammed into his car. I sat next to him in front with the four women in the back seat. He told us that he was finding it more and more difficult to drive past the Japanese sentries. Apparently they were tightening their control so that nobody could enter or leave the city without their permission. Dr Choo decided therefore to drive to Bukit Timah by a different route.

So this time he drove along deserted Moulmein Road and turned into Thomson Road. Suddenly a large group of Japanese sentries with fixed bayonets stopped our car. A grim-faced sergeant shouted something in Japanese. Dr Choo pointed to his arm band and said, 'Isha', meaning 'doctor' in Japanese. The sergeant repeated angrily, 'Isha?' And then he pointed his finger accusingly at me and the women-folk in the rear seats. He shook his head vigorously to indicate that he did not believe we were all doctors.

We were in a dilemma. Dr Choo said, 'Chan Bee, produce your special pass.' When the Japanese sergeant read it, his expression changed. He seemed displeased. He was quiet for a few minutes, and we wondered anxiously what he would do. Then he took out his notebook, tore out one page and wrote something on it in Japanese. He gave me back my special pass, and shook his hand and his head vigorously to signify that my pass was not good enough. Instead he handed me his own scribbled sheet of note paper and indicated that it was a better pass which we should use when we next met a Japanese sentry. We were then allowed to proceed.

On the way we saw many overturned military vehicles and boxes of ammunition with their contents scattered all over the roadside and in the drains. Apparently they had been discarded

by the retreating British soldiers.

We finally reached 4 Keng Chin Road, the home of Mr and Mrs Seah Eck-Jim. Fortunately nobody had looted their two houses and they invited us to stay with them. Since our own home was right on Bukit Timah Road, the main trunk road leading to Johore and the mainland, we agreed that there was a greater risk of being disturbed by disorderly Japanese soldiers there than at their place, which was situated in a secluded side street.

However, we were anxious to know what had happened to our own home. Two of Seah Eck-Jim's sons and I went by a round-about route through back lanes to my old home. Fortunately, at the time of the surrender, the Japanese forces had not advanced beyond the fifth mile. I was astonished to find that our home was the only one in that row of houses not disturbed by the Japanese soldiers or the looters. The front door was still locked and the iron grille padlocked, just as we had left them on that fateful day of 11 February 1942, when we became war refugees!

Entering by the back lane, we saw that the Indian watchman whom my wife had treated with kindness was occupying our garage. He had turned it into a home for himself and his two children. He explained that he had moved into our garage from his attap shed to escape the shelling. Whenever Japanese soldiers came to investigate or break into the houses in search of goods, the Indian watchman would point to himself and his children and declare loudly, 'India! India!' He then asked that his quarters be not disturbed. The Japanese had planned to make friends with all Indians in Singapore and Malaya, and then persuade them to join up with them for the 'liberation' of India. So they left this Indian watchman and our home undisturbed.

In the next few days there was more looting of Chinese homes in the vicinity. The owners had not been able to return because

of the military cordon the Japanese had put around the city. Outside the cordon, groups of looters were moving in and out of houses, carrying away even large pieces of furniture. Later, in the afternoon, small groups of Japanese soldiers also appeared. One group that came into Seah's compound was shown my pass. They saluted us, and moved away. We felt happy. The pass had again proved effective.

Then came three soldiers, one with a red arm-band, and they walked through the gate as if they owned the whole of Singapore. They were aggressive, probably because the man with the red arm-band was a member of the dreaded Kempeitai or Military Police. They first entered the bigger of the two bungalows and looked at us men-folk with contempt. Ignoring us and my special pass, they went right inside the house. We became apprehensive because the women and girls, about twenty of them, had rushed into the innermost room for safety.

The man with the red arm-band of the Military Police was surprised to find so many young women in one room. Dr Choo whispered to me that some of the men should also go into the innermost room to prevent trouble. Accordingly my host, one of his sons and I made our way there. But the Japanese Kempeitai soldier shouted at us angrily and by gestures ordered us to get out. We pretended not to understand him and remained. He sat down on a bed and thought for a few minutes of some plan. Then suddenly he went into the next room and said something in Japanese to his two friends. They then left the house! We felt relieved but at the same time we were afraid and perplexed. My wife sensed that the three of them were planning something evil and would return soon. She urged me to get some protection immediately before they returned.

Who was there to give us the necessary protection? We knew nobody who could stop the three Japanese soldiers. They were the new masters of Singapore. Then Dr Choo remembered that

one of Seah's bungalows nearby had been occupied by a Japanese civilian press officer to whom Dr Choo had given a small leather suitcase. Perhaps this officer would be able to help. But we did not know the Japanese language. So how were we to make him understand our plight? My wife said that maybe if two women were to go with me, he would understand that we needed help. Also we could send a message to a former student of mine living near by, who could read and write Chinese. The Japanese officer would be able to understand the Chinese written language, because the Japanese and Chinese ideographic characters were somewhat alike.

So Dr Choo Joo-Kong, myself, one of Seah's sons and two women, including my wife, went to the bungalow where the Japanese press officer was staying. His car, a big Chevrolet, was outside the house. He was on the point of leaving, when he saw us. We explained excitedly by word and sign, and then I showed him my pass. He went back into his house and came out with paper, a Japanese brush and ink. He accompanied us to Seah's home to investigate our trouble.

There my former student joined us, and he explained our problem in written Chinese. Again my wife had the thought that some refreshments should be provided to show our goodwill to this unknown Samaritan. A plate of boiled chicken, several cups of pineapple cubes and cold drinks were served.

At this point we were interrupted by a warning shout that several Japanese military trucks had stopped at the gate. The three Japanese soldiers who had been in the house earlier in the day had come back accompanied by a Kempeitai officer of high rank. Quickly we rushed out, and the Japanese press officer followed us.

He went forward to meet the captain and saluted smartly. Then he spoke rapidly in Japanese, apparently explaining that he was staying nearby and that we were people of good character. He might also have referred to Matao Otaguro and

the protection certificate given to me by the previous Japanese officer. Perhaps he stressed the importance of the new Japanese policy of winning over the hearts of the law-abiding civilian population of Syonan. We did not know exactly what he said, but eventually the two officers respectfully saluted each other. The Japanese captain turned on his heels and ordered his men to get back into the three trucks. The three Japanese soldiers who had been at the bottom of the trouble now looked sheepish, and obeyed.

After they had driven off, the Japanese press officer came back and told us that we did not have to worry any more about the three soldiers. He then proceeded to write with his brush and ink on a large sheet of paper, in bold Japanese characters, a notice certifying that the people in our household were of good character. He also requested members of the Japanese Imperial Army to give us protection. He stamped it with his big red seal and told us to display it on the gate.

Our women folk had had a narrow escape. The three Japanese soldiers, seeing so many girls and young women together, had decided that they could please their superior officers by supplying these local girls for a Japanese comfort home, ie, a house of prostitutes for the comfort of Japanese officers and soldiers. These 'comfort homes' later mushroomed in Syonan.

After two shocks in a day, we decided to remain within Mr Seah's compound and padlocked the garden gate. The Japanese press officer had advised us to remain indoors for the time being, as order had not been restored in the city.

A few days later, another former student, O.P.W., came looking for us. Japanese sentries had stopped him at Newton Circus but allowed him to proceed when they saw his newly acquired 'pass', which was in the form of a rubber stamp imprinted on a man's shirt or on his forearm. O.P.W. described what had happened at the Japanese 'concentration

camp' where he was examined. He said that thousands of them, all Chinese, were separated into small groups and directed to walk in a line past several Japanese officers. If these officers for some reason or other disliked the look of a particular fellow, he was asked to stand aside. Apparently the Japanese officers were out to select those who appeared potentially dangerous, such as the physically tough and the scholarly type. At the end of the day, thousands of those selected were loaded into trucks and driven to some unknown destinations. This separation went on for two days in six or more large concentration camps around the city.

Some people thought that the selected groups were subsequently sent out of Singapore to accompany the Japanese forces as labourers and camp followers. Others suspected that they were massacred. In any case, all of them disappeared.

The largest number of persons who disappeared were taken away from the Jalan Besar Camp, where Dr Lim Tay Boh went to get his rubber stamp 'pass'. I too would have gone there if not for the protection certificate provided by the unknown Japanese officer. We subsequently heard that the military commander at Jalan Besar was the worst. He seemed to regard the Chinese who wore spectacles as the most dangerous. These were taken away and never seen again. Among those who disappeared were two of my colleagues on the staff of the Anglo-Chinese School. Both of them wore spectacles. And so did I. Thus I would have disappeared with them had I gone to the camp.

Meanwhile I was vainly making enquiries about Matao Otaguro. Then one morning I read in the new *Syonan Times*, a daily paper which had replaced the *Straits Times*, a report of an aeroplane crash in Taiwan. Among the passengers listed as killed were an Indian leader of the new Indian Liberation Army and his Japanese military adviser, Matao Otaguro. A mass meeting was subsequently held to honour these two men.

Later I heard from an old boy of my school that Otaguro had been looking for me for days, immediately after the Japanese conquest of Singapore. But nobody could tell him where I was. I was told that Otaguro was held in high esteem by the Indian soldiers in the new Indian National Army and by the civilians in the Lavender Street housing area. When certain Japanese soldiers had forcibly taken away watches and jewellery from civilians there, Otaguro went to the military commander in charge of that district and appealed to him. He was then allowed to address the Japanese soldiers. He was so persuasive that the rank and file responded and returned the articles they had previously taken.

One day I saw walking up Bukit Timah Road towards my house a short youthful Japanese civilian officer, with a long Samurai sword reaching almost up to his neck. I recognised him as a mischievous little Japanese I had taught in Form Three. He was now a civilian officer-interpreter attached to the staff of Count Terrauchi, Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese forces in South-East Asia, with his headquarters in Saigon. Joseph Nanao Tsutada was very glad to see me and my family safe and sound, and he wrote out another protection certificate to certify that I had been his former teacher and that I had treated all the Japanese students in the school with consideration and kindness. He asked other members of the Japanese Imperial Army to give me and my family the same friendly treatment. He signed as officer-interpreter on the staff of Count Terrauchi, and put his red seal on it. His certificate later helped to change three brutal, ruthless Japanese guards into tolerant and understanding human beings.

As we had expected, the Japanese special branch officers made an immediate search for my eldest brother-in-law, Ong Kiat-Soo. They sent a group of soldiers to my father-in-law's shop to look for him. When they could not find him, since he had already fled to Sumatra, they decided that my father-in-

law must be arrested in his place and forfeit his life. Though he was an old man, they did not spare him. They tied his hands behind his back and took him away, presumably to be shot. My mother-in-law and the family grieved for him. But after some days he came back. He reported that after he had been questioned by the military police, he was taken out to be shot. Just then an old friend of his, a fellow trader, passed by and saw him. Out of pity he plucked up courage and pleaded with the Japanese officer in charge, saying that the old man had done no wrong and had been a peace-loving citizen. He vouched for my father-in-law's good character and maintained that Ong Kim-Lian had had nothing to do with his eldest son's political activities. The Japanese officer thereupon allowed my father-in-law to return home. If he had died at that time, we would not have known how to support the other members of his very large family.

In the early months of the Japanese Occupation, the British military prisoners of war were allowed to camp in fields within the city area, and many local people often brought them food. My younger sister, Sek-Neo, repeatedly and openly gave clothes and food to the Australian POW's camped near St Andrew's School. She did not realise that she had been spotted by the Japanese guards encamped on a small hill in the school grounds.

At that time my father-in-law had rented a bungalow near the two POW camps, and we stayed with him. One afternoon, returning from my school duties, I was surprised and disturbed to see three Japanese soldiers armed with rifles standing near the gate of our residence. There was an angry look on their faces. They watched me enter the house without making any move. My wife told me that the Japanese guards had been walking back and forth outside the house for quite some time. Something prompted me to act quickly to remove their suspicions before it was too late to explain.

So I went out of the gate and spoke to them in the simple Japanese I had learned. I explained that I was a schoolteacher who had taught Japanese boys in pre-war days. Then I produced the protection letter given to me by Joseph Nanao Tsutada. When they read Joseph's letter written in simple Nippon-go, they laughed, and the atmosphere changed. Japanese soldiers usually had a soft spot for young children, and for them to know that Japanese children had been kindly treated by this Chinese schoolteacher in Singapore changed their attitude.

So they told me frankly why they were there. They had come from their camp on the hill because they had seen a Chinese woman walk past the British POW camp. She had tossed clothes and food supplies to the prisoners of war. This had happened several times. I explained that my sister tended to befriend anybody in trouble, and apologised for her actions. They asked me to warn her not to repeat such acts because everything could be seen by the guards in the school building on the hill. My wife, as usual, served them with light refreshments. They now behaved like other ordinary sociable human beings, and even invited me to visit them in their camp on the hill.

THE YEARS OF OCCUPATION

Several weeks after the fall of Singapore, when conditions had become more peaceful, we returned to our old home in Bukit Timah Road. Our car had been taken away by the Japanese authorities. Our funds were low, and there seemed to be no prospect of employment for a teacher like myself.

Then one day we read in the *Syonan Times* a notice issued by the Japanese Military Administration stating that the schools in Singapore would be re-opened under new names with new heads, and that all who had been teaching in Singapore before the war must report for duty at certain specified centres. It was an order. This seemed to be good news for us unemployed teachers. We wondered whether there was a catch behind the announcement. When we reported for duty, we were told that the Japanese Military Administration had decided that only primary schools would be re-opened, and that the media of instruction would be Nippon-go (Japanese), Chinese, Malay and English, but that gradually more and more lessons would be in Nippon-go. When the students had become proficient in Nippon-go, then secondary schools would be re-opened.

Thus teachers in pre-war secondary schools, like myself, would now have to learn Nippon-go and teach in primary schools like the others. Former top grade schools like the Raffles Institution, the Anglo-Chinese School, St Joseph's Institution and St Andrew's School were closed down. All schools were now named after roads and streets.

And so we teachers taught primary pupils in the morning,

and attended Nippon-go classes in the afternoon. At the end of about three months, a centralised examination was held. By guesswork as well as study, I did well but was surprised to find my name among those who had scored a hundred per cent.

Later I was to learn that during the period of Japanese Occupation the less successful a person was academically, the happier he was likely to be. Not long after the announcement of the results, I told my wife that physically I had never felt better in my life. And then something strange happened. While trying to separate two dogs locked together in a fight, I fainted. A doctor was called, and he gave me a week's medical leave. That illness turned out to be a real blessing. That very morning my name had been placed on a list of teachers to be drafted to a Japanese military school in Upper Serangon, Singapore, for six months' full time training for executive posts in the new Education Service.

At about six o'clock that evening, the chief clerk from the new Japanese Education Department came personally to deliver to me a letter from the Inspector of Schools, stating that I had been selected for this special course. I read the letter with dismay. Then I told the clerk, 'You see me in this helpless condition, and here is a medical certificate to prove it'. He saw that mine was a genuine case; so he promised to explain to the Inspector of Schools that I was medically unfit to accept the honour. Later I heard that another teacher, on being informed of his selection, purposely swallowed some typhoid bacteria so that he would have to go to hospital for treatment.

In early 1942 Japan's navy, army and air force certainly appeared to have a clear field in the Pacific, and their newly occupied territories of Syonan (Singapore), Malaya and the Dutch East Indies were considered safe enough for a Japanese type of civilian administration to function side by side with the military authorities.

From several friends who worked in the Education Depart-

ment in Syonan, we gathered that the Japanese had planned to make Syonan the main showpiece of the new Japanese Co-Prosperity Sphere. Hence it was necessary to re-organise and re-establish the schools as early as possible, so as to train and discipline the future citizens of the new Japanese Empire.

The Japanese doubted whether teachers previously trained by the British could be effective instruments for the achievement of their new educational objectives. However, since there were not enough Japanese school teachers available among the military forces in South-East Asia, they decided that they would have to use us temporarily, teaching us Nippon-go through afternoon and week-end classes.

Japanese songs had to be memorised by both teachers and students. Each day began with a school assembly. The principal, the staff and the students lined up in the compound, facing the Japanese national flag – the Rising Sun – flying at the top of the school flagpole. The drill master then barked out an order. All stood rigidly to attention. Another order, and everybody would bow very low, until the body was at right angles to the legs. This was repeated three times. Then the Japanese national anthem was sung. Next came the Radio Physical Exercises, to music. Finally the whole school would sing the solemn Japanese song of dedication to the Emperor.

Remembering the friends and relatives who had died in the Japanese concentration camps, as well as the hardships and regimentation they themselves had to endure daily, the teachers and students sang the songs mechanically like puppets. They made their respectful bows, and they learned and taught Nippon-go, but they still longed inwardly for the day of liberation from the self-appointed liberators of South-East Asia.

Young children, in their thoughtless exuberance however, sometimes expressed the feelings and hopes of their elders. At one school playground, as they sang Japanese songs and tried

their new Nippon-go phrases on one another, they began to chant in unison, 'Nippon-Go! Yankee Come! Nippon-Go! Yankee Come!' Horrified, the adults quickly stopped the children from continuing with their dangerous sing-song. Nevertheless the story of this episode was passed from one person to another in Syonan, and it cheered the hearts of many.

Before the war I had been driven to work by car. Now I went on foot or by bus, with three changes during the journey, covering twenty-four miles each day.

When I was young, I had never bothered to learn to ride a bicycle. But now, out of sheer necessity, and after several falls, cuts and bruises, I managed to cycle along fairly deserted roads, provided I had both hands on the handle-bars.

One Sunday I decided to pay a visit to Mr Seah Eck-Jim. With a friend on another bicycle following behind, I ventured on the three mile test run on my second-hand B.S.A. bicycle. Suddenly, I saw ahead a Japanese armed sentry outside an officers' mess. To my horror I realised that I was wearing a hat and that it was obligatory for passing cyclists to remove their headgear and bow respectfully to every Japanese sentry on duty. Those who failed to do so were often severely punished. Some had been hit and ordered to squat, or stand at attention on the roadside, or carry a piece of rock above their heads for hours.

As I had not yet learned to keep my balance with only one hand on the handle-bar, I could not take off my hat without losing control. So I shouted to the friend cycling behind me, 'Hey, please take off my hat for me! Japanese sentry ahead!'. He speeded up and removed the offending head gear just in time. Cycling slowly, I bowed my head as I passed the sentry. When I related the incident to Seah and his family, we had a good laugh together.

The Japanese military police, the Kempeitai, was the most dreaded branch of the Japanese Imperial Army occupying

Singapore. Wherever they went, they evoked fear. To be suspected by the Kempeitai often meant spells of detention in their special cells, 'cages', and notorious torture chambers. Persons released after long periods of gruelling examination were often shadows of their former selves.

Whenever people met for business or socially, they presumed for their own protection that one of those present could be an informer of the Kempeitai. So topics of conversation were limited to the prices of food stuffs and the health of friends.

One day while I was undergoing a three months' course of advanced teacher training, I sensed that I was being watched. I noticed that two teachers often approached me to talk about the world situation and daily events. I avoided their questions by saying that all I knew was to be found in the local newspaper. I noticed also that I was never left alone.

Looking back, I figured that their suspicions had been aroused because I had declined promotions, first to be monitor in the Nippon-go class, and then to be headmaster of a new primary school. This must have seemed strange to them because in pre-war days I had been a senior graduate teacher in a leading school in Singapore. My excuse for not accepting a higher post was my lack of proficiency in Nippon-go.

I was not surprised therefore to hear from a former school colleague soon after this that he had been asked by the Kempeitai for information on various persons in Singapore, and I was one of them. I was suspected of being in touch with some of my former students who were members of Force 136 hiding in the jungles of Malaya. Some of these guerillas had parachuted into Malaya, or had been sent there by submarine to link up with the jungle fighters. They were to prepare for the counter-invasion of Malaya and Singapore by the British and American forces. My friend asked me not to think ill of him should I be called in by the Kempeitai, because whatever he had told them had been under duress.

I appreciated his forewarning me but I was disturbed. I limited my activities to school work, the Nippon-go class, the little garden behind our house or harmless routine chores. All the same I prepared for the worst. I got ready a small bag of some of the essential things I would need if ever I was suddenly awakened at three o'clock in the morning and taken to the Kempeitai Headquarters.

We had long suspected a street sweeper who used to rest in front of our house. Occasionally he would look through our window. He looked unusually intelligent and inquisitive for a street scavenger, and we began to think of him as a possible secret service agent of the Kempeitai.

Fortunately, there was a Japanese old boy of my school, Dr Peter Mitsuo Tsutada, a dental officer, who used to join us for hymn singing every Sunday, whom the 'sweeper' must have seen visiting us. His reports could have deterred the Kempeitai from taking immediate action.

The war dragged on and on. We teachers carried on with our daily tasks on monthly salaries which would provide food for the family for only a week or two.

It was a soul-killing, depressing kind of existence, working through each long day with nothing to look forward to except the promised liberation which was so slow in coming. Many died of sorrow and malnutrition.

In the first few weeks after the fall of Singapore, there had been an abundance of essential foodstuffs in all the provision stores and small shops in town. However, as the weeks went by, counters and shelves began to display fewer and fewer items. Consumer goods were hidden elsewhere for future black-market sales. Consequently, the prices of various foods began to rise. People who had ready money bought up most of the imported canned provisions so that they could be sure of several months' supply of food. Finally, such goods disappeared completely from the shops.

Because of the rapidly increasing shortages, the Japanese Military Authorities decided to control the sale of sugar, salt, fish, meat and fruits through government agencies or syndicates, called 'Kumiai', which, we were told, would ensure a fair rationing of necessities. But in practice the Kumiai system allowed the Japanese Military Authorities and their privileged supporters the first pickings of all daily supplies of meat, fish, poultry, fruits and even vegetables. Then their employees made their selection, and finally what remained of inferior quality would be sold to the public.

For security reasons every person living in Singapore had been registered under a rigid household system, with the names, ages, and other particulars of all persons staying in each house listed, and the head of family was held responsible for each household. Nobody was allowed to be away from home for even one night without the permission of the headman of a group of households, called the One Star officer. He was given a metal badge with a star on it. Then various groups of households were organised under a Two Star officer. Higher up there were Three Star superintendents in overall charge of various district groups, all directly under Japanese officers. Thus the people of Singapore were quickly organised under a rigid police system, whereby their movements could be restricted and checked daily if necessary. The One Star officers had to report against members of any household who showed signs of disloyalty or lawlessness. At the same time, the military authorities used these One, Two and Three Star officers for the distribution of government rice and sugar at controlled prices.

As the war dragged on, the shortage of rice became increasingly acute. Wheat flour was no longer obtainable. The entire supply had been commandeered by the Japanese authorities for their own use. Bread was now made from tapioca, corn and sago flour, and the loaves on sale to the public were now hard as bricks. They had to be steamed before they could

be sliced. Similarly the noodles, previously made of wheat flour, were now made of sago and tapioca flour and were almost indigestible. Beef, pork and poultry were so expensive that dogs and cats began to disappear from the streets! Once I saw rats in wire traps being sold at foodstalls in Waterloo Street.

The once despised tapioca root replaced rice as the staple food. I managed to contact a former colleague who had taken to farming because he had found that he could earn far more by selling his produce than by teaching, and he offered us a portion of land for our own cultivation. Here two or three of us would plant tapioca during our spare time, and after several months we had a sufficient supply for the family to supplement our meagre rice ration. Occasionally we longed for meat, but it was impossible on a schoolmaster's salary to buy beef or pork.

But the Heavenly Father provided us with such daily needs. My father-in-law, an old-fashioned Chinese entrepreneur, had resumed trading with the neighbouring islands of Java, Bali and Lombok, using a *tongkang*, a small Chinese sailing junk. He used to send one to the Indonesian islands, and after a month or so it would return laden with dried beef, red beans, peanuts and dried fruits.

One day Sim Boon-Howe, one of my faithful old boys, went to my father-in-law's shop and heard that a shipment, including dried beef, had arrived. He brought us a few pieces and asked my sister to fry them. This provided a valuable source of protein in our daily food.

Sim now became a fisherman. He was staying with us during this period. He would go out early in the morning to the Johore Causeway area and fish in the streams in the vicinity. He gave us a share of the small fish and prawns left over after selling his catch. Thus we had our supply of sea food as well as calcium.

During the fruit season, we were also fortunate. My father lived in an attap house in the country, with rambutan trees

around. He would often bring to town a basketful of fruit which I could not afford to buy on my salary.

Whenever my wife and I visited my parents-in-law in their shop in Chinatown, I saw many opportunities to make easy money in the black market, because the shop had become a centre where brokers met daily to exchange information about goods desired by customers in the black market and the sources available. I could have left my job in school where my monthly salary was sufficient to last us only a few days, and set up my own business as a black market broker, but somehow I felt that God wanted me to continue in education. Those boys who came to study Nippon-go, indirectly also learned English and Chinese, and they seemed to like the stories I had to tell them of God's Hand in human affairs. And so I decided to remain a poor schoolmaster.

Those were sad days for most people in Syonan. We too were often hard pressed to find money for our daily food. My wife had to sell personal and household articles from time to time. At last her precious family heirloom, a gold pendant holding a beautiful pearl embedded in its original mother-of-pearl setting, was handed to Sim with instructions to pawn it. In the late afternoon he returned with a bundle of Japanese banana currency notes amounting to \$1,000, and then gracefully like a magician he produced the pendant as well. It had not been sold after all. He said that when he called at my father-in-law's shop, my mother-in-law told him that the previous night her husband had given her \$1,000 to be handed over to their daughter.

Another incident towards the end of the Occupation further strengthened our faith in a loving God. One afternoon my wife said to me longingly, 'I have not tasted green bananas, *pisang hijau*, for years. They used to cost about two cents each.' I replied, 'Do you remember the once popular song, "Yes! We have no bananas!" I am afraid my answer is the same. My

whole month's salary would be just enough to buy one comb of bananas, with nothing left for our daily food.'

The next morning, however, there was a knock on our back door. When I opened it, there stood Dr Peter Mitsuo Tsutada's maidservant carrying a large bunch of *pisang hijau*. I had never seen a more beautiful bunch of ripening bananas. I looked at the servant with astonishment. 'My master,' she said, 'asked me to bring this to you and your family. It is from our garden.'

A few days later when Peter Tsutada called on us, he explained that about dusk, on the day when my wife had asked me for some green bananas, he was looking out of his verandah into his garden and he noticed three heavy bunches of green bananas turning yellow. He had instructed his maid servant to cut down all the three bunches and take one to us as a gift from him. That was his explanation, but the coincidence was too strange in its timing to be explained away.

Peter Mitsuo Tsutada used to come and visit us every Sunday when he was in Syonan. He missed his family in Japan, and since we were old friends, he felt quite at home with us. A favourite hymn, which he asked us to sing together every Sunday, began thus:

Will you meet me at the fountain,
When I reach the glory land?
Will you meet me at the fountain?
Shall I clasp your friendly hand?

The chorus followed:

Yes, I'll meet you at the fountain,
At the fountain bright and fair . . .

After the war, Peter returned to Japan to rejoin his family. He wanted to come back to Singapore, the land of his birth.

But anti-Japanese feelings after the war were still so strong that he was not allowed to do so. A few years later he died. But the words of that hymn now and again still ring in our minds and hearts. Where justice cannot be done on this earth and in this life, it must be done elsewhere in the hereafter.

LAST DAYS OF SYONAN

The *Syonan Times* was the main source of news, both local and foreign. Although heavily censored and edited to make defeats appear as victories, still local readers could tell roughly the progress of the Allied comeback in North Africa, Europe and the Pacific.

The news kept on improving day by day. The big question worrying us in Syonan was whether the Japanese forces would fight to the bitter end or follow the example of Hitler's armies and negotiate a surrender. We could see Japanese soldiers digging tunnels in the hills all over the island. We were told that they would use local manpower as forced labour, and those taken into the tunnels would have to die with them.

Mamoru Shinozaki, who was known to be more kindly disposed to the local people than the military authorities, persuaded several thousand Eurasians to leave Syonan and establish a new settlement at Bahau in Negri Sembilan. Next he persuaded thousands of Chinese through the Syonan Chinese Chamber of Commerce to start another settlement at Endau near Mersing, in Johore, about a hundred miles away. He told them that the British and American forces were trying to stage a comeback and there would be massive bombing of Singapore. To spare civilian lives, the Japanese wanted them to leave Syonan and take refuge at Bahau and Endau.

Many of our evacuating friends called on us to urge us to join them. However, we decided to remain in Singapore to wait for the day of liberation.

Outwardly, the Japanese officers looked as confident as ever. However, we noticed that although the Japanese lecturers in the Nippon-Go Teachers' Training School remained stern and disciplined, they did try to show more goodwill and patience towards us. One of them confided to a local teacher that the military situation was serious.

One day, a lawyer friend invited me to go with him and a group of other friends to visit Pulau Batam, a large island to the south of Singapore. A sailing junk took us to a small creek, and then we walked along a footpath through deserted rubber estates for about a mile, until we came to a group of plank and *attap* (thatched) houses where we were to spend the night. On the way I met a former student who had been a court interpreter in Singapore. He had taken refuge in Pulau Batam much earlier. However, he could not give us encouraging information. Conditions in Pulau Batam, he said, were very primitive, and everyone including himself had fallen victim to malaria. Nevertheless, we agreed tentatively that if there was sufficient notice, we would all bring our own provisions and clothes to a certain rendezvous and flee to Pulau Batam.

Back in Syonan I awoke one night with a strange sentence in the Japanese language ringing in my ears. Unfamiliar with one of the words I looked it up in my Japanese dictionary, and discovered that the sentence meant, 'Do not evacuate. Do not evacuate.'

One early morning in August 1945, a neighbour called on me and whispered the wonderful news that the Japanese had surrendered! The atom bombs had fallen on two Japanese cities and the Japanese Emperor had given the order.

At first we could hardly believe the news. We waited until confirmation came from several other friends. We were advised to feign ignorance, because the British had not yet appeared in Syonan, and any premature rejoicing might bring upon us the wrath of the Japanese authorities.

And so we waited patiently until the Japanese themselves announced in the *Syonan Times* that the Japanese Emperor had sent His Imperial Highness, Prince Higashikuni, a senior member of the Imperial family, to deliver a personal message from the Emperor to the Japanese Imperial Forces in Syonan. Therefore, in obedience to the order of their Divine Emperor, the Japanese forces would honourably lay down their arms and hand back Syonan to the Allied forces.

The Japanese soldiers during their last days in Syonan maintained a most commendable self-control. Those who were unhappy over the order from the Emperor looked grim but did not take it out on the people of Singapore. One Japanese teacher in the Nippon-Go Teachers' Training School informed his students that he would commit *hara-kiri*. And he did. Then one night we heard a series of terrific explosions about half a mile from our house. When we looked out from our verandah, we saw flames reddening the night sky. The next day we heard that a group of Japanese officers who were unwilling to surrender had met in a house in Newton Road and there, after some feasting and three *Banzais* or cheers to their Emperor, they had poured petrol all over the place, exploded some dynamite and killed themselves honourably in that blazing inferno. That was their way of solving their inner conflict between obligatory obedience to their Emperor and a deep personal reluctance to surrender.

Within a few days we saw Chinese trishaw riders displaying small British and American flags on their vehicles. We learned that some British soldiers had been parachuted into Singapore from Allied planes to arrange details for the surrender of Syonan to the British. Subsequently we heard that British prisoners of war in their POW camps were free to contact their civilian friends.

Immediately a crowd of civilians made their way to the nearest POW Camp in Sime Road. Even people who had been

bosom friends of the Japanese officers, and travelled in their red and blue flag cars, were now eager to renew their friendship with their old British pals. Somehow, I did not feel like joining the crowd proceeding to the Sime Road Camp. But that afternoon the financial clerk in the Education Department called on me to convey the message that Mr Hinch, my former principal, had asked me to call on him at the Camp, as he had no transport. I cycled to the camp with a paper bag containing some articles of food and clothing which my wife had provided. Mr Hinch was very thin but cheerful. He was delighted to see me and expressed a desire to leave the camp early and recuperate in somebody's home. Straightaway I told him that he was welcome to stay with us for as long as he wished, and we would give him a spare room. He gladly accepted our invitation.

Food in liberated Singapore was still scarce and expensive, but my wife felt that we could surely afford to give our old friends a good meal, and so we invited a number of them from the POW camp to join Mr Hinch one evening for dinner. It was good to see them again. They were like persons risen from the grave.

And how they enjoyed eating fried spring rolls, Chinese noodles, and other dishes which my sister had skilfully prepared. They ate so heartily that one of them at last rubbed his stomach and warned the others that they must not eat too much. They had been told by their camp doctor that they should restrain themselves, because their digestive organs had not yet become accustomed to an abundance of food. After the meal they walked back to their POW camp in good spirits. They were now free men in a free Singapore.

WORLD HORIZONS

Having gone through the harrowing experiences of a Japanese military invasion, conquest and prolonged occupation, many of us recoiled at the prospect of such horrors recurring once in every twenty or thirty years – but that is what some politicians and historians predict as inevitable.

But is it? Cannot ordinary men and women, and their leaders all over the world, do something to break the vicious circle?

The hitherto untold story of what happened in Malaysia (Malaya) and Singapore in the years after the Second World War gives hope that mankind need not be slaves to the past.

Bridges of goodwill and hope can be built across the widest gulfs of ill-will and misunderstanding and thereby avert a national, or even an international, catastrophe.

One afternoon in mid-July, 1946, I was standing with my wife and daughter on the verandah of our newly-rented bungalow, when my daughter pointed excitedly to a picture in the newspaper she was reading. 'Hey, Dad!' she said, 'Here is a report about a world conference on Moral Re-Armament at Caux in Switzerland. Surely you ought to be there.'

For the first time I saw a picture of Mountain House, Caux, standing against a restful background of snow-capped mountains. The conference, the paper stated, was to help promote a spirit of peace and goodwill among men and nations. A group of Swiss had decided to express their gratitude for the years of

peace in Switzerland during the Second World War by investing in a project which could help prevent another such disaster. They had therefore given generously to buy the derelict Palace Hotel at Caux. Volunteer workers had renovated and turned it into a conference centre. Delegates from all over the world were invited to attend for discussions on ways and means to remove the underlying causes of personal, industrial, and international conflicts. The conference, the paper said, would go on until the middle of September, 1946.

The report aroused my interest. I wished I could go. But what hopes had I of being invited to the conference and of going on an expensive journey to Switzerland? I laughed at my daughter's remark. It was beyond the realm of possibility.

A week or two after the incident, a telegram arrived from London from Brigadier David Forster, inviting me to attend the conference at Caux. This came as a great surprise. I remembered David Forster. He was Officer Commanding the Singapore Garrison in 1926, and came over to our school to give a talk on Empire Day on 24 May.

The telegram caused a flurry of excitement in our home. After some frank discussion, we regretfully came to the conclusion that it was beyond our collective financial resources to send me to Caux. So I cabled a reply, thanking David Forster for his kind invitation but expressing my regret that I could not afford to make the trip. Soon another telegram arrived. He offered me the fare from Singapore to London; but there was no mention of the return fare!

Two friends, a veterinary surgeon and an army chaplain, urged me to go and promised to help. My father-in-law offered me \$1,000 as his contribution. So I thought that at least I should take some of the preliminary steps, such as applying for leave, getting my passport, obtaining my health certificate, and making the air flight reservation. If the necessary funds should be forthcoming in time, then I would go. I would move forward

in faith. First, I enquired from a travel agency about a plane reservation for London. The reply was not encouraging. It would be extremely difficult for a civilian to obtain a seat on any of the military planes going to London, and the earliest date for me would be some time in late September.

One morning, in early September, I received a message that there would be one vacant seat on a Lancaster bomber, leaving the next day. If I wanted it, then I must pay for my ticket before closing time that very afternoon.

I was in a fix. The money from Brigadier David Forster had not arrived. We ourselves did not have the money. Then my wife thought that I should see our friend the banker, Tan Chin-Tuan, to ask if his bank could give me an advance. When he heard of the invitation to Caux and my predicament, he suggested a solution. Did I have a banking account? The answer was no. He said I should open an account in his bank, and he would grant me an overdraft facility up to \$2,000 (US \$800). This would enable me to pay for my ticket. The problem of my return air fare would have to be faced later.

Thus I embarked on an adventure of faith with my bank account overdrawn. Early next morning, accompanied by my wife and daughter in a borrowed car, I went to the RAF airfield at Changi. With four other passengers and the crew of the Lancaster bomber, I was soon air-borne.

In those days an air flight to London usually took about three days, but the Lancaster bomber did it in one-and-a-half days. I landed at London Airport at about 4 p.m. on the following day. The next morning I met Brigadier David Forster, a limping fatherly figure with a kindly face and a gentle voice. Since time was short, he suggested I should fly the very same day for Zurich with a British journalist, who very kindly paid for my air ticket. At Montreux railway station we were met by an old friend, a former prisoner of war under the Japanese. He drove us up the mountain road to Mountain

House, Caux, arriving there at midnight. I shared a room with a retired English schoolmaster.

The next morning I looked out from my balcony and had my first clear view of a Swiss lake and the Alps. Some 3,000 feet below me lay the calm waters of Lake Geneva, and the city of Montreux. On the left, against the blue sky was the snow-capped Dents du Midi, a row of white mountain peaks in the Alps.

My bedroom had been furnished with great care. There were Swiss mountain flowers in a vase and a plate of fresh fruit on the table. Everything spoke of the warm goodwill of my hosts.

I joined the other delegates in the dining hall for breakfast, and later attended the full conference session. The old Palace Hotel was still undergoing extensive repairs and renovation, but I could see that Mountain House would soon become a wonderful home for people from all parts of the world. Here they would find evidence of a new spirit of goodwill and determination to work for a better world. Here the delegates were not expected to deliver learned lectures, or read out long speeches. They listened to short, interesting, down to earth talks, heart-stirring songs, and humorous musical items.

At one of the public sessions, a group of ten British MP's spoke about social problems in Britain. Five of them were members of the Conservative Party and the others were Labour Party men. I also heard four Indian trade union and political leaders deliver a long tirade against British imperialism. However, later these fiery politicians learned to listen not only to views from the other side but also to the inner voice in their own hearts. At one session the British MP's apologised to the Indian delegates for their past mistakes towards India. This evoked a similar response from the Indians, who apologised for their own hatred and ill-will towards Britain.

Then there were workers from the factories and representatives of management, presenting their own particular problems

from their own angles. There were groups of coal miners from Wales, who talked about their grievances and how they had found a new dialogue with management in several of the collieries.

We heard stories of how problems between parents and children, and teachers and students, were resolved through a new approach. A number of Germans, both men and women, who looked rather pale, dejected and confused, were present. They had come from a defeated and divided country. They had lost everything and were now trying to rebuild Germany from its ruins.

There were also representatives from other parts of Europe – from Holland, France, Norway, Sweden and Denmark – where they had suffered much under the German invaders. They spoke about the bitterness that had to be cured and of how they were trying to find a way to build a new Europe. These people reminded me of the bitterness of those in South-East Asia who had suffered under the Japanese invaders. Day by day I learned a great deal. Nevertheless I wondered why God had sent me to Caux.

At breakfast, lunch and dinner, we usually sat in groups of four or more at a table, and as we discussed our problems and shared our experiences, we began to see new ways of solving them.

Most of the work at Mountain House was done by teams of volunteers. I was invited to join the dish-washing team, and after three shifts I thought I had become an expert and volunteered for a fourth shift. They suggested that I should learn another job, and so I was put on a team in charge of washing pots and pans. One of my colleagues was a senior medical lecturer at a university in Scotland. Such experiences at Caux helped me to appreciate the difficulties of the manual labourer.

One day I was invited to attend a press meeting to discuss contemporary national and world problems and the relevance

of the conference in providing constructive solutions to them. Among those present was Peter Howard, the well-known Fleet Street journalist whose vitriolic pen had previously offended many British politicians. He was now devoting his life to the building of a new and better world. He shared with us the conviction that in our quiet time of listening we should not revolve around ourselves. He did not question the fact that God had helped many of us to solve our personal problems. But he made a statement which, at that time, shocked some of us, especially myself. He said that if a man was good only for himself, his family and his immediate circle of friends, then in the context of prevailing world conditions, that man was really 'good for nothing'. A man's personal goodness must be good for something beyond his own family and his own circle of friends. It must be of value to his nation and to the world.

After the meeting, the wife of the American Ambassador to Finland remarked to me that Peter Howard's statement was too strong and she wondered how she could apply it to her own life. I agreed with her. I said I was only a schoolmaster; so how could I affect my country and the world? Still we conceded that if this new approach which he spoke about could be applied by ordinary folks everywhere, it could mean a great deal for the world.

Then one day, towards the end of the conference, I listened to an interesting talk given by a captain who had served in the United States Air Force. It was on divisive and uniting ideologies. He showed us a picture of two dogs confronting each other – one with a bone representing the 'haves', and the other with its mouth wide open, trying to grab the bone from the first dog, representing the 'have nots'. On one side were the grippers of the world, and on the other, the grabbers. If the bone was taken from the mouth of the gripper and put into that of the grabber, then their positions would be reversed. The gripper would become the grabber, and the problem would remain

unsolved. Thus, until the greed which motivated human beings was changed, the grippers and the grabbers of the world would keep on fighting, gripping and grabbing, exploiting issues of race, colour, language, religion, and social differences to further their own selfish ends.

The speaker then said that the real answer to the world's problems caused by the selfishness of both the 'haves' and the 'have nots', of both the capitalists and the anti-capitalists, depended on a drastic change in human nature on both sides, which could take place with God's help.

As I listened, I began to see that between the gripper and the grabber there was a kind of psychological and spiritual barrier – a divisive but invisible vertical line. This vertical line could be due to class differences, or differences of race, language, and religion. Then I suddenly realised that in my own heart there had been many such divisive vertical lines. When I looked at a Malay, I would think to myself, 'I am a Chinese and he is a Malay'. When I met a Catholic, I would say in my heart, 'I am a Protestant and he is a Catholic'. Or if the other person was a Protestant, a Baptist, the thought would recur, 'I am a Methodist, and he is a Baptist'. I realised that all these divisive vertical lines were barriers in the human heart. They must go down so that we could look at one another as fellow human beings.

I decided that day at Caux that I would not allow such vertical lines to determine my attitude towards my fellow human beings. Instead, I would strive to build between myself and my fellow men bridges of sincere goodwill and understanding.

I also realised that this basic self-righteousness in the human heart could determine a person's political and ideological stand. At some time or other in my life I had felt like a capitalist, an imperialist, a nationalist and a Communist.

When I was a boy and my father was rich, I wore silk, had plenty of pocket money and did not care for my poor friends.

I was then a capitalist. But when my father's business collapsed, I had to wear patched clothes. Rich friends turned away from us, and I felt within me the rage and resentment of the 'have nots' who became Communists. I was prepared to tear down society.

When I became a teacher, I was given a cane as my badge of office and I felt like an imperialist. I was the one who laid down the law for my pupils, and I could use the cane to enforce my orders. Also, in those days, the top posts in Singapore were held by the British, and when I resented the discriminations and aspired for these positions, I felt like an intolerant nationalist. God told me, 'You are a selfish person, and your selfishness makes you feel like a capitalist, a Communist, an imperialist and a nationalist at different times, but you are still the same fellow. You need to change first in your nature before you can help others and your leaders to promote a new spirit of goodwill, understanding and co-operation.'

So I decided that to be that new type of man, I must surrender my life to God and be unselfishly guided by Him. Something happened after that. On this new basis I could meet anybody – Malay, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, European, Communist, capitalist or nationalist – and regard him as my fellow human being with the same need to take the same steps in order to build together a new world, where all men and women could live unselfishly together.

Towards the end of the conference, I was asked to speak on what I had learned at Caux. Frederick J. Philips, who later became the head of the worldwide Philips industrial organisation, later said to me, 'Thio, you have something of national and world importance.' I thanked him, but at that time I could not appreciate the significance of his remark. God had brought me to Caux to plant a seed in my mind and heart. The seed would take time to grow. In the coming years it did grow, with surprising results.

PROBLEMS OF RACE

At Caux I was joined by an ex-POW friend, Clive Penn, whom I had met in Singapore just before the Japanese invaded South-East Asia. He accompanied me back to Britain, and took me round to visit Cambridge and Oxford, and then to his home in Cardiff, Wales. Later we visited several coal mines and heard from the miners their difficulties and their bleak future. We called on the manager of a well-known steelworks, who was applying principles he had learnt at Caux to produce teamwork in industry. His steelworks had a low record of accidents because the workers had learned to care for one another.

Just before I left London for Southampton, Brigadier David Forster asked me to join him and three friends for a time of quiet listening to find out what God had to say about my future plans.

I cannot now remember what thoughts came to me, but David Forster wrote down certain thoughts, and said that something was going to happen between me and 'the Governor-General of South-East Asia round about Christmas time.' He was not clear beyond that. Inwardly I wondered whether that would ever materialise, because a wide social gulf lay between an Asian schoolmaster in Singapore and the British Governor-General of South-East Asia, the Rt Hon Malcolm MacDonald, PC.

Our Sunderland flying boat stopped first in Marseilles, France. I could sense there the bitterness of the French against the Germans. Then we flew over the Mediterranean towards

Palestine. I remembered an incident at Lydda Airport on my way to London. We had stopped for a meal, and a Jewish passenger had sat next to me at the table. The waiters were apparently all Arabs. One of them came to our table and placed a plate in front of me, and then when he came to the Jewish passenger, he suddenly realised that the man was a Jew. The Arab waiter's face changed. He banged the plate on the table and walked away. The Jewish gentleman was startled. Angrily and loudly he had remarked that the only way to treat such people was to use guns. I did not quite realise then the significance of that statement, but now, looking back over the years, I realise that the use of guns has still not solved the conflict between the Arabs and the Israelis.

The giant flying boat stopped next at Karachi, and here I thought of the problems between Hindus and Muslims in Pakistan and India.

Then, as the plane brought me homeward, it occurred to me all of a sudden that problems involving race had also emerged in Singapore and Malaya. There was already a serious controversy between the Malays led by Dato Onn bin Ja'afar and the Chinese led by Mr Tan Cheng-Lock.* Both were recognised leaders of their communities, with long records of public service. Both were popular and fiery demagogues who could hold large crowds under their spell. Whatever criticisms each made in public against the other became headlines the next day in the Malay, Chinese, Indian and English language newspapers. Emotions were aroused and opinions expressed along mainly ethnic lines.

While this public debate continued in the press, aggressive trade union leaders in the towns and former anti-Japanese

*NOTE: Later a knighthood was conferred on Dato Onn by the Queen. The titles of 'Dato' and 'Tun' were later conferred on Tan Cheng-Lock by the State and Federal Governments, and he was also knighted by Her Majesty.

resistance fighters in the jungles, armed with weapons that had been dropped by the British liberation forces or left behind by the Japanese, openly supported Chinese demands for political equality with the Malays. This group needed the support of the Chinese community leaders in their fight against the British and the Malays over the proposed Federation of Malaya Constitution. The Chinese merchants, guilds and associations were organised under the divisional State Chinese Chambers of Commerce and also together as the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce of Singapore and Malaya. Mr Lee Kong-Chian*, often known as the rubber and pineapple king of Malaya, was then the President of the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce. He was a key man in this complicated and critical situation, and Tan Cheng-Lock depended on him for the support of many Chinese leaders. Thus Malaya and Singapore were at the crossroad of history. Would the opposing groups resort to violence, or would they find a workable alternative?

Hitherto, I had been only an interested spectator in public affairs, watching the leaders make fighting speeches in the public arenas and following the press reports and reactions thereafter. I saw the worsening situation but felt that there was nothing I could do.

But after my visit to Caux, I suddenly saw that perhaps I did have something constructive to suggest to my national and community leaders.

The divisive vertical lines that had prevailed in my heart before I went to Caux had gone, but they were still powerful in the hearts of many leaders all over Malaya and Singapore. If only these psychological and emotional barriers between people could go down, a solution could be worked out. So, as I flew

*NOTE: Upon Lee Kong-Chian was later conferred the title of 'Dato' by the Sultan of Johore and 'Tan Sri' by the Federal Government of Malaysia.

back to Singapore, I pondered over this racial problem of Malaya and Singapore.

Soon after my return in mid-November, 1946, some friends suggested that I should prepare a press statement on what I had seen and learned at the Caux conference and during my stay in England. This I did. With copies of this statement, I called on the news editor of the *Malaya Tribune*. He said he would print the whole statement, if I did not give it to any other paper in Singapore. I agreed to this, and on the following day the full report appeared.

When visiting Kuala Lumpur I called on several of the community leaders and discussed with them the possibility of a new approach for the reconciliation of the racial groups in Malaya and Singapore. An old family friend, then a member of the High Commissioner's Advisory Council in Malaya, urged me to call on Sir Edward Gent and present my views. One morning I found myself calling on His Excellency at King's House. He listened to what I had to say about bridging the gulf between the racial groups in Malaya, and then he said he would like to include a paragraph from my statement in the *Malaya Tribune* in a broadcast he would be making over Radio Malaya. When I listened to his pre-Christmas broadcast I recalled Brigadier Forster's prophetic words in London.*

Later somebody told me that Dato Onn bin Ja'afar, the dynamic Malay leader, was also in Kuala Lumpur and suggested that I should contact him too. I phoned him and he agreed to meet me at his hotel.

After I had given Dato Onn a brief account of the Caux conference and what I had learned, he surprised me by saying that he had previously become acquainted with the work of

*NOTE: *Malay Mail*, 30 December 1946. Eve of Christmas broadcast by Sir Edward Gent, Acting Governor-General of South-East Asia and Governor of Malayan Union, headed 'New Spirit of Responsibility and Goodwill.'

Moral Re-Armament in San Francisco, when he was there as a leader of a trade mission from Malaya. I then made a suggestion that perhaps he could broaden the base of his political party, the United Malays' National Organisation (UMNO), so that it would be possible for Malaysians of all races to be in one political party or group. Dato Onn said it was too late. He then referred to Tan Cheng-Lock, and said, 'Why does Cheng-Lock keep on attacking me in the press? I know he is loyal to this country. People like Cheng-Lock and myself must work together for Malaya. Please tell him not to attack me in the press.' I was glad for that interview. I had learned that he was willing to make friends and work together with Tan Cheng-Lock for the good of Malaya as a whole.

On returning to Singapore, I called on Lee Kong-Chian with whom I had become acquainted through his eldest son. He was a remarkable pioneering industrialist who had risen to leadership in the fields of commerce and industry in South-East Asia. He still believed in the social values traditional among the Chinese of the older generation. He had great respect for teachers, for he himself had once been a teacher. Also it turned out that during the war he had attended an MRA conference at Mackinac Island in the USA and had met Frank Buchman, the founder of Moral Re-Armament. He had gone there with General Chang Kia-Eng, the builder of the Burma Road, on the recommendation of the then President, Harry Truman.

When I told him about my recent interview in Kuala Lumpur with Dato Onn bin Ja'afar, the Malay leader, he said that I must also meet Tan Cheng-Lock.

Meanwhile the new constitutional proposals for a Federation of Malaya had become a highly emotional and controversial racial issue, particularly between the Malays and the Chinese in Malaya and Singapore.

One evening Lee Kong-Chian telephoned and asked me to call at his home. Tan Cheng-Lock was also there. He had

brought with him a rattan tray full of documents. He expounded on the constitutional proposals, pointing out what he considered to be the most objectionable features in them. As he talked, he became highly agitated. His arguments were along these lines. 'The British,' he said, 'have sold us to the Malays. Our children and our grandchildren will have practically no rights at all, no future in this country which has been our home, in some cases for generations. Very few of us will be citizens. Therefore we must oppose these new constitutional proposals with all our might for the sake of ourselves, our children and our grandchildren.'

In his anger he rose from his seat, took the tray of documents from the table, and violently dashed them to the floor. Then he paced about like a raging lion. Suddenly, during a pause in his tirade, I had the thought to say to him, 'Mr Cheng-Lock, Dato Onn said that he was not really against you. He believed that you love Malaya as much as he does, and therefore people like you should work together with him.'

Tan Cheng-Lock stopped in his stride. 'Did he really say that?' he asked. 'Well, what else did he say?' He then picked up the tray of documents, placed it on the table and sat down. I told him what had happened during my interview with Dato Onn. He was visibly impressed and said, 'Well, you tell Dato Onn not to attack me, and I promise that I will not attack him.'

Lee Kong-Chian was peace-loving by nature. Together we helped Tan Cheng-Lock to calm down. Soon he was in good humour again.

As soon as I could obtain an appointment, I called on Dato Onn bin Ja'afar, this time at his home in Johore Bahru, for Dato Onn was not only the national leader of UMNO but also the Chief Minister of the State of Johore, just across the Causeway north of Singapore. I reported to him what Tan Cheng-Lock had said and the promise he had given – that if Dato Onn would agree not to attack him in the press or in public, then

Cheng-Lock would do likewise. Dato Onn readily agreed.

Thereafter the gentlemen of the press could not continue the 'war' between the two, because neither of them could be persuaded to supply the press with ammunition. This truce helped to ease the racial tension which had been rising and spreading throughout Malaya and Singapore.

But, after a while, new causes of misunderstanding appeared. New fears arose. As leaders of the Chinese in Malaya and Singapore, Tan Cheng-Lock and Lee Kong-Chian were pressed by different groups to make a stand and fight for the rights of the Chinese and the other non-Malay communities before it was too late. The militant trade union leaders also promised their support. Leaders from other communities rallied round. They were all in favour of a twenty-four hour country-wide hartal or boycott of all transport and trading activities in Malaya and Singapore as a demonstration of their united opposition to the new constitutional proposals. They demanded certain changes in the proposals.

Tan Cheng-Lock's stand was that, as the political leader of the Chinese in Malaya, he could not very well ignore these appeals, and he was prepared to support the move for a hartal as a form of national protest which had been successfully used in India by those who had fought for independence. But Lee Kong-Chian, as President of the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce in Malaya and Singapore, being a peace-loving man, hesitated to embark on a course of action which might lead to widespread unrest and violence, as in India. Finally, he agreed to support a resolution at a meeting of the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce, calling for a peaceful hartal. He insisted on one condition – that there should be no acts of violence whatsoever. It must be a peaceful demonstration, so that the British colonial authorities and the Malay groups would not misunderstand and misconstrue the hartal as a token of violent opposition or a rebellion against the government.

This was agreed to by all.

This first nationwide hartal proved to be a great success. All trade and public communication by ship, rail and road stopped. The markets and shops were closed. No trains or buses moved. The hartal was so effective that it frightened the British authorities and the Malay leaders. If left unchallenged, the opposition groups could paralyse the whole country at will.

After the peaceful hartal, Lee Kong-Chian confided in me his early fear that the hartal might lead to violence. Now he was happy that the only act of violence reported was the puncturing of the tyre of a Chinese cyclist who had been carrying goods on the carrier of his bicycle.

The success of this first hartal, however, encouraged many in the opposition groups to demand a second and more prolonged hartal so as to force the British authorities and the Malay leaders to amend the constitutional proposals to give more citizenship rights to the non-Malays in Malaya.

Tan Cheng-Lock was at first receptive to the suggestion for a second hartal, but Lee Kong-Chian was not keen.

One evening Lee Kong-Chian phoned me up and asked me to go to his house with Dr Roy Oram, the RAMC Deputy Director of Medical Services. As Roy was of Irish descent, he was regarded as neutral and objective in his views. He had also attended conferences at Caux.

When we arrived at Mr Lee's home, we found that he and Tan Cheng-Lock were already in the midst of a serious discussion with four representatives from a militant group of supporters. They strongly urged the Chinese and other non-Malay communities to fight for their rights and for the independence of Malaya and Singapore. They argued that freedom had never been obtained without bloodshed. Therefore, they said, there must be a series of hartals until the British authorities agreed to revise the constitutional proposals and give independence to Malaya and Singapore.

Lee Kong-Chian then asked Dr Oram for his views.

Dr Oram pointed out that Ceylon had obtained her independence without bloodshed. Therefore Malaya and Singapore could also obtain independence from the British in the same manner.

Tan Cheng-Lock commented that if there was a violent clash, the non-Malays would be handicapped because they had no arms. To this the four representatives said that they knew of arms hidden in the jungles of Malaya, and there would be people who would readily come out of the jungles with their arms to help those in the city and the rural areas in their fight for independence. They could also depend on the militant trade unions for support. The proponents of violence seemed confident of success and required only the support of the two Chinese leaders and the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce in Singapore and Malaya for the second hartal. After the four had had their say, they left us to deliberate on their proposals.

Lee Kong-Chian was still hesitant. He knew that once there was an open conflict between the main communities in Malaya and Singapore, it would be extremely difficult to bring about peace and reconciliation again. He asked us for our views.

I suggested that we might perhaps try to visualise the possible consequences of a second hartal. Firstly, the British and Malay leaders would not stand still and maintain peace as they did the first time. They were bound to take steps, such as arresting the leaders of the second hartal. And then the conflict would spread. There would be strikes and riots in different parts of Malaya and Singapore. If armed men from the jungles were to join in the conflict, then there would be much bloodshed. The whole thing could escalate into a racial war as well as a civil war.

At that time we did not have the example of a war-stricken Vietnam or a strife-torn Northern Ireland, but the ingredients

in Malaya and Singapore were equally, perhaps even more, explosive. Neither side was likely to win decisively. Thus there would be a long period of chaos with much suffering for the common people on both sides. As leaders of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya, Lee Kong-Chian and Tan Cheng-Lock would have to think of the possible adverse consequences to their community. Lee Kong-Chian agreed that a second hartal must be avoided and a new approach must be sought.

Tan Cheng-Lock then admitted to us that at a previous discussion with the four militant representatives, he had unfortunately agreed to a second hartal. He had promised to deliver a speech at a forthcoming meeting of the delegates of the Chinese Chambers of Commerce and move formally a resolution advocating this. He could not therefore withdraw. As a political leader of the Chinese in Malaya, he would be regarded as showing cold feet if he backed out at this stage. But he agreed that we must all seek a better approach. What could we suggest? He laughed uneasily over his own predicament. He had a sense of humour, even at his own expense, when he was not in a temper.

Then Lee Kong-Chian worked out a plan. He said that Tan Cheng-Lock must be allowed to deliver his speech. However, supposing he managed to secure enough support among the Chinese delegates so that they would agree to a postponement of any decision on the resolution, would Mr Tan then accept this? He readily agreed.

And so, at the meeting of the representatives of the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce in Tanjong Rhu, Singapore, Tan Cheng-Lock made his fiery speech advocating a second hartal. Then a delegate got up to say that in view of the seriousness of the proposal, he would suggest that the question be deferred for more careful consideration. This was accepted by the delegates present and agreed to by Tan Cheng-Lock. And so the second hartal was postponed and later

shelved indefinitely. The Chinese leaders had publicly shown how far they would go to express their discontent, but, as responsible people, they would not precipitate action so long as there was a chance of a reasonable solution.

The British authorities were unaware of the real reason behind this dramatic turn of events. They had fully anticipated a second and more dangerous hartal, and apparently they were prepared. The news of the postponement of the second hartal must have come as a great surprise to them. However, the British military command or the police authorities in Malaya recommended the arrest of several of the leaders of the proposed hartal as a preventive measure and as a lesson to the others.

One morning, after a meeting of the Singapore Advisory Council, of which I had been appointed a member, Sir Franklin Gimson, the Governor, beckoned to me to join him and the Attorney-General, E. J. Davies, in their private discussions. He also asked Tan Chin-Tuan, a leading banker on the Advisory Council, to remain behind. Sir Franklin then told us in confidence that he had received word from Kuala Lumpur that the British authorities there had proposed the arrest and detention of Lee Kong-Chian to prevent another hartal from breaking out. He wanted to know our views and the probable reactions of the Chinese community in Singapore.

Both Tan Chin-Tuan and myself were horrified by such a suggestion. We knew the constructive and peacemaking role Lee Kong-Chian had been playing behind the scenes. I then told the Governor the truth about Lee Kong-Chian in his role as secret peacemaker, that he was the most constructive and respected Chinese leader at that time, and his arrest and detention would deprive the Chinese community in both Singapore and Malaya of a leader of integrity and goodwill. The consequences among the Chinese following his arrest would be unthinkable. The Attorney General seemed to agree

with us, and the Governor said he would communicate our views to the authorities in Kuala Lumpur.

Some twenty-two years later, in the autumn of 1970, when I called on Malcolm MacDonald at his home on Rasput Hill in the south of England, I asked him whether he knew about this particular incident. Yes, he did remember it very well. He had received a file from Kuala Lumpur containing the suggestion that Lee Kong-Chian should be detained. And he too was astounded and greatly disturbed. As Governor-General of South-East Asia he had a wider and more objective view than the military leaders in Kuala Lumpur. He strongly opposed the suggestion, and went so far as to make it clear to the authorities in Kuala Lumpur that, if necessary, he would have to convey his opposition privately to the higher authorities in England. It was fortunate for all the people in Malaya and Singapore that this strong opposition from both Malcolm MacDonald and Sir Franklin Gimson blocked the proposed move against Lee Kong-Chian. Thus he was spared to continue his work as a peacemaker.

SEEKING AN URGENT SOLUTION

Although the delegates of the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce had not approved the second hartal scheduled for 1 February 1948, still they had publicly registered their protest against the British Government's decision to inaugurate the new Federation of Malaya on that date. They had also adopted a resolution calling upon all members of the Chinese Chambers of Commerce in the various states of the new Federation of Malaya not to nominate nor accept any nomination of Chinese representatives to the Malayan Federal Legislative Council or State Councils, under the new constitution.

This was a constitutional boycott which, they said, was the least harmful way of expressing their dissatisfaction against the British authorities. At the same time, to prevent further racial misunderstanding, the Chairman, Lee Kong-Chian, proposed a round table conference of representatives from the different racial groups in Singapore and Malaya to foster understanding and harmony. This was unanimously approved by the delegates.

Dato Onn, as head of UMNO, expressed his regret at this boycott of the Federal Legislative Council and State Councils by the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce. He said that it would be in the better interest of all in the country, and of the Chinese Chambers of Commerce in particular, if their representatives were members of the Federal and State Councils. Any just amendments to the new constitution which the Chinese desired could be amicably achieved in and through the Federal Legislative Council.

It was against this background of racial disagreement and tension that the historic signing of the Federation and State Agreements by the Malay rulers and the High Commissioner of the new Federation of Malaya, Sir Edward Gent, was scheduled to take place at three o'clock on the afternoon of 1 February.

Meanwhile, in Singapore, Governor Sir Franklin Gimson had a problem to solve. The Singapore Legislative Council had been asked to include five multi-racial unofficial members in the Singapore delegation to attend the inauguration ceremony for the installation of Sir Edward Gent as the first High Commissioner of the new Federation of Malaya. But because of the boycott of the new Federal Constitution by the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce, all the four Chinese members of the Singapore Legislative Council including myself were unwilling to attend the inauguration ceremony for fear of being misunderstood by our community. The Governor sent word to ask if I could kindly go with the Indian, Eurasian, British and Malay unofficial representatives of the Singapore Legislative Council to represent Singapore, and to read out a congratulatory message on behalf of the Singapore Legislative Council. If I declined, then the Chinese community in Singapore would not be represented.

This put me on the spot. Sir Franklin and I were on very friendly terms, but when I read the proposed message, I realised that I could not deliver it with a clear conscience, because I could not honestly congratulate the British authorities and the Federation Government for having forced through a Constitution in the face of strong opposition from a large proportion of the people of Malaya and Singapore. However, going through the draft message, I saw that I could sincerely convey to the new Federation Government the good wishes of the members of the Singapore Legislative Council and our desire for continued goodwill and co-operation between the

Federal Legislative Council of Malaya and the Legislative Council of Singapore.

I therefore sent word to Sir Franklin that I would be willing to attend the inauguration ceremony and read out the message on behalf of the Singapore Legislative Council provided he would allow me to make a change in the first portion of the message, so that it would become not a message of congratulation, but a message of goodwill to the Government and the people of Malaya. The Governor agreed to the amendment proposed, and I accepted this role of a messenger of goodwill on behalf of the Legislative Council of Singapore, knowing full well that my action could be misunderstood by the Chinese community.

Thus it came about that at the official ceremony in the Council Chamber in Kuala Lumpur, attended by leaders of the Malay States resplendent in their colourful native costumes and by British officials in their impressive uniforms, a simple schoolmaster read out a message of goodwill from Singapore. Both the local press and the *London Times* published this message, and Sir Edward Gent later warmly thanked me for this demonstration of goodwill from Singapore. Thus another hurdle had been surmounted in the journey towards the goal of inter-racial co-operation.

Tan Cheng-Lock, being a dynamic leader of the Chinese in Malaya, could not remain long on the side-lines as a silent spectator, especially when he believed that progress towards an amended Federal Constitution would be slow and frustrating. Very often, when he came to Singapore, he would meet with Lee Kong-Chian and myself privately in Mr Lee's home and discuss the latest situation. Cheng-Lock was usually fiery and emotional, and for some time Lee and I would have to be patient listeners. But gradually Tan would calm down and laugh quietly like a philosopher over his own difficulties and frustrations.

One day he came to my home in Singapore, looking agitated and unhappy. It was most unusual for him to call on me personally and alone because, among the Chinese of his generation, age and seniority were important, and a younger man should call on a much older person rather than the other way round.

In my small sitting room he began to give vent to his suppressed feelings. He said that months had passed by, and he saw no progress being achieved. He could not stand the delay any longer. Something more must be done, and if there was no progress, he must be willing once more actively to lead the opposition forces to fight the British authorities, and the Malays too if necessary, in order to safeguard the rights of the Chinese, their children and their grandchildren. This, he said, was his responsibility and he would not run away from it. He was prepared to go all the way, regardless of the consequences to himself and his family.

I listened to his furious words, feeling unequal to the task of advising him in his frustration and disappointment. He went on to say that the British had allowed the Malays to organise a new all-Malay regiment. Therefore, he said, before it was too late, all the non-Malays opposed to the new constitution must organise themselves to fight for their rights. All the debates in the new Federal Legislative Council, he added, had been futile. What did I think was the right course?

While listening to him I had been praying silently. Thoughts came to me – Tan Cheng-Lock had been a teacher before, and was fond of reading history books. Therefore, it would be wise to reason with him against the background of world history. Then he would appreciate the seriousness of his proposed line of action.

At last when he had finished presenting his views, I suggested that we should try to envisage the consequences of such a militant course of action as he proposed. Tan Cheng-Lock

would organise the Chinese and the other Malay communities to fight the British and the Malays. Dato Onn naturally would organise the Malays and, with the help of the British, oppose and fight the Chinese and the other non-Malay communities. History, I said, would record that the two leaders who had brought bloodshed and misery to the people of Malaya were Tan Cheng-Lock and Dato Onn bin Ja'afar.

I did not know what gave me the courage to talk to him like that. Mr Tan Cheng-Lock was very much my senior and the accepted leader of the Malayan Chinese. What I said shocked him. He glared at me in anger, and then burst out, 'Yes! But what else can I do? What else can I do?'

Then I suggested a new approach along these lines; nobody could prevent him from organising the Chinese, and nobody could prevent Dato Onn from organising the Malays. 'But supposing,' I said, 'both of you organise for a different purpose. Supposing you organise the Chinese to co-operate with the Malays to build a new nation – to build together, but never to destroy each other. And supposing Dato Onn organises also the Malays in Malaya to co-operate and work together with the Chinese and the other communities. Thus both of you will be remembered with gratitude as the two leaders who brought peace and happiness to the millions of people in Malaya.'

The message seemed to reach his heart. He was silent for a while. And then he said slowly and thoughtfully, 'Yes, Chan Bee, I agree with you . . . If you can arrange a meeting between Dato Onn and myself, and if he agrees to this new approach, then I promise you I will work with him to organise and build a new nation in Malaya. I promise you that.'

Thus a grave responsibility and a great load had been thrust upon an ordinary man. How was I to arrange this meeting between the two Malayan political leaders? How would Dato Onn respond to this new course of action?

I consulted Lee Kong-Chian, and he tried his best to arrange

a private meeting between Dato Onn and Tan Cheng-Lock. I also visited Dato Onn several times in his office in Johore Bahru to discuss with him this new approach of organising to co-operate and build together instead of organising to fight and destroy each other. He agreed with me that this was a better approach, and he promised that at the right time he would meet with Tan Cheng-Lock. The timing, he felt, was most important.

And so we waited. Days passed into weeks. Weeks became months, and still the meeting could not be arranged. At one stage Dato Onn had accepted an invitation to tea at Lee Kong-Chian's home to meet with the three of us. Then, at the last moment, he telephoned to say that he could not come. He asked me to convey to the others his apologies. Thus our efforts to get the two leaders to meet had failed.

I pondered over this situation for days, and then the thought came that perhaps I should call on Malcolm MacDonald, the Commissioner-General for South-East Asia, with whom I had had several private discussions on contemporary issues. (The post of Governor-General had been re-designated Commissioner-General for South-East Asia, with greatly expanded responsibilities over a wider area). Perhaps, I thought, he should now be invited to come in and help us.

Mr MacDonald was most friendly and receptive. I told him frankly what had been happening as a result of discussions among the three of us – Cheng-Lock, Kong-Chian and myself – and of the new formula for co-operation between the Chinese and the Malays which Tan Cheng-Lock had accepted. But, I said, Tan Cheng-Lock could not be kept waiting indefinitely. It was vital and urgent that he and Dato Onn should get together as soon as possible. A policy of 'divide and rule' in Malaya would make matters worse. I therefore appealed to him to help arrange a private meeting between them. If successful, the people of Malaya and Singapore would remember him with gratitude.

This was in the latter part of 1948. The jungle war had already erupted. Failure to bring Dato Onn and Tan Cheng-Lock together could produce a chain-reaction which could plunge the whole country into violence and disorder. Mr MacDonald knew that Cheng-Lock was a man of tempestuous emotions and a fiery popular leader among the militant Singapore and Malayan Chinese, especially among the Chinese educated, although he, Tan, was English educated and could hardly speak his own Chinese dialect.

The appeal evoked a constructive response and Malcolm MacDonald kept his word.

After some weeks three Malayan Chinese leaders came to Singapore from Kuala Lumpur to discuss their problems with Lee Kong-Chian and other Singapore Chinese leaders. A private session was held after dinner at the home of a Malayan cinema magnate.

In the middle of the heated discussions, somebody whispered into my ear that Malcolm MacDonald was on the phone and wished to speak to me. He had tried to contact me at home and my wife had told him where I was.

Mr MacDonald had good news for us – Dato Onn had agreed to invite ten Chinese leaders to meet privately with ten Malay leaders at dinner in his home in Johore Bahru on 29 December 1948. Dato Onn had insisted, however, that everything must be done confidentially, and that nobody outside those in the limited group should be told about this secret meeting. Mr MacDonald asked me to convey the message privately to Tan Cheng-Lock and Lee Kong-Chian, who were to nominate the other members of the Chinese group.

FROM ENEMIES TO FRIENDS

The fateful day of 29 December arrived. Would the secret meeting between Tan Cheng-Lock and Dato Onn produce a new trend in the history of South-East Asia? Within twenty four hours we would know the result.

Eleven Chinese leaders from Kuala Lumpur and Singapore met for lunch at the Singapore Garden Club. We were to decide on a common plan of action for the forthcoming dinner and meeting at the home of our host, Dato Onn bin Ja'afar.

Somebody suggested that since this was the first meeting of Malay and Chinese leaders from both Singapore and Malaya, it would be an excellent opportunity for both sides to explain to each other their different points of view on the new constitution. He suggested that we should speak frankly and fearlessly. I thought that this would be the very worst possible beginning. Before a spirit of goodwill, understanding and trust had been generated among the participants, any frank statement of conflicting views was bound to produce a negative reaction from the other side.

I expressed my opinion, and the majority agreed that it would not be tactful to begin like that, especially as Dato Onn was our host and we were the guests. Various other matters were discussed and everyone had his say. Suddenly Tan Chin-Tuan, the banker, looked at his wrist watch and said, 'Well, it is nearly half past two, and most of us have to go back to our offices'. He suggested that those who did not have any office work to do after the lunch should remain behind and thrash

out the points raised. Their recommendations would be submitted to the whole group which would meet again for tea at Mr Lee's home.

Only three persons were able to remain for further discussions – Tan Cheng-Lock, Yong Shook-Lin, the lawyer from Kuala Lumpur, and I.

I thought that since the meeting in Dato Onn's house would be the first between the Malay and Chinese leaders, it would be advisable to begin with points of agreement so as to develop goodwill on both sides. This first meeting could lead to others, and after enough goodwill and trust had been engendered, then only should the stormy issues be raised. Both Cheng-Lock and Shook-Lin agreed that this was a good line of approach.

We then turned to other points, and at last we came to the appointment of the person who should make a speech of thanks to Dato Onn on behalf of the guests. Yong Shook-Lin and I agreed that naturally the spokesman should be Tan Cheng-Lock, but he vehemently declared that he would never do such a thing. He maintained that he could not express his thanks on behalf of the Chinese guests, because he and Dato Onn had been at loggerheads for such a long time that he felt it would be insincere for him to say thank you to Dato Onn for the dinner! The more we tried to persuade him, the more obstinate he became.

We almost gave up. Then the thought suddenly struck me to try a new line of argument. 'Mr Cheng-Lock,' I said, 'let us ask ourselves this question: who is the leader of the Chinese delegation?' He thought about it and said, 'Well, I suppose I am'.

'If somebody else were to express his thanks on behalf of the Chinese guests, then that person would appear to be the leader of the Chinese group. That surely would give Dato Onn a wrong impression'.

Cheng-Lock saw the point and laughed. 'Well, if you put it

that way,' he said, 'then I suppose I must make the speech of thanks on your behalf, but not on my own behalf'.

Just before we parted, Tan said to me, 'Chan Bee, please sit somewhere near me. If my temper flares up, please give me a nudge.' Then he chuckled to himself. He was beginning to enjoy pioneering a new approach in the role of peacemaker and bridge-builder.

At tea time, all the eleven Chinese members of the group were at Lee Kong-Chian's home. The recommendations of the *ad hoc* committee were accepted. It was also agreed that we should not go in one big group, but in our cars separately, so that Tan Cheng-Lock, Lee Kong-Chian and I would arrive at Dato Onn's house ahead of the others.

On our arrival we found Dato Onn standing outside his front door, with Malcolm MacDonald by his side. When Tan Cheng-Lock went up to Dato Onn and offered his hand, I could see that they shook hands rather gingerly! They had been bitter political opponents for quite a long time. And now they were meeting again face to face, man to man, in a friendly manner, as host and guest of honour.

Awaiting the guests inside Dato Onn's house were some of his UMNO colleagues, one of whom was the late Dr Ismail (later Tun Dr Ismail) bin Dato Abdul Rahman who later became Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia. Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Abdul Razak were not at the meeting because, as Dato Onn explained later, he had invited only some of the Malay leaders from Kuala Lumpur and Southern Malaya.

Dato Onn was a generous host. He had prepared a banquet. The long dining table, very tastefully decorated, was loaded with all the delicacies which the Malay culinary art could produce. Dato Onn sat with Malcolm MacDonald and Tan Cheng-Lock on each side of him, and the rest of us were placed on opposite sides of the long dining table.

As the guests ate, drank and exchanged jokes, they became more relaxed. Tan Cheng-Lock began to recite fluently one Malay *pantun* (short poem) after another, and his Malay hosts applauded his performances. At last one Malay leader exclaimed, 'Mr Cheng-Lock, you are more Malay than many of us. You can recite so many *pantuns*, but we can't.' There was much laughter, and more applause. Such cordial reactions warmed the heart of Tan Cheng-Lock.

After dinner, we went to the lounge. We sat in a circle, and I sat as close as I could to Tan Cheng-Lock, remembering what he had said to me at the Garden Club. Actually there was no need for anybody to restrain him from losing his temper. Towards midnight, he rose to thank Dato Onn on behalf of the guests. He spoke movingly, and with sincerity. The gist of what he said was: 'In Malaya, Malays and Chinese have lived together like friends and brothers for many generations. Why should they not now settle their differences as between friends? Surely, as friends, they could find the right solutions to their problems more easily than if they were enemies. Why should they organise to fight each other, and ruin the country? Instead, could they not organise to co-operate with each other, and so build together a new country and a new nation? After such an amicable evening, surely it would be most regrettable if they were to return to their homes and start quarrelling again.'

He concluded by expressing his sincere thanks on behalf of the guests and the hope that their meeting would not be the last, but the beginning of a new cordial relationship between the Malays and the Chinese in Malaya and Singapore.

There was an embarrassing silence after he had sat down. Then one of the Malay leaders took off his *songkok* (Malay cap), scratched his head, put on his *songkok* again, and said something like: 'The Chinese have economic power. The Malays now have political power. If the Chinese will help the Malays to rise economically, then surely the Malays must share

with the Chinese their political power. And if the Chinese want to organise themselves to co-operate with the Malays, then surely the Malays must welcome their co-operation. However, if the Chinese want to organise themselves to fight the Malays, then naturally the Malays must do the same.'

There was a loud chorus of dissent to the second proposal from among the Chinese guests present. All were in favour of the new principle: to organise to co-operate to build together a new nation.

Tan Cheng-Lock appeared happy. Would the Malays have any objection to the formation of the Malayan Chinese Association, he asked, if the objective was to co-operate with the Malays to build a new nation?

'Not if you organise to co-operate with us,' was the reply. This seemed to find favour with everybody present, and thus a new basis and a general formula for inter-racial co-operation had been found.

At this juncture somebody looked at his watch and exclaimed that it was very late, and we should be going home. Then Malcolm MacDonald expressed the view that it would be a pity for those present to depart with no permanent arrangement for the continuation of the good work started. Someone suggested forming a standing committee to work out the details of future co-operation. But Dato Onn pointed out that there were no Malay representatives at that meeting from northern and eastern Malaya. He therefore proposed another meeting to be held in Penang, on the occasion of the marriage of the son of Dato Mahmud bin Mat, the Menteri Besar (Chief Minister) of Pahang, to the daughter of Encik Hashim of Penang. The idea of a standing committee could be discussed there. This proposal was agreed to by all.

A suggestion that a joint press statement should be released was opposed by Dato Onn, because at that stage, he said, it would be premature. He preferred that such a statement be

released after the meeting in Penang, when other Malay leaders from northern and eastern Malaya would be present. The next meeting would not be a secret one, and therefore could be publicised.

Thus both the local and the world press were kept in the dark about this dramatic dinner at the home of Dato Onn bin Ja'afar on 29 December, and the new basis of co-operation which had emerged from the cordial discussions held there.

After the dinner, Yong Shook-Lin said to me, 'You know, that was a great event. History has changed its course for this country because of the reconciliation between those two men'.

To the world outside, the reconciliation commenced at the meeting of the Malay and Chinese leaders at the wedding of the son of the Chief Minister of Pahang. Several Indian, Ceylonese, British and Eurasian community leaders were also invited to attend, so that when the Communities' Liaison Committee was formed it would be representative of all the major races and communities in Malaya and Singapore. At that time, Singapore was still regarded as practically a part of Malaya, and Singapore representatives were also welcomed. The Chairman appointed was a well-known Ceylonese lawyer, Mr E. E. C. Thuraisingam.

Lee Kong-Chian kindly suggested that I should go to the Penang meeting, but I had my school duties to perform. However, whenever Tan Cheng-Lock came to Singapore, the three of us would get together to discuss the progress made in the Communities' Liaison Committee. Sometimes he was very impatient, and felt that some members of the committee had been obstructive. However, we urged him to continue to be patient, to state his views frankly, and then work for a constructive solution.

As agreed to by the Malay leaders, Mr Tan and his colleagues organised the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA). Its primary objective was to organise the Malayan Chinese all

over Malaya to co-operate with their Malay counterpart, the United Malays National Organisation, to settle their differences amicably, and work towards building a new Malayan nation. The Indians in Malaya similarly organised themselves as the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC).

When news of the meeting in Penang was released to the press, the *Malaya Tribune* of 12 January 1949 immediately welcomed it with an editorial headlined 'Men of Goodwill'.

Yong Shook-Lin, writing to me from Kuala Lumpur on 24 February, said, 'No one can claim credit for the good results achieved. We are concerned with good results and not the honour. Tan Cheng-Lock has repeated often to me, "God brought us together" to work together for the communities.'

NOTE: Letters from the Honourable Dato Onn bin Ja'afar and Mr Tan Cheng-Lock are reproduced in the Appendix.

JUNGLE WAR AND THE EMERGENCY IN MALAYA

It must be remembered that a state of emergency had been declared in Malaya in June, 1948. Those who favoured the use of violence for the achievement of independence had decided that they would go their own way. Acts of terrorism were becoming more and more frequent in towns, villages, and rubber estates. The state of emergency, or the Jungle War as it is sometimes called, was giving the British and the Malay authorities a great deal of worry and anxiety.

One morning, I was horrified to read on the front page in big headlines, 'Grenade wounds Tan Cheng-Lock in outrage at Ipoh meeting. Town cordoned in search of assailants.'

Anxiously I read through the account. After addressing an MCA meeting in Taiping, Tan Cheng-Lock had gone to Ipoh to address another meeting at the Perak Chinese Chamber of Commerce. While he was speaking, two hand grenades were thrown at him. Pieces of shrapnel struck him on the shoulder and he was taken to hospital.

The attempt on Tan Cheng-Lock's life shocked many people. They now realised that the stormy firebrand of Malayan politics was a sincere leader, prepared to sacrifice his life for his new conviction. Subsequent events showed that the Malay leaders did learn to trust this Chinese leader who was once their political enemy but had become their friend.

The emergency turned out to be more serious than had been expected. The British found that it was difficult for their soldiers, trained in western methods of warfare, to locate

elusive enemies who could disappear into the villages and jungles and then reappear somewhere else to commit acts of terrorism. Moreover, the terrorists could not be distinguished from the ordinary Chinese labourers in town or the farmers in the countryside.

Furthermore, many of the Chinese squatters had established villages in jungle clearings to cultivate vegetables and raise poultry for their livelihood. Some of these farmers were forced to help the guerillas. However, the military authorities believed wrongly that all the male squatters were supporters of the jungle guerillas.

One day Lee Kong-Chian and I were asked by Tan Cheng-Lock to join a delegation to meet with Sir Henry Gurney, the new High Commissioner of Malaya, who had replaced Sir Edward Gent. Sir Henry had called for a meeting with the Chinese leaders to discuss the question of the squatters. Something had to be done very quickly and drastically to deprive the terrorists of their lines of communication and supplies. The British military authorities apparently had suggested the destruction of the villages and the repatriation of the village folk to China.

As far as I know, the following account has never been given. I became an eyewitness of a dramatic scene in King's House, the official residence of the High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur. We sat round a long table, with Sir Henry at one end and Tan Cheng-Lock at the other. Sir Henry explained that he had received reports on the illegal Chinese settlers who had squatted on state land in or near the Malayan jungles, and he had been told that they were supplying food and information to the guerillas. One proposal was to ship them back to China; another was to compel them to resettle in new areas.

Tan Cheng-Lock expressed forcefully his disagreement with Sir Henry's views. He condemned the proposals as being too extreme and lacking in humanity. He pointed out that the

Chinese squatters in the jungle clearings had to obey the guerillas or else they would be shot. To them the danger from the guerillas was nearer and far greater than the so-called 'protection' given by soldiers or policemen who were far away and could not protect them at all. He asked Sir Henry to see the problem from the Chinese squatters' point of view. He stressed that if the British soldiers and Malay policemen could really give the squatters adequate protection, then those who helped the guerillas could thereafter be treated as disloyal people and punished.

Sir Henry, however, argued that the emergency in Malaya was equivalent to a war and in war humane consideration sometimes had to give way to national security. Therefore, he felt that he had to ask the Malayan Chinese leaders to agree to the proposals submitted by his advisers.

Tan Cheng-Lock remained firm in his opposition. His voice rose to an angry pitch. Suddenly we were shocked. He banged his fist on the table and told the High Commissioner point blank that if Sir Henry were to implement such drastic plans he would oppose them openly. The squatters were like cattle needing protection, but the drastic measures now proposed would drive more of them into the jungles to swell the ranks of the guerillas. He asked Sir Henry to amend his proposals; otherwise, he said, the world would hold Sir Henry responsible for the consequences. In his anger he used some very strong language.

We could see the suppressed anger on Sir Henry's face.

Lee Kong-Chian whispered quite loudly to Tan Cheng-Lock in the Hokkien dialect, and then in English, remembering that the latter spoke only English and Malay, 'Hey! Hey! Cheng-Lock, please don't speak like that. He is the High Commissioner, you know. Please tone down your speech. Don't lose your temper.' Tan looked at him and then calmed down somewhat.

At the other end of the table, Sir Henry Gurney sat in silence. Perhaps nobody had ever dared to speak to him in that way before. At the same time, he must have remembered that Tan Cheng-Lock himself had been a target of the terrorists and had shed his blood for the country. Therefore nobody could question his loyalty. Instead of answering Tan Cheng-Lock, Sir Henry suddenly said that it was time for refreshments. They would resume their discussions later.

During this short break, Lee Kong-Chian and several of the other Chinese leaders present urged Tan Cheng-Lock to restrain himself and keep calm. We were afraid that his temper might flare up again, and then there would be no hope of reaching any agreement. But he had already regained his composure and was in a cheerful mood.

Sir Henry too must have had second thoughts because, when the meeting resumed, he was constructive. He appreciated Mr Cheng-Lock's objections, and asked for counter proposals. Gradually a new resettlement plan emerged. Supposing the Malayan Chinese Association, not the Government, were to approach the Chinese squatters with an offer to resettle them away from the dangerous jungles in comparatively safe areas, where they would be given proper protection by the British soldiers and the policemen, would the squatters agree? With some persuasion, they might respond to this proposal of new protected villages. They would then have less cause to take sides with the guerillas.

The question of finance was now raised. Who was going to pay for the labour and building materials for the construction of these new villages? Sir Henry suggested that the MCA should provide such accommodation and amenities as were necessary. The Government on its part would build the fences, and protect the villages. Since the amount involved was likely to be colossal, Sir Henry suggested that the Government give the MCA permission to raise funds for this purpose through

public lotteries. There was at first doubt about the desirability of this method of fund raising. Finally it was agreed that the Government would ask all official members of the Legislative Council to support the motion to make such lotteries legal.

Some ten years later, one of the leaders of the MCA, Tun Leong Yew-Koh, a former Secretary General of the party, expressed to me privately his regret that the MCA had to appeal to the Chinese in Malaya to join the MCA on the basis of participation in public lotteries. The main motivation for people to join MCA was therefore to win a lottery prize, and not from the conviction that they should support a party promoting inter-racial goodwill and co-operation, instead of confrontation and destruction. Nevertheless Sir Henry Gurney's suggestion gave the MCA a quick start in raising funds.

The plan seemed to work out well. The squatters were re-settled far away from the jungles. In the day time, they would go out to work on their farms, but at dusk they would be back inside the new fenced-in villages, protected by their own home guards as well as the police and military.

Sir Gerald Templer, who succeeded Sir Henry Gurney after the latter's death in an ambush on the way to Fraser's Hill, pursued the new policy of squatter re-settlement in new villages with great vigour. Thus the terrorists in the jungles had increasing difficulty in getting their food supplies. Nor could these squatter farmers be contacted easily for information.

THE ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

After the Japanese Occupation, there were many observers from foreign countries who expressed the opinion that Malaya could never be given complete independence because the moment that happened, the people of different races and religions would be at one another's throats.

But there were also others, particularly among the local people, who felt that this was only an excuse to enable the British to preserve the *status quo* and prevent Malaya from achieving complete independence. Therefore some politicians maintained that independence could be obtained only if the people were prepared to use force.

Fortunately for Malaya and Singapore, leaders like Dato Onn, Tan Cheng-Lock and Lee Kong-Chian realised in time that it was preferable for the leaders of the different racial groups to unite and then negotiate for independence from the British colonial authorities than to fight among themselves and talk of independence at the same time. The British would then have no reason to delay the granting of independence because of the fear of inter-racial conflict.

Round about this time, Dato Onn thought that conditions had become favourable for UMNO to open its doors to the non-Malays as members of one common organisation which could then demand independence for Malaya from the British. But many of his powerful colleagues did not agree with him. Dato Onn bin Ja'afar calculated that he would be able to bring them round to his line of thinking if he gave notice that

unless his colleagues accepted his new policy, he would withdraw from UMNO. Subsequent events showed that he had been too hasty. His colleagues would not accept his new policy, and after Dato Onn's withdrawal from UMNO, they urged Tunku Abdul Rahman to take over the leadership of the party. Thereafter, in 1951, Dato Onn bin Ja'afar inaugurated his Independence of Malaya Party (IMP), which sought to win popular support on a multi-racial demand for early independence for Malaya.

Tan Cheng-Lock, Lee Kong-Chian and I met together to discuss this new and unexpected development. That Dato Onn's policy was far-sighted, we all agreed. But we were not sure about the timing of the call for early independence for Malaya and whether the different communities were ready to give up racial politics.

The big question now was whether Dato Onn with his new multi-racial Independence of Malaya Party would be able to rally enough of his Malay supporters for the MCA organisation to continue to co-operate with him. To fulfil the main objective, Tan Cheng-Lock decided to show goodwill to both Malay groups – those in IMP and in UMNO. Although he spoke in favour of the IMP, he did not campaign at the Kuala Lumpur municipal elections in 1954 against UMNO, which had now formed an alliance with another group of MCA leaders led by Colonel H. S. Lee, under the banner of the UMNO-MCA Alliance.

Results of the Kuala Lumpur municipal elections gave a sweeping victory to the UMNO-MCA Alliance, and thus Tan Cheng-Lock, while maintaining his personal friendship with Dato Onn bin Ja'afar, was compelled by circumstances to join hands with UMNO to form the UMNO-MCA Alliance at the national level.

Fortunately the new UMNO-MCA Alliance (re-inforced by the MIC – Malayan Indian Congress) followed the same basic

principles which had been formulated and agreed to at the secret dinner given by Dato Onn in his home on 29th December 1948. Each racial group was represented by a political party dedicated to the principle of co-operation for the common good with the other partners of the Alliance.

Tunku Abdul Rahman, the new leader of UMNO, went to London in 1954 to press the point that there must be an increase in the number of unofficial seats in the new Federal Legislature so that real power would be in the hands of the local people. There was some resistance, but Tunku Abdul Rahman was adamant.

At that time I happened to be in London attending a conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The Tunku and I were invited by Raja Tun Uda, the Malayan High Commissioner, to be at the Malayan section of the British Empire Festival Exhibition, when the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret came on an official visit.

As Tunku and I walked around to see the exhibits, he told me that if he failed to win the next general election, he might have to retire from politics. If that should happen, he planned to build a small house by the river in his home state of Kedah. Although a member of the Kedah royal family, he was a simple man with simple tastes, and a friendly, open disposition. But he was determined that Malaya should have independence as soon as possible.

The British could not very well resist a demand jointly presented by leaders of the different racial groups in Malaya. The 1955 Federal Legislative Council elections resulted in another sweeping victory for the inter-racial Alliance Party of UMNO, MCA and MIC and Tunku Abdul Rahman then became the first Prime Minister of an Independent Malaya (1957). *Merdeka* or freedom had now been achieved by the local people. Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman could now tell the Communist leaders and their forces in the jungles of

Malaya that there was no longer any purpose in their struggle to liberate Malaya, because Malaya had already been liberated by constitutional means.

Dato Sir Onn bin Ja'afar had lost the contest for leadership in the new independent Malaya which he had worked so hard and so long to achieve. However, the new leader, Tunku Abdul Rahman, was generous hearted enough to realise that both he and Dato Onn had the same main objective – to gain early independence for Malaya; that both had served UMNO well; and that he had succeeded by building on the foundations laid by Dato Onn. Therefore, the Tunku graciously and fittingly named the road in Kuala Lumpur leading to the official residence of the first Prime Minister of Independent Malaya – Jalan Dato Onn.

In subsequent years, Tunku Abdul Rahman strengthened further the bonds of goodwill and trust between the different racial groups in Malaya, and also between the different political units of the former British colonies in South-East Asia. In 1963 he became the first Prime Minister and father of Malaysia, a confederation of the existing Federation of Malaya, Sarawak, Sabah (former British North Borneo), and Singapore.

POSTSCRIPT: In January 1976, Tun Abdul Rasak, the second Prime Minister of Malaysia, died in London while undergoing treatment for leukaemia. Datuk Hussein Onn then succeeded him as Prime Minister. Thus, his late father, Dato Onn bin Ja'afar, the founder of UMNO, had not laboured and pioneered in vain for an independent Malaya.

R. K. SAMY, MILITANT SINGAPORE TRADE UNION LEADER

In the early part of 1946, soon after the liberation, Singapore was bedevilled by industrial strife. The Indians were active in the trade unions and dominated the powerful Singapore Traction Company Employees' Union through their militant trade union leader, R. K. Samy. The Chinese workers in the Chinese bus companies also supported him. The reports circulating in Singapore were that R. K. had also the support of Communist trade unions in the city.

One morning, the people of Singapore woke up to find that all the bus workers had decided to go on strike, and there was no public transport. For the first time the workers of Singapore found that they had to go to work on foot. Many had to walk for miles from their homes to their employment early in the morning, and retrace their steps wearily in the late evening.

R. K. was a powerful speaker and attracted thousands of workers to his rallies. He used to call them his children, and lived among them day and night. Although only a tally clerk in the Singapore Traction Company, his influence was tremendous. He led the transport workers' strike for fifteen weeks until at last a settlement was reached with management.

After my return from the conference at Caux, I had the persistent thought to call on R. K. Samy, just as I had called on Dato Onn in Kuala Lumpur. I made enquiries and found that R. K. lived with some fellow workers in a block of labourers' quarters just opposite the Singapore Traction Company Headquarters.

One Sunday morning I called on him without previous notice. I asked one of the workers in that block to show me the way, and I was led to one of several small rooms facing a corridor.

R. K. had had a late night, holding discussions with other trade union leaders, and so I found him unprepared to receive visitors. He was lying in bed with a book entitled *Nehru's Speeches*. There was a small table inside the room, a rickety old chair beside it and another bed. The room was bare of other furnishings. I told him who I was – a teacher from the Anglo-Chinese School. He then introduced himself as an old boy of the school, having left when he was in the primary section. But he had been reading books on his own so that he was quite fluent in English. He invited me to sit beside him on his bed, as his chair was rather shaky.

I explained to him why I had come to see him, that I had learned to listen to a greater wisdom than my own. He was intrigued. I told him the thought had come persistently to call on him, and make friends with him.

Briefly I gave him an account of what I had learned and seen while I was in England and at Caux. I mentioned the labour leaders and industrialists whom I had met. They had solved problems between labour and management in their factories on the basis of a new spirit of friendship, goodwill and understanding. They had been able to arrive at solutions which were fair to both sides. Some of those workers and employers had also begun to pass on the benefits of their new spirit of co-operation to the public, so that products could be sold at lower prices.

R. K. Samy said that such an approach would be an improvement on what had been going on in Singapore. He explained how during the three months' old strike in his company, the women and children at home had suffered most because of lack of food, whereas the men demonstrating in public enjoyed the

thrill and adventure and the press publicity given to the strikers. He admitted that help had been given to them financially by other unions and by sympathisers. However, he had felt that if he could settle future disputes without striking, he should try to do so, especially for the sake of the women and the children. He wanted to know more.

I used to visit him after that whenever I felt it was right. And then one day he told me that perhaps I could help him to solve a deadlock in a dispute between the workers in the pineapple industry in Johore and the owners of the pineapple factories living in Singapore. R. K. Samy asked me to put to Lee Kong-Chian, the rubber and pineapple king of Malaya and Singapore, a suggestion that he should help the other pineapple owners realise that if the workers staged a strike, then it could affect both sides adversely, and even when the dispute was settled, there would be a residue of bitterness and hate. Why not give the workers the maximum possible increase before a strike broke out? R. K. said that the workers had demanded a 30 per cent increase in pay, because of the prosperity that had come to the pineapple canning industry, but the employers had offered only a 10 per cent rise, and that was the deadlock. I promised I would try.

I called on Kong-Chian and described the situation. Of course, only the employers themselves knew how much profit they were making each year. They would therefore know how much more they could give to the workers as increase in pay. If they were to give their workers the highest increase possible before the strike actually broke out, this would gain for them the gratitude of the workers. This would be better than letting a strike break out and then offering a higher rate of increase which would evoke no sense of gratitude.

Kong-Chian laughed and said that if the other employers in the pineapple industry were to know that he was trying to help R. K. Samy and the workers, they might regard him as a traitor

to management. However, he agreed with me that an approach along the lines suggested was a better alternative than for the employers to sit tight waiting for a strike to develop. He promised to pass on these ideas to the other employers in the pineapple canning industry indirectly, through a friend of his. They would then make the best offer possible, with a view to settling the deadlock on terms which would result in goodwill between employers and workers.

One day R. K. phoned to tell me the good news that the workers had been offered a 20 per cent increase in wages, and that they had accepted the offer with gratitude and appreciation. Even if they had gone on strike, a 15-20 per cent increase was all that they could expect. Thus, they got what they wanted without paying the price of suffering to their families as a result of a prolonged strike.

Another result was the friendship which developed between R. K. and Lee Kong-Chian, thus introducing a new factor in labour-management relations in Singapore. During a severe slump in the rubber industry, the price of rubber fell so low that it was not worth employing the tappers and the millers. Most factories closed down, thereby creating thousands of unemployed in Malaya and Singapore. However, I heard that Lee Kong-Chian's company had drawn up their own scheme of retrenchment, which labour leaders such as R. K. Samy regarded as fair and humane. Lee Kong-Chian had decided that the retrenched workers should be given three months' wages and permission to remain in their quarters in the factories while they looked for new jobs elsewhere.

R. K. Samy's boss, the General Manager of the Singapore Traction Company, was Andrew A. Ewing, a typical hard-headed Scotsman. One day I had the thought to call on him and build a bridge between him and R. K. When he heard what had happened to R. K., he was pleased, because deep down, he said, he had admired R. K. Samy's leadership

qualities. Although sometimes he felt that R. K. Samy was too strong a labour leader for his own peace of mind, still he felt that with R. K. in charge of the Singapore Traction Company Employees' Trade Union, he would be able to talk things over to settle disputes before a strike broke out. Later, R. K. Samy told me that Ewing had invited him into his office, and told him that in future he need not make any appointment to see him. The door to his office would be always open to him, and at any time if there was any dispute or difficulty to discuss, he could just come in and tell the secretary that he wanted to see the General Manager. Thereafter they were on very good terms, so much so that labour troubles in the Singapore Traction Company were reduced to a minimum.

R. K. Samy was a strong character, fearless in time of danger. He knew that some people wanted to get rid of him because he refused to be their tool. As president of the strongest trade union in Singapore and adviser to many other trade unions, he could prevent trouble makers from organising unofficial strikes for their own selfish ends.

One day he told me that as a nominated member of the Legislative Council, I could be accused of being a stooge of the government. He knew that I was a man of independent views and had advised the government accordingly. He suggested to me that I should stand for election in the ward where he lived, in Farrer Park, although two-thirds of the voters there were Indians. He said he would give me his full support. As an elected unofficial member of the Legislative Council, he said, I would be respected by the public and the workers.

I had a good chance of being re-nominated by the Governor. To stand for election in a constituency with predominantly Indian voters was taking a great risk. I decided that I would take it. When I announced my intention to stand as a candidate for Farrer Park, my friends were not only surprised but worried. They said that as a Singapore Chinese I could never win in that

constituency. Furthermore, the two candidates who opposed me were leading Indians – an Indian banker and a left wing Indian labour leader. The election forecasts gave me practically no chance at all. An Indian colleague on the Legislative Council offered to bet ten to one on a \$10,000 bet that Thio Chan Bee would not win the election. He was confident that there would be no takers. He was right. There were none.

But R. K. Samy kept his word. He organised a canvassing team from among his own workers, and they went all over the Farrer Park constituency publicising the work I had been doing for labour in Singapore in the past few years. Also, they said, a schoolmaster in politics would be able to serve the people better, particularly the under-privileged. I often went out with R. K. Samy to visit the voters in their homes. I could see that he was in touch with the masses, for they listened to him with respect.

When the results of the voting were announced, my friends were surprised. I had won the constituency by a clear majority of votes, my total exceeding the combined votes for the Indian banker and labour leader.

When R. K. developed a bad stomach ulcer I called on him at the General Hospital. He looked pale and weak, but his first words were an enquiry about my health and my family. He said that he hoped to get well, but he realised that even in the hospital there were people who were against him because of his independent stand in the labour world. When his condition deteriorated, I found that on the instruction of Andrew Ewing, his boss, he had been transferred to a single room with a special nurse in attendance. Unfortunately R. K. did not recover.

At his funeral in Farrer Park, there were thousands of mourners representing many different trade unions, from both the English and the vernacular speaking sections. Even the rival trade union leaders were there to pay their last respects.

Andrew Ewing and several European officers of the Traction Company were also present. It was the largest turn-out for the funeral of a trade union leader in Singapore.

The next morning, just before we went in for a meeting in Government House, I heard the President of the European Singapore Chamber of Commerce, Sir Ewen Fergusson, tell his colleagues on the Executive Council that on the previous day he had witnessed a very strange and moving scene. Andrew Ewing, the General Manager of the Singapore Traction Company, had shed tears when he announced to his Board of Directors the death of R. K. Samy. Sir Ewen said he could hardly believe his eyes, because Andrew Ewing had been regarded as a tough Scotsman and a tough General Manager.

Both the tough Scotsman and the tough Indian trade union leader had tried a new approach and had found that it worked for them.

A MUCH MISUNDERSTOOD ALBAR

R. K. Samy had expressed the hope that one day I would go into full time politics to promote the new kind of relationship between labour and management, and between people of different races, which he had personally experienced. However, this was not to be.

By the early 1960's a tense political situation had developed in Singapore. The party in power had been so weakened by an internal split and defections in the Legislative Assembly that its large majority had been reduced to one. Also it was known that at least one member was seriously ill, and further defections could be expected. It was a golden opportunity for those in the opposition.

At this juncture an approach was made to the top leadership of our party, of which I was the Vice-Chairman, to place national interests before our own party's future by not opposing the party in power's proposals on Singapore's merger with Malaysia. This put us in a real quandary. Several leaders argued that to respond to the request would be to commit political suicide. But our party had committed itself to a policy of sincere friendship and co-operation with Malaya and other neighbouring countries. And so, in spite of our fears and forebodings, we decided to put country first, and party second.

Stability was restored and the merger with Malaysia was achieved. But our party was misunderstood by the electorate, and suffered disastrously.

Thus, when I lost my seat in the Singapore General Elections

in late 1963, Bishop Hobart B. Amstutz felt he could now offer me the vacant post of Education Secretary of the Methodist Schools in West Malaysia and Singapore. Since Kuala Lumpur would be the federal capital of the new Malaysia which then included Singapore, I accepted the offer. I had the conviction that I should continue to be a bridge-builder of goodwill between the Chinese and the Malays and between Singapore and Malaysia. This meant a great deal of sacrifice for my family financially and in other ways.

My new duties compelled me to travel widely all over West Malaysia and Singapore, visiting over one hundred Methodist schools and coming into contact with teachers, parents and their friends. One Malay leader who became like an elder brother to me was Dato Sir Mahmud bin Mat, a former Chief Minister of the State of Pahang, Federal Minister of Land and Mines, and the first Speaker of the Malaysian Federal Legislative Council. He remained unspoiled, a Muslim philosopher statesman, respected for his independence and integrity.

But in the loneliness of my new surroundings and separated from my family and my old friends in Singapore, I sometimes wondered whether I had made the right decision by going into voluntary exile in Malaysia. I had plenty of time for reflection. One day the thought came that I should call on an outstanding and outspoken Malay political leader of part-Arab descent who had been regarded by many Chinese as the most fiery and dangerous extremist leader among the Malays. Dato Syed Ja'afar Albar had been described as the number one enemy of the Chinese in this part of the world. When racial riots broke out in Singapore in 1963, he was publicly alleged to be mainly responsible for the disturbances.

It was said that Albar's powerful speech to the Malays at a rally in Pasir Panjang, Singapore, had triggered off the racial riots in the Malay and Muslim areas. Albar had denied these allegations, but his explanations had fallen on deaf ears. His

image had been so smeared that whenever his name was mentioned in Singapore, many Chinese expressed their feelings in no uncertain terms.

And yet the thought had come in my daily time of listening that I should call on Dato Syed Ja'afar Albar in Kuala Lumpur.

I brushed it aside, thinking my mind had gone astray, but the thought persisted. Then I argued within myself: if I were to call on Albar, what would people in Singapore think of me? They would say that I had been disloyal to the Chinese race by making friends with their enemy number one. That was a misunderstanding which I would not like to create.

But the thought came back clearly, 'How do you know that Albar is against the Chinese? You will not know the real man until you have spoken to him face to face . . . You remember Dato Onn? Dato Onn was regarded as an enemy of the Chinese until you met him personally. The same kind of miracle can happen.' So I phoned Albar one day, and said that I would like to call on him. He was surprised and asked me for the purpose of my visit. I simply added that it was something quite important. He responded by inviting me to tea.

Dato Syed Ja'afar Albar was then Secretary General of UMNO and a powerful political leader in Malaysia. When I asked him whether Muslims believed in seeking to know and obey God's will, he said, 'Yes, the Muslims usually pray five times a day seeking to know the will of Allah.'

Then I told how God had wanted me to call on him, and of my fears of being misunderstood by the Chinese in Singapore, and how I had decided that I must obey God's guidance. I explained that God had told me that Dato Albar had not really been against the Chinese in spite of the popular impressions in Singapore that he had. I had therefore called on him to find out the real truth.

Albar laughed. He was intrigued. Yes, he said, he had been

misunderstood. If he had been really anti-Chinese, he would not have joined the Tunku's Alliance Party, and campaigned for it all over the country, selling the Alliance concept of inter-racial goodwill, co-operation and harmony. He admitted that some of his public speeches had been wrongly reported and so the Singapore public had got the impression that he was anti-Chinese. He showed me a copy of the verbatim report of his speech given at a rally at Pasir Panjang organised by the Malays and the Muslims. According to the report, the speech had been wrongly interpreted and publicised as an attack on the Chinese in Singapore.

Then I told him the story of the reconciliation between Dato Onn bin Ja'afar and Tun Tan Cheng-Lock. That was the beginning of many visits and friendly discussions between us on the need to strengthen further inter-racial and inter-religious harmony and co-operation in Malaysia.

Meanwhile, the merger between Malaysia and Singapore in 1963 had not progressed smoothly. Tunku Abdul Rahman began to have increasing doubts and fears about the inclusion of Singapore as one of the component parts of Malaysia.

After consulting his top colleagues, he regretfully decided that the Singapore leaders must take Singapore out of Malaysia and sign a separation agreement. Thus, in August 1965, Singapore and Malaysia became separate and independent states.

When the news was made public, it came as a great shock to most people in Malaysia and Singapore.

In any case, the Tunku's authority was undisputed, and nobody in the ruling Malaysian Alliance party dared to express any opposition to him – except one. And that one was Albar, who voiced his opposition openly and loudly, saying that the Tunku should not have decided on the separation of Singapore from Malaysia without first discussing it democratically with his colleagues on the Executive Council of the Alliance.

Later, when it came to voting in the Federal Parliament to approve the separation of Singapore and Malaysia, Albar wanted to speak against the motion, but was persuaded not to do so. He therefore absented himself when the voting took place. Such open defiance of the Tunku, especially by the Secretary General of his own party, UMNO, was something which the Tunku could not overlook. And so Ja'afar Albar, the strong man of the Malay Party in the Alliance, resigned from his important party post and went into the political wilderness – a bitter man.

A few days later the thought came to me that I should call on him to comfort him. I realised that at this time his old friends would not dare to do so for fear of offending the Tunku. And yet the order from above was for me to call on Albar.

I was aghast, and fearful. I asked myself how would the Tunku interpret my visits to Albar's home at this time? He might think that I had taken sides with Albar against him. Still the thought persisted, that this was the time for me to show Tan Sri Albar that my friendship with him was above political considerations or changes of fortune.

To ensure that I would have a witness during my talk with Albar, however, I asked a friend to accompany me.

We found him in a state of suppressed anger and frustration. He did not have many visitors as he used to have previously.

He explained his stand. He believed that in the long run the separation of Singapore from Malaysia would be bad for both countries. He felt he could use the separation issue to destroy the Tunku's popularity. However, he was not sure whether this was right.

'Tan Sri,' I said, 'you may be right, but Tunku may also be right. Only God knows who will be right in the end, because only God knows the future. So, until God tells us more clearly, or until time shows us who is really right, why not let us suspend judgment and wait?' He thought for a moment, and

agreed that only God knew whether Tunku or he was right.

I then said to him, 'Tan Sri, since you have plenty of leisure now, why don't you utilise your time in business or other public activities?'

As a result of his resignation from the post of Secretary General of UMNO, he suffered financially, and so he moved into a small house.

We called on him again in his new home several times. One day, round about the year 1968, we found him in deep thought. He told us that he had to make a big decision and he wanted to know our opinion. The Tunku, he said, no longer had any use for him. On the other hand, the Malay parties in opposition to the Tunku had approached him, asking his help against the Tunku. He was still undecided. He invited us to express our views.

Our views were that the Tunku was generally regarded as the father of Malaysia, and to the non-Malays in particular he was a symbol of racial goodwill, harmony and co-operation; that if he, Albar, and the opposition groups were to topple the Tunku, then the non-Malays would get so frightened that they might panic and resort to extremist defensive action. We all agreed that in Malaysia racial harmony and co-operation were vital for peace, stability and security. Anything that endangered this policy would be a danger to everybody in the country, regardless of race, class or religion.

Albar looked at us reflectively and seriously. We took a group photograph outside; then we parted. About two months later, I called on him alone, and when he saw me he took my right hand in both his hands and said to me, 'Chan Bee, I am glad I took the advice you and your friend gave me. The Tunku and I are friends again.'

I was deeply moved by this man, who was willing to give up his ill-will, bitterness and private ambition, in order that he might not endanger racial peace and harmony in the country.

Later, at the wedding of Albar's son, Tunku Abdul Rahman was the chief guest of honour and gave his blessing to the bride and the bridegroom. It was a public expression of the new relationship between the two leaders who had once been close friends, had parted because of a misunderstanding and quarrel, and had again been reconciled so as to promote national unity.

BRIDGES OF HOPE

Towards the end of 1969, a book by an English author was on sale in the bookstalls of Singapore. He described the violent racial riots which had broken out on 13 May after the Federal general elections, and predicted that by 1971, when the British forces would have been pulled out of South-East Asia, Malaysia could be in the grip of a second Communist insurrection. He referred to the leaders of the UMNO extremists behind the scenes, and mentioned specially two by name – Syed Ja'afar Albar and Syed Nasir. He indicated that unless the influence of such 'ultras' in UMNO was checked, Malaysia would have little chance of recovery.

In the solitude of my office during the long curfew imposed after the riots, I had wondered about my friends, Tan Sri Syed Ja'afar Albar and Tuan Syed Nasir. If they had been actively involved, then the riots would soon spread to other parts of the country. But I felt sure they had not been involved. From what I had known of them they were courageous, open political fighters, but they sincerely believed in promoting inter-racial goodwill and co-operation.

On my return to Singapore, I met a lawyer who told me that he had been with Albar on the very day the riots broke out. Far from inciting others, he actually tried to dissuade the Selangor UMNO leaders from staging their counter demonstration parade which had triggered off the riots. He had warned them on the phone that things could get out of control.

When order had been restored, I called on Albar at his home.

He was very glad to know that I was safe. We discussed the riots and the steps which should be taken to prevent a similar tragedy.

At this time, I received several invitations from Rajmohan Gandhi, the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, for some delegates from Malaysia and Singapore to attend a Moral Re-Armament Conference at Asia Plateau, Panchgani, a mountain resort in India, near Pune. The theme of the conference was, 'For People Who Care'. That struck me as being relevant to the needs of Malaysia.

I suggested to Albar that he could take advantage of the lull in politics to go to Panchgani. He agreed to go. The Secretary General of the Malaysian Chinese Association, Kam Woon-Wah, went too. The Federal Auditor General of Malaysia, Mohamed Zain bin Ahmad, joined us a few days later. There were four of us from Malaysia and Singapore, with about 150 other delegates from India, Ceylon, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Africa and America.

After the first meeting, I could see that my colleagues from Malaysia were heartily enjoying themselves, listening to the witty songs, the melodious music, and the talks given by some of the delegates. All met and mixed together freely. There were Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Buddhists, as well as atheists. In the evening there were films, depicting problems of race and class, in factories and home, with the solutions dramatically and realistically brought to a climax.

One day it was decided that there should be a full morning session devoted to talks on Malaysia. Kam Woon-Wah spoke from the non-Malay point of view. He described the problems in a spirit of goodwill. Then Tan Sri Albar presented the Malay point of view without any sign of anger, bitterness or hatred. They both agreed that a constructive solution must be found to remove the grievances on both sides.

I described the racial and constitutional crisis in Singapore

and Malaya in 1946–48, and the new approach which enabled both the Malay and Chinese leaders to co-operate with sincere goodwill to solve their common problems as between friends who cared for each other.

Later Albar told me that as a Muslim he had learned many things from the conference. His stay at Panchgani had been like a whip to awaken him from his deep sleep. In his farewell address, he suggested that more politicians be invited to Asia Plateau, so that they could learn to solve the problems of their country.

Soon after our return to Kuala Lumpur, Tan Sri Albar, Kam Woon-Wah and I called on the Finance Minister and leader of the MCA, Tun Tan Siew-Sin, to report on what we had seen and heard at Panchgani. Albar came into Siew-Sin's office like a refreshing breeze. He began laughingly by saying, 'Tun, you too must go to Panchgani. It is a wonderful place, and I learned many things from the conference. The most important is this – you cannot heal the deep wounds and bitterness on both sides by economic means alone. The more you give, the more they want, both sides. Soon they ask for too much, and you cannot give them what they want. And then they both attack you. We are all selfish. We must find the cure to our selfishness. And this we found at Panchgani.'

It was a wonderfully concise statement of the root cause of conflicts in the world and of the new philosophy of healing which Albar had found at Panchgani. And Tun Tan Siew-Sin welcomed it at once.

Then Albar said that he and Kam Woon-Wah had invited the members of the MRA musical revue *Anything to Declare?*, with their timely message of goodwill and reconciliation, to perform in Malaysia in May on their way to Australia. Would Tun Tan Siew-Sin help to make this possible? He promised he would do his part, provided Albar cleared it also with the Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Chairman of the

National Operations Council, Tun Abdul Razak, and the Home Affairs Minister, Tun Dr Ismail. These leaders gladly gave their blessing.

Tuan Syed Nasir*, also a Muslim leader, was equally co-operative. He too had been to Panchgani with other Malaysians, and had been impressed with what he had seen and heard.

As Vice-Chairman of the Committee of Hosts, Tuan Syed Nasir suggested that the Prime Minister be invited to be the Patron of the revue. He offered to approach the Tunku himself. Later he reported to the committee that the Tunku had agreed to be Patron and attend the première showing at the Town Hall on 15 May 1970. This kind of cordial human relations warmed the hearts of all of us.

When the hundred or more members of *Anything to Declare?* arrived at Kuala Lumpur Airport on 11 May, they lined up and presented a song in Bahasa Malaysia, the national language. The theme was *Muhibbah* – goodwill. When the clear voices rang out, everybody at the airport listened in delighted surprise.

The next morning the Malaysian press gave encouraging reports of the arrival of these messengers of goodwill, and stated that their message was particularly relevant to Malaysia at that time. Thus one focus of attention of the public on the day before the anniversary of the riots of 13 May 1969 was the arrival of this international cast with their message of racial tolerance and co-operation.

Somebody afterwards commented that the visit could not have been more timely. It set the right keynote for the anniversary of the riots, because all kinds of alarming rumours had been circulating that acts of violence were bound to recur to demonstrate the anger and grief of those who had suffered.

The next morning we were glad to read in the newspapers that the anniversary had passed off quietly without incidents.

*NOTE: The titles of Dato and Tan Sri were later conferred on Tuan Syed Nasir.

Just before the arrival of the international cast, Albar suddenly fell ill. His long-time colleague, Tuan Syed Nasir welcomed the Tunku and other guests to the première of *Anything to Declare?*

At its close he made a speech which surprised the audience with its warmth and sincerity. He thanked the Tunku, the guests and members of the musical revue. He said that he too had been to a conference in Panchgani and had seen how people made themselves miserable by building walls of ill-will between each other. Therefore he believed in promoting goodwill and sincere co-operation among people. He looked forward to the time when people in Malaysia would live and work together in unity.

When news of these events reached the British writer who had forecast such gloomy prospects for Malaysia, he admitted that if ultras like Albar and Syed Nasir could change, then the premises on which he had built his pessimistic prophecies were no longer valid. Later developments have confirmed this assessment.

For instance, I think of an occasion in the early part of 1976 when Tan Sri Albar said to me, 'I think only a miracle can save this country. We have become very disunited. Some people are inciting the young against the old, and one group against another. I cannot tell you more.'

I was surprised. I could only say, 'Well, Tan Sri, if only a miracle can save this country, then only God can produce that miracle.'

He looked at me thoughtfully and agreed. 'Let us pray for that'.

Several months later he told me he had decided to attempt the impossible! At sixty-two years of age he would contest the election for the vacant post of President of UMNO Youth! Some people ridiculed him. He would have no chance against much younger candidates. But Albar had an inner conviction

that he must do it. He must try to build a bridge of unity between UMNO youth and the top leaders, or else the party would break up.

When the election results were announced, Albar had won by an outstanding majority. The Lion of UMNO had come back, still full of fire and vigour. When I met him again, he said laughingly, 'Well, that was certainly God's miracle'.

In the following months he travelled all over the country, never sparing himself. He spoke at meetings and conferences, fearlessly propounding his views. Gradually, he built bridges of understanding and co-operation between opposing individuals and groups.

An incident in late 1976 revealed the strength of his character. I had called on him with a friend, and he told us that the previous caller had just warned him that unless he kept quiet, his enemies were going to kill him.

He had given his reply. 'If it is recorded in Allah's book that I must die at the hands of my enemies, so be it. But I am not prepared to be silent because of fear of anybody.'

Two months later he felt unwell. His family tried to dissuade him from attending an important UMNO Youth meeting at Muar in the State of Johore, but he told them it was his duty and 'work comes first'.

At the meeting, he appeared to be happy and gay as usual. But in the middle of the discussions he excused himself and went to the Muar Hospital. His wife and one son were summoned to his bedside. A few hours later Radio Malaysia announced the news that Albar had died of a heart attack.

At the last press interview he gave to *Asia Week*, which was published on the day of his death, 14 January 1977, he reiterated his main aim: 'I want to bridge the gap between the top leadership and the youth'. Praising Datuk Hussein Onn for his firm leadership Albar said, 'We are giving him our fullest backing in his efforts to unite the party and country.'

As the son of the late Dato Onn, who united all the Malays in the then Malaya to fight for independence, I have full confidence that Datuk Hussein will be able to unite not only the Malays but all the races in this country'.

The Singapore *Straits Times* of 19 January printed across the editorial page the following, 'No other UMNO leader was more outspoken. Albar: always in the forefront of party controversy – it wasn't position he sought.'

According to their report, in the six months Albar had led UMNO Youth, he had been very successful in his mission. He had done much to accomplish the immediate objectives he had set himself of 'eradicating the misunderstandings and distrust that had hitherto bedevilled relations between UMNO Youth and the top leaders.

'No one else has got his style, nor his status to do what he did so successfully He called a spade a spade . . . yet he was never revengeful

'But for his absolute candidness, he would have gone higher up the political ladder.

'In matters of race and religion, he was tolerant Albar was very knowledgeable in religion, not only in Islam but in other faiths, which he applied to everyday life. He was active in the Moral Re-Armament movement.'

When Datuk Hussein Onn, the Prime Minister, returned to Kuala Lumpur from his visit to Egypt and Libya, the papers reported that his first words were an expression of sadness over the death of Tan Sri Syed Ja'afar Albar. He said it was a great loss to the party leadership and to the nation. Soon after that he visited the grave and prayed for this brave servant of the people.

The *Straits Times* had a picture of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, with other friends at the home of Tan Sri Albar, paying his last respects and offering a prayer in Malay for his Muslim friend. Among those with the Arch-

bishop were Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and Hindus, and kneeling at prayer was a Muslim family friend, Puan Hajjah Saleha binte Haji Mohamed Ali, a tribute to the spirit of inter-racial and inter-religious goodwill and understanding in Malaysia.

EPILOGUE

A distinguished visitor to Malaysia, early in this decade, said that people in other countries should hear about what he called 'The Malaysian miracle'.

That remark has led me to visit many countries, and I have marvelled at the eagerness of all kinds of people to hear about the adventures of an ordinary man from South-East Asia. In Washington, the door was opened for me to speak to one who was shortly to become President of the United States. He listened intently to the story of reconciliation and co-operation in Malaysia and commented, 'Certainly, this is a new approach'.

On one of my visits to America, I was given a poem by an unknown author:

THE BRIDGE-BUILDER

An old man going along his way
Came in the evening, cold and grey,
To a chasm vast and deep and wide.
The old man crossed in the twilight dim;
The sullen stream had no fears for him.
But he turned when safe on the other side
And built a bridge to span the tide.
'Old man,' said a fellow pilgrim near,
'You're wasting your time by building here.
You never again will pass this way.'

Your journey will end with the closing day.
You have crossed the chasm deep and wide.
Why build you this bridge at eventide?
The builder lifted his old grey head.
'Good friend, in the way I've come,' he said,
'There followeth after me today
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
This stream that has been naught to me,
To that fair-haired youth might a pitfall be,
He too must cross in the twilight dim.
Good friend, I'm building this bridge for him.'

It is as such a bridge-builder, in however humble a way, that I would wish to be remembered. And because any bridges of hope which I have helped to build have been built in a strength other than my own, I know that many other ordinary people, young or old, from any nationality or culture, can build such bridges too.

APPENDIX

Tel. No. 83669.
Tel. No. 82381-Kat[illegible].

*It is requested that the
following number be quoted
in reply to this letter.*

No.



OFFICE OF THE
MENTRI BESAR, JOHORE.

JOHORE BAHRU,.....5th. August.....1948

Dear Chan Bee,

Thank you for your letter of the 25th which I received on the 31st July 1948, having been busy all over the place in the meantime.

I have at the moment a particularly busy three weeks ahead, what with the meetings, discussions and visits to Kuala Lumpur so that perhaps we could arrange an informal meeting sometime in the latter part of the month.

I am expecting the draft report of the Joint Committee on the University to be ready very soon and it will necessitate a further meeting of the Committees to consider, approve and sign it.

Perhaps when we do have that meeting we could follow up with the informal meeting suggested by you with Mr. Cheng Lock and others.

The public meeting you referred to has been postponed pro-tem.

I will let you know again, however, so that we can get in touch with Mr. Cheng Lock.

Selamat Hari Raya to you,

Yours sincerely,

Thio Chan Bee Esq.,
5, Balmoral Crescent,
Singapore.

TAN CHENG LOCK

REFERENCE:
111, GREEN STREET A
1271, KLANG ROAD,
TELEPHONE No. 107.

OFFICE:
91, FIRST CROSS STREET,
TELEPHONE No. 132.

TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS:
"ANCHLO"

Malacca, 4th January, 1949,

The Hon: Mr. Thio Chan Bee,
5, Balmoral Crescent,
Singapore.

Dear Mr. Chan Bee,

Very many thanks for your letter of the 2nd inst. received to-day. I have to-day sent a letter to Mr. Shook Lin informing him of the contents of your letter concerning the Penang Conference on the 9th instant and have requested him to write to you.

Mr. Shook Lin will book a seat for me on the plane within the next two or three days pending the making of definite arrangements for the Penang meeting on the 9th instant. As far as I can see the meeting will definitely take place in Penang on the 9th instant, as I did suggest to the G-6 at Dato Onn's house that we should appoint somebody to confirm arrangements about the date and place of the meeting, but he said it was unnecessary, as everything might be taken as settled there and then. You may speak to Mr. Shook Lin on the telephone after 7 p.m. at his house. His house telephone number is 3943.

I entirely agree with you that we should pay the cost of the lunch, and I have mentioned this to Mr. Shook Lin.

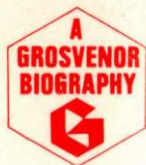
I will do my utmost best at the Penang meeting as advised by you. I will painstakingly do all that you want me to do at the meeting.

I do heartily and gratefully appreciate all your fine efforts in Singapore.

My warmest regards and best wishes to you and family for 1949,

Yours most sincerely,

Tan Cheng Lock



Dr THIO CHAN BEE

CAN AN ORDINARY MAN do anything about the vast problems of the modern world?

This is the first-person story of the effective, but almost invisible, role which a schoolmaster is playing in his part of South-East Asia, resolving communal differences, getting opposing politicians to work together, creating trust between labour and management.

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