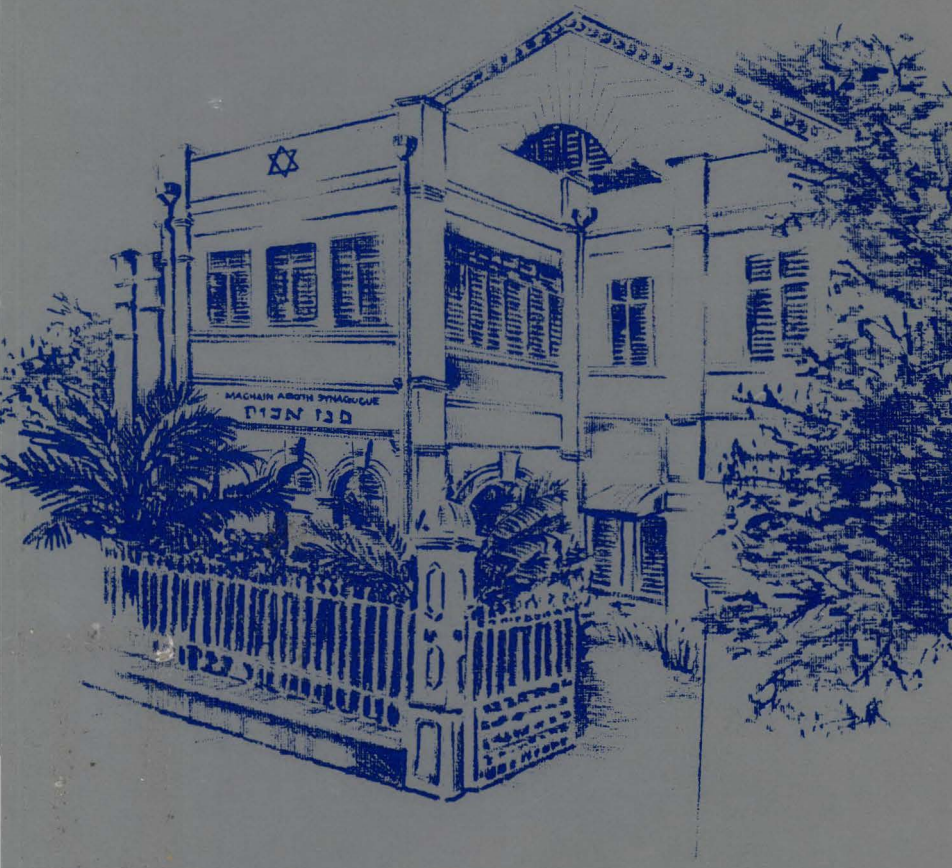
THE HISTORY OF JEWS IN SINGAPORE 1830-1945



A personal account by *Eze Nathan*

THE HISTORY OF JEWS IN SINGAPORE

1830-1945

Eze Nathan

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"Before a child is born, a light is held behind its head with which it can see from one end of the world to the other, and they teach it the whole of the Torah. But at the moment of birth an angel touches it on the lips, and it forgets all. So, all of life is spent remembering what we once knew."

Based on tractate Niddah

Dedication and apologies

Dedication

To my children and grandchildren and to the memory of my beloved parents and brother, Ivor.

Apologies

May I beg the reader's indulgence for any inaccuracies or omissions.

Acknowledgement

I am deeply grateful for the vigilant, critical but caring help I have received from my wife, Nina, in the preparation and editing of this manuscript.

My thanks, too, to my sister, Gladys Mitchell, whose hospitality made it possible for me to carry out further research in Singapore and who, although at the outset somewhat sceptical about my having the resolution to achieve my objective, once the manuscript was completed, has given of her time unstintingly to guide it to publication.

I am also indebted to the staff of the National Library and National Archives in Singapore and the British Museum in London for their courteous help.

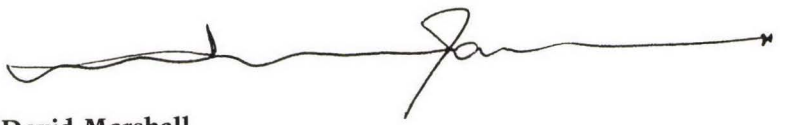
Foreword

Interest in its history is one of the first symptoms of a mature society. It has taken our community in Singapore one hundred and fifty years to awaken to an interest in its history!

Fortunately, for more than fifty years within that period, a member of our community had this interest in the very marrow of his bones. Almost from his youth, Eze Nathan was recognised by all in our community as the high priest of our community's welfare and the keeper of our historical facts and figures. He had this interesting and fortunate need to know the community and to serve it, which he did faithfully and well for many a decade.

This book is the fruit of his earnest, honest labours to record for posterity the origins and development of our community in Singapore. The value of this book is in the acknowledged absolute integrity of its author in gathering and recording the results of his passionate interest and research in the minutiae of the growth of our community.

I commend this book to every home where young people need to know their cultural roots; and as a fellow member of our community, I express my gratitude to Eze Nathan for his labour of love over many long years in the service of the community he loves.



David Marshall
Singapore Ambassador to France

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Prologue

Before the occupation of Singapore by the Japanese, I had compiled records of the history of the Singapore Jewish Community. I had also kept a notebook of interviews I had had with the elders of the community. During the Japanese Occupation of South-east Asia, in World War II (1939–45), all early communal records were lost. My notes, too, disappeared. I have had, therefore, to rely on memory, interviews with the surviving elders and published material, in my attempt to piece together the pre-war history of our community.

Geographically, the island of Singapore before the recent extensive land reclamation had an area of approximately 206 square miles, measuring 28 miles from east to west and 14 miles from north to south. It is separated from the Malay Peninsular by the Straits of Johore, a channel varying in width from three-quarters of a mile to two miles. The highest point is a small hill, **Bukit Timah** (Hill of Tin), only 500 feet above sea level. The Plain, so named by Sir Stamford Raffles, on which the town now stands, is composed chiefly of beds of sand, mostly silica, with about ten per cent alumina. Deep beds of sandstone, heavily impregnated with ironstone, form the basic geological structure of the land.

The earliest history of Singapore is lost in the mists of time. It seems few chronicles were written and even fewer remain. We glean a few facts, however, from an account written in 1365. The island was originally called **Tumasik** and the narrow western entrance of its natural harbour, into which the Chinese sailed their junks, was then named **Loong Ya Men** (Dragon's Teeth Gate).

The palaces of early kings were built on the main hill overlooking the harbour. The Malays named the hill **Bukit Larangan** (Forbidden Hill) for the populace were forbidden to ascend the royal seat of kings. Today, it is known as **Fort Canning. Tumasik** was strategically placed between India and China — at the southern tip of Malaya and immediately north and north-west of the East Indies. Far back in recorded time, there existed a great trade route, bringing silk and spices from China to all parts of the world. It passed through Tumasik. The trading post itself was situated near the shore and was given a proud Sanskrit name in visionary

anticipation of its later fame, **Singapura** (Lion City). That it was a highly valued site can be guaged from the number of battles fought over its possession. Yet, in 1365, it fell to the Javanese who, jealous of its former pre-eminence, destroyed it. But Tumasik itself was virtually indestructible. We know that it continued to be a port of call, not only for legitimate traders, but also for pirates. For over 400 years it was to be a haunt for cut-throats, their scurrilous exploits living on in tale and legend. For most of that period, though sea and sky painted the island in the brightest of hues, its history is veiled in conjecture.

Much of the early history of the Jewish connection with the Far East is also a matter of conjecture. From the reign of King David, Palestine was already recognised as the highway between Africa and Asia and when he occupied the port of Ezion-Geber on the Gulf of Akaba, he commanded the bridge which joined three continents. He, and later King Solomon, encouraged the Phoenicians to use the port for their brilliant sea-faring enterprises. Hebrew sailors are known to have sailed with them and, King Solomon himself, participated in trade with the Orient so that the wondrous rare beasts and commodities of the Far East became familiar in Jerusalem.

But colonies of Jews are not known to have settled in India and China until much later, after the series of disasters that struck their land. The Assyrian conquerors, Tiglath Pileser III (745–28 B.C.E.) and Sargon II (722–05), deported many thousands of Jews from the Northern Kingdom of Israel. After Nebuchadnessar's destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., there were many more deportations.

Later, partly again as a result of the occupation of their land, colonies of Jews were founded throughout the vast Hellenic world and on the Arabian peninsula. The Jewish Commonwealth came to an end in 70 C.E. and there followed a vast, continuous exodus of Jews from Judaea to foreign Jewish settlements. It was from this period that legends of the Lost Tribes originated and with them, tales of Jewish travellers who discovered far-flung colonies of Jews. Fact and legend, legend and fact, became interwoven in the fabric of the story.

There is ample proof, however, that Jews settled in India during the time of the Babylonian exile. In his "*History of Kerala*", K.K. Menon relates how a Roman merchantship, plying between the Red Sea and Malabar on the south-west coast of India early in the second century of the Common Era,

found a Jewish colony in that area.

In the famous Pardesi Synagogue of Jewtown in Cochin, in the province of Mysore, are two copper plates on which is inscribed the *Sassanam* (Charter) accorded to Joseph Rabban by His Majesty, King Sri Parkaran Iravi Vanmar. They were given to him as patents of his nobility and record the special privileges bestowed on him. The principality of Anjuvannam became his. He was allowed to ride on an elephant or be carried in a litter and he was to be shielded from the sun by a state umbrella. Furthermore, whenever he ventured out in public, he was to be preceded ceremoniously by drummers and trumpeters.

It is probable that Jews settled in the Bombay Presidency at the time that Joseph Rabban was building up his reputation in Cochin. Today, there are still members of a sect who call themselves *Bene Israel* (Sons of Israel) living in the region although several hundreds of them emigrated to Israel in 1951. They speak *Mahratti*, the regional vernacular, bear *Mahratti* names and wear Indian clothes, but they are convinced that they are Jews. They observe the *Shabbat* (the Sabbath), refrain from work and attend services in the synagogue. Locally, they are known as *Shanwar Teles* (Saturday oilmen) because they light up oil lamps to greet the *Shabbat*. They claim their descent from Jews who fled from Judaea during the atrocities perpetrated by Antiochus Epiphanes immediately before the Maccabean Revolt in 175 B.C.E.

They believe that their forefathers were journeying to India by sea when a storm arose, and they were shipwrecked on the Konkan Coast, 30 miles south of Bombay. The *Sefer Torah* (Scroll of the Law) that they had brought with them, and jealously guarded on the hazardous voyage, was lost. They have mourned its loss ever since. Without it, they remained ignorant of the Hebrew Language and the written law for many centuries.

No Jewish community has a stranger history than the Jews of China. Today, there are possibly only a few hundred Chinese Jews. So rare have they become that they have been referred to as "ethnological museum specimens"! But they have a proud history.

It is considered a reasonable supposition that, during the period of the Maccabees, some of our resourceful ancestors escaped from persecution and took refuge in the Chinese province of Honan, in the ancient city of K'aifeng on the Yel-

low River. Their increase in numbers and influence was such that a Chinese emperor of the T'ang Dynasty in the seventh century C.E. appointed a mandarin to look after their welfare. Once a year, this princely official entered what has been described as their exquisite synagogue at K'aifeng to burn incense before the altar in the name of the emperor whom he represented.

Chinese emperors continued to grant the Jews full protection and accorded them courteous treatment. At the very period when the Crusaders were savagely exterminating hundreds of Jewish communities in Europe, a Chinese emperor welcomed Jewish immigrants with these words: "You have come to our China; revere and preserve the customs of your ancestors." He provided them help in the form of encouragement and materials when they planned to build a synagogue. From this time, frequent official mention appeared in the Imperial records.

Chinese surnames such as **Shih, Li, Al** and **Ha** became common among the Jews in China. They acquired a nickname, the *Blue Mussalmen*, but more often they were referred to simply as K'aifeng Jews. Apparently, they resembled their hosts in so many ways that they first became favoured guests and then respected citizens. Writers have noted their qualities of gentleness, their devotion to the study of religious writings and their reverence for tradition and their ancestors.

In time the Jews began to disappear from the records. They were not forcibly converted, neither were they persecuted nor driven out of the country. They were gradually absorbed, biologically and culturally, into the society which had so warmly welcomed them. They did not vanish without a trace. Travellers have told tales of meeting Chinese citizens, who were convinced of their Jewish origins though there was little evidence that they practised the Jewish faith. Their story has yet to be told.

During my childhood days, I used to see an elderly gentleman in Chinese attire among the worshippers in the synagogue. I believe he was a descendant of the K'aifeng Jews but all I know about this gentleman is that he was employed in the firm of Raphael Sassoon.

Jewish communities established themselves at strategic points on the busy sea and caravan routes from Mesopotamia through India and Malaya to the East Indies and China many centuries ago. Surely, then, it is possible that some of these early travellers visited the trading post of *Singapura* and noted

its splendid potential. But this is pure speculation.

It is a fact, however, that the Jewish community of Singapore springs primarily from Mesopotamia. Our forefathers belonged to the migration that travelled south, west and east. They became known as *Sephardi*, a name derived from the Hebrew word for Spain, *Sepharad*, where many of these early migrants settled. In the first centuries C.E., Jewish communities in Babylonia flourished. Until the middle of the 11th century, they exercised considerable influence over their brethren throughout the world. But this period was followed by a time of upheaval — war, invasions and persecution — that drove out thousands of Babylonian Jews. By the 18th century, Jewish life in Baghdad and throughout Mesopotamia had become painfully restricted. Their Moslem rulers daily devised measures to harass them. The result was emigration on a large scale. Many sought a haven in the East.

Dr Walter J Fischel, in his book, "*The Immigration of the Arabian Jews to India in the 18th century*" records the existence of a thriving Jewish colony in Surat, on the north-west coast of India. From other diverse sources, we learn that Arab-speaking Jews had vast Asian-centred commercial markets spreading between Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf and thence to the Malabar Coast of India, Malaya, Siam and China. They traded in cotton goods, mirrors, goldleaf, copper, tin, coral, coffee, raisins, almonds, spices, indigo, sandalwood, elephant tusks, coconuts, saltpetre and timber.

Ashkenasi Jews were also on the move. Australia received Jews from Britain and Europe from 1788. By 1831, they had organised themselves into a settled community in Sydney. Meanwhile, the East India Company was extending its influence and in 1805, it acquired the island of Penang, off the Malayan coast, with a strip of mainland territory.

Stamford Raffles, who had been a clerk with the East India Company since 1795, secured Singapore for the British in 1819. In 1826, just before Raffles' untimely death, Penang, Malacca and Singapore were brought together under the title *Straits Settlements*. But before his death, he had succeeded in laying a firm foundation for the future development of the new settlements.

Raffles' vision grew out of his respect for the peoples of the East, his faith in commerce as a civilising force and the need for an orderly, multi-racial society. With these ends in view, he created a well-organised Malayan government, provided a codification of native law, built a residence for the governor,

the *Istana Negara*, on Fort Canning, established schools and founded the Singapore Institute, which was designed for the study of the life and language of the Eastern world.

Furthermore, he urged that the important role played by merchants in building up British prosperity and influence overseas should be fully recognised. That this had not always been the case is revealed in the following passage written in a despatch to the Supreme Government, dated 29th March, 1823:

"I am satisfied that nothing has tended more to the discomfort and constant jarring which have, hitherto, occurred in our remote settlements than the policy which has dictated to the exclusion of the European merchants from all share — much less credit — in the domestic regulation of the settlements of which they are frequently its most important members."

Although Raffles was making a plea specifically for European merchants, the freer atmosphere he wished to create would inevitably benefit merchants of all nationalities. Singapore, under his guidance began to prosper and grow rapidly. It attracted visitors from many parts of the world. None gave vent to their feelings of surprise and admiration more forcibly than a prominent Dutch officer, Colonel Nahuijs. In a letter to his superior in Holland, he described the harbour already teeming with ships of many nations and then went on:

"I believe that no person with any feeling can help being impressed when setting foot in Singapore, because he can now see a seat of European trade and industry, a place which only five years before was a cavern and hiding place for murderers and pirates . . . Ground standing vacant is obtainable by any person without payment whatsoever . . . The climate is healthy but very warm. Drinking water is good . . . Reservoirs are being constructed."

Colonel Nahuijs, obviously, saw the Straits Settlements as a threat to the Dutch East Indies and while not being able to withhold his praise, he stressed that there were difficulties to overcome. "The cost of living is very high as the island produces little or nothing," he wrote. He added, also, that there was still little protection from pirates and that "foreign capital will be necessary for all projects."

These difficulties did not deter the immigrants. They came in their hundreds and among them were a small number of Jews.

Chapter One

The early history

"Happy are they who live in Thy house;
they shall be ever praising Thee."

— Psalm 84.

The first recorded entry, referring to the presence of Jews in Singapore, was dated 1830. In that year, a census of **traders** included an entry: **Nine traders of the Jewish faith.** We do not know if the nine merely spent a few days ashore or set up their businesses at the trading centre, but we must surely number them among the pioneers of our community.

Another census in 1833, this time of **settlers**, recorded: **Jews . . . 3**, which was a brief and anonymous entry, but of great significance. Only eight years later, a census of settlers numbered Jews as 22 (males 18, females 4). The first three **traders** might have viewed the prospects offered by Singapore favourably, returned to their country of origin to fetch their wives and families and sailed back to this jungle-clad and swampy outpost, risking their lives for the promise of a prosperous future. By 1846, of the 43 merchant houses recorded, twenty were British, **six Jewish**, five Chinese, five Arab and two Armenian.

Plying the pirate-infested seas, at that time, was a Jewish captain of a trading vessel. It was his untimely death at sea that has provided us with proof of his existence. There was no Jewish cemetery then, so he was buried in the Christian cemetery at Fort Canning. Before the Japanese Occupation, I took a picture of his grave and the stone, which was inscribed in Hebrew characters. I cannot reproduce it as it was lost with my other records during the war. When I looked for the grave after the Japanese surrender, I found things very changed. Only the headstones of certain graves had been preserved. They had been collected and mounted around the boundary walls, but the captain's headstone was missing.

It is unlikely that there were any other Jews buried in the Christian cemetery, as our founding fathers proved themselves devoted to their heritage and far-sighted in preserving it. Although there were scarcely sufficient males

to guarantee a *minyan* (a quorum of ten), the parents took steps to ensure that their children would live and die as Jews. In Chapter 248 of the Laws of the Straits Settlements Volume V, published in 1936, the following notice appeared:

"Whereas by an indenture of the lease of the first day of September 1841, the late Government of these Settlements demised on a peppercorn rent a certain piece of land, situated in Synagogue Street in Singapore Town, estimated to contain 5,414 square feet, to Joseph Dwek Cohen, Nassim Joseph Ezra, Ezra Ezekiel, their successors, representatives and assignees, as Trustees for the Jewish inhabitants of Singapore for the purpose of erecting and maintaining thereon for the use of the Jewish inhabitants, a synagogue or place of Divine worship with a proviso that the said piece of land should be resumed by Government in the event of the same being appropriated for any other purpose than that of Divine worship."

The three trustees, who came originally from Calcutta, not only put their plans for the synagogue into action immediately, but also probably in 1843, acquired a plot of land for a cemetery. It was situated in what was at that time the outskirts of town, behind Fort Canning, and it later became known as the **Orchard Road Cemetery** or the Old Cemetery. The lease was for 99 years. The trustees have been criticised by the post-war generation for acquiring only a 99-year lease instead of freehold. However, it must be said that in those early days of settlement, there was little evidence that land was offered *freehold* as the government encouraged citizens to obtain land for cultivation on a *lease*. Yet, the action of the trustees cannot be entirely exonerated as the Orchard Road Cemetery was in a very swampy area on the very fringe of the jungle. It would seem that had they exerted a little more pressure, they could have obtained a longer lease.

Synagogue Street is in the old commercial district of Boat Quay, off South Canal Road and just behind the present Central Police Station. The synagogue, that was built there, was almost indistinguishable from the shophouses on either side of it. For about 30 years, it served the little community as a place for divine worship. Then, it was sold as a shophouse. I visited the premises in 1938 and was most courteously welcomed by the Chinese occupants who showed me around. They told me how happy they were to live in a house that had once been a house of prayer for the *Orang Jaudee* (Jewish people). They felt it was a house of good omen and



First Jewish quarter.

revered it, especially the *Ahel* (Ark room) which they had left untouched. They considered it an altar and respected it. They had removed the *bimah* (pulpit), and the benches and seats for those thirty pioneers had long since disappeared. I was conscious of a special atmosphere in the building and I am glad that I was able to pay my respects before it was demolished to give way to the erection of a power transformer after the Japanese Occupation.

In 1858, Jacob Sappier, an Israeli traveller, author and poet visited Singapore as part of his fund-raising mission to the Far East. He casts a little light on the life and livelihood of the Jewish community of those early years, in an account he wrote of his travels. "I found some twenty families of our brethren . . . their means of livelihood was mainly the legalised opium trade that flourished between India and China," he wrote. He found his brethren generous, but their generosity "depended on the swings of the trade, for it was like putting money on the horns of a bull." He described the Arab dress worn by the Jews, but thought this fashion would not last as the Jews were already becoming westernised. He found the synagogue "a fine building", but noted that it was "full of cobwebs". He attributed this state of affairs, goodhumouredly, to the fact that "services were not held daily, but only on the Sabbath and festivals when it was easy to find a *minyan.*"

Christian missionaries were active during that period, and he was glad to observe that although they had great success in converting the Chinese, the Jews remained staunch in their Faith. Singapore, as a whole, impressed him greatly. "It was a city with a beautiful harbour where many ships anchored. This land really has goodness and the blessing of G'd!" he commented.

Further to the south, the European town had begun to take shape with its streets laid out at right angles to the main thoroughfare of **North Bridge Road**. Beyond **Bras Basah** (wet rice) **Road** were sites reserved for the "institutions". In the upper reaches of a fresh water stream, now a canal, the washermen carried on their trade which gave the quarter its name, **Dhoby Ghaut** (washermen's waterside), a Hindustani name that reminds us that Singapore was still an East India Company station.

Fort Canning was known as Government Hill from 1859 and the first Christian cemetery was situated at its foot. The south bank of the river was reserved for godowns and offices of the principal merchants, both European and Asian and the area of commerce began to spread over the filled-in swamp where **Raffles Place** is today. South and west of Raffles Place were Chinatown and the Tamil district of Chulia Kampong.

A vivid description of one of the first Jewish settlers can be found in Buckley's book, "*Anecdotal History of Old Time Singapore*". He quotes a certain Mr Thomas, who described Abraham Solomon with these words:

"He might have sat to a sculptor for a model of the Father of the Faithful. He was dressed in the flowing robes of the East with a large turban: and his beard, as large and long as is seldom seen, flowed down over his breast. He was a man of large stature and as noble a person as any in Singapore. He was a leading man among his tribe having much to do with the synagogue and taking an enthusiastic interest in the manners, customs and literature of the East. He would sometimes entertain Christians, but was careful to remark that he would not dine with them. His children were educated in an English school here, an advantage Baghdad did not offer Abraham Solomon, but he himself conducted his affairs in Malay."

Abraham Solomon was a merchant from Baghdad who traded with Singapore, at first, from Calcutta where he spent five years. In 1842, he came to live in Singapore permanently. He lived in the area of Boat Quay and the street in which he lived was named after him, **Solomon Street**. His imposing

figure would have been conspicuous among the merchants who crowded down to the landing stage to greet the first junk of the season, brought in with the north-east monsoon and escorted up the river by a flotilla of small craft.

It is almost certain that he lived his last years in Singapore, as there is a grave stone in the Orchard Road Cemetery bearing the name of **Abraham Shalom Seliman** (the Baghdadi version of Solomon) and the date of death is 2 **Iyar 5644** (19 May 1884). There are other graves with the names, Abraham Solomon or Seliman and the forenames suggest that Abraham's wife and young children were also buried there. Of the many settlers who came to Singapore before the end of the century, many were called Solomon, but as far as I know, none have claimed this grand old man as their forebear. It is possible that none of his immediate family survived him.

Chapter Two

Close bond

"How good and how lovely it is when brethren dwell together in unity."

— Psalm 133.

At the time when Abraham Solomon began trading with Singapore, the persecution of Jews in Mesopotamia intensified. Wave after wave fled and many found refuge in India. There, principally in the large cities of Bombay and Calcutta, they set up businesses. Within a few years of their arrival, members of some of these families travelled to Singapore with their merchandise and, like Abraham, decided to take up permanent residence on the island. Through them, a close bond was forged between the Jews of the main trading cities of India and the pioneer settlers of Singapore. The bond with Calcutta proved particularly strong and, till today, the descendants of these families acknowledge their debt with sympathy and affection, for the influence of the Calcutta Jews was for the most part beneficial.

I do not know the names of all the original families, but fortunately, some have been recorded. Among the first mentioned is Salleh Manasseh Salleh who was described by a contemporary as "a man of intelligence and learning". He left Baghdad in 1862 and married Esther, the daughter of Abraham Aaron Cohen in Calcutta. Shortly afterwards, lured by the lucrative trade in opium and spices, he set up a warehouse in Singapore. The street on which it stood was soon to bear his name, **Manasseh Street**. He achieved great wealth through his successful speculation in the growing property market and his family became influential members in the small community.

While his brother, David Ezra, remained in Calcutta to become the head of one of the most powerful families in Calcutta and the Far East, Nassim Joseph Ezra made his home in Singapore. He was to be one of the three trustees of the first synagogue. Members of David Haham Aaron Gubbay's family came, too. It was a relative of Aaron Shalome Yahya Gubbay who, in 1882, while on a visit to Singapore,

performed four *brith mila* (circumcisions) in less than two hours! During the last decades of the nineteenth century, twenty-six members of my father's family arrived in Singapore from Bombay. It seems that, at that time, they outnumbered every other family. Saul Jacob Nathan set up a firm of share and exchange brokers in 1882. His office was at 13 **Change Alley**, the narrow lane linking Collyer Quay with Raffles place, which derived its name from the thriving business carried on there.

Saul's son, Eddy, was born in 1884. He was one of the first Jewish boys to be sent to England to school. After attending Cheltenham College, he returned to Singapore to join his father in the firm that became Nathan & Sons. Saul served as a trustee of the synagogue for many years. When he died, his son retired and went to Europe with his family. The firm was then wound up.

My father, Elias Manasseh Nathan, lived at first in River Valley Road. He established a large import-export business with the Dutch East Indies where he had branches in Batavia, Samarang and Cheribon. Knowing very little English, he conducted his transactions in Arabic and Malay. He kept few records, merely jotting a few figures on his shirt sleeves, and relied on personal contacts and mutual trust. He dealt mainly in basic commodities such as gunny bags used for the storing of dried food and spices. But I had an interest in a completely different type of merchandise. One afternoon, my brother and I climbed through a window of a store room and came upon a crate of brilliantly coloured Japanese matches. Delighted, we filled our pockets with those little 'magic lights' and emerged from the window like Aladdin from the cave of treasure.

My father made frequent journeys to the Dutch East Indies and, during his absence, he left his nephews in control. After his early death, they took over the business and ran it under the name, Sayers and Company.

By the 1870's, the firm of Joshua Brothers was established. Joseph Joshua Elias and his brothers were among those who speculated in the opium trade. In those days, it was a legitimate short cut to wealth and many of the pioneering settlers took advantage of it. The partaking of opium was practised widely in the Orient, especially among the Chinese and Indian communities. It was used as a household remedy to relieve pain and was also helpful in easing gastric and respiratory ailments. Some smoked it, others chewed it. It was used as a tranquiliser or taken merely for pleasure.

At a time when the entrepot trade was on the increase in India and China as well as Singapore, the British Government became the sole purchaser of opium from the Indian farmers. The government sold the opium by auction to the highest bidders who were frequently the Jewish merchants. The opium was then exported privately, first to Penang, then to Singapore, Hong Kong (established as a British colony in 1842 after the Sino-British Opium War) and Shanghai.

Many great fortunes were amassed, but there were losers too. Among the latter was the firm of Joshua Brothers. In 1872, they were unwittingly the receivers of cases of opium that had been adulterated by certain Chinese merchants who had sold them with forged declarations. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce expelled two of its members for the offence. An account of court proceedings appeared in The Straits Times of 30 November 1872. The jury pronounced Joseph Joshua "not guilty", but before discharging him, the Judge addressed him with these words: "Young man, you have had a very narrow escape. I hope that, for the future, you will lead an honest life." The newspaper reported many offences connected with the opium trade, but I believe that, fortunately, there was only one major incident. It severely tested the equilibrium of the commercial life of the island and the panic it engendered caused a run on two of the principal banks — the Chartered and the Mercantile banks. But Singapore survived.

Happily for our community, the majority of our elders did not sink all their assets into this one trade. They diversified at an early date. When the opium trade was finally banned, we find them purchasing property, engaging in the stock market, buying and exporting an increasingly wide variety of goods, keeping their heads well above water at a time when the tide of financial and economic changes might have swept them away.

Joshua Raphael Joshua brought his nephews, Rubin, Elias and Manasseh Meyer to Singapore. Manasseh was later to become the outstanding member of his generation of Singapore Jews. He was born in Baghdad in 1846 and was educated in Calcutta. In 1861, he came to Singapore and continued his English education in St Joseph's Institution. It was then a very small school with a class of twenty-eight pupils made up of twenty-seven Catholics and one Jew. He returned to Calcutta in 1864 to join his maternal uncle in business and also took the opportunity to resume his Hebrew studies inter-

rupted by his stay in Singapore. Three years later, he started business on a small scale in Rangoon where he remained until 1873 when he left for Singapore with his wife, Khatoon, determined this time to stay for good. He worked exceedingly hard to establish his business and, within ten years, had become the largest local importer and exporter in the Indian trade. Raphael Sassoon was one of the first Jews to join the firm which traded under the name, Meyer Brothers. Thus, a nucleus of industrious Jews was formed. They provided the incentive for others to follow. Not all made their fortunes and not all left their mark, but all, merchant and pedlar alike, wove the pattern of communal life that was beginning to take colourful shape.

A variety of customs, brought from their countries of origin, survived the tribulations of settling in an almost virgin land. In fact, they seemed to re-root themselves on arrival for they flourished for many years. Like my father and Abraham Solomon, many spoke Arabic and often wrote in Hebrew or Arabic script. Where there was no training in book-keeping, accounts were written on shirt cuffs. For the most part, there was an immense trust between dealers of different nationalities.

A variant of Hindustani was also used and nicknames were soon a feature of the language, lending a homely touch to the form of address in an alien environment. A tailor was called *Darzee*, a dark-skinned swarthy man, *Aswad* and if he came from Kurdistan, he was called *Kurdee*. *Habaz* was a baker and *Kundarchee*, a shoe-maker or cobbler. It was customary to include the father's name as a middle name. For instance, my name is Ezekiel Elias Nathan.

The Arabic style of dress was convenient and was worn for more than a generation. Men wore long buttoned vests called *sederia*, a long top coat, *dagla* and *zebun*, a fez or turban on their heads. The women wore loose white dresses with lace collars and long sleeves trimmed with lace, colloquially known as *moo-moos* (wrappers).

The *hookah* was smooked with great poise, not only by men, but also by the matriarchs of this new society. It was not unusual to find a goat looking on indulgently as their owners puffed away and conversations were often accompanied by the clucking of hens as most households kept poultry in their backyard. In the bathroom, the pride of place was given to a Shanghai jar, as large as the one which sheltered Sinbad the Sailor. The bather would sit on a small

bangku (a small wooden stool), scoop up the precious water from the jar with a small bucket and give himself a refreshing shower. The water would seep out gradually through a hole in the tiled floor — very convenient and, for that period, remarkably hygienic.

By 1870, Singapore was evidently a multi-racial society. The various communities became increasingly aware of their responsibility to their own people and this was also true of the Jews. The community now numbered 172 (116 males and 56 females), most of Sephardi descent.

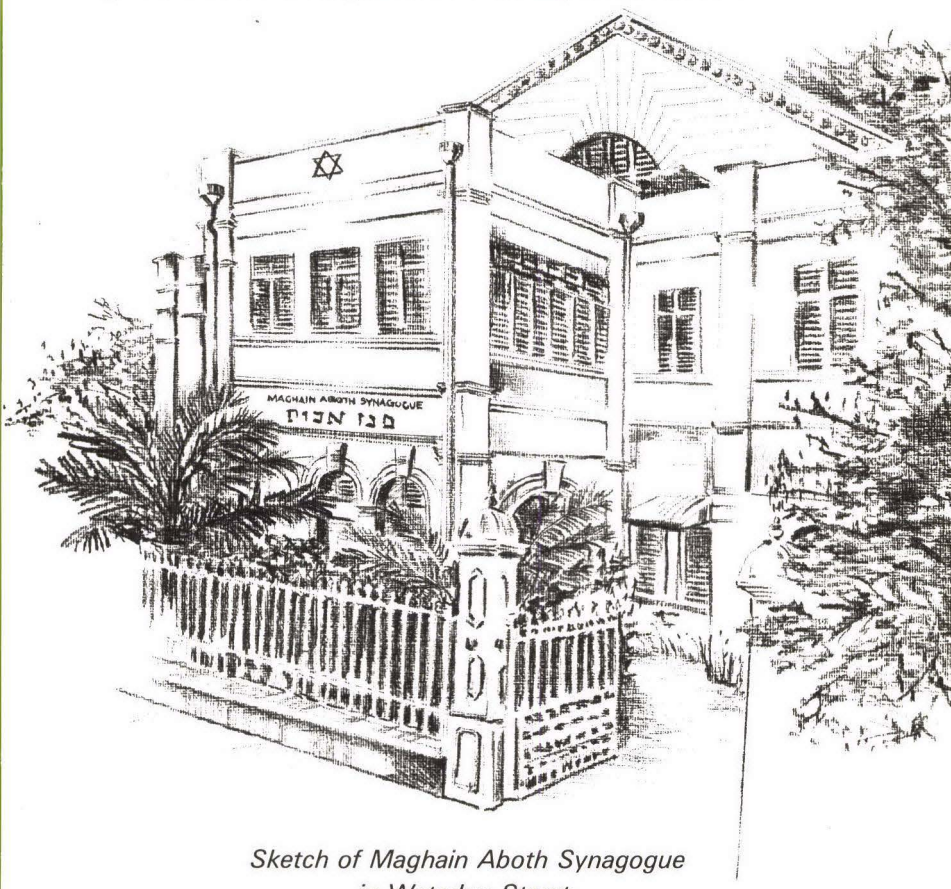
The Jewish pioneer settlers had, by now, moved away from Synagogue Street and the surrounding area to the rapidly spreading residential areas of North Bridge Road, Sophia Road, Wilkie Road, Dhoby Ghaut, Waterloo Street, Prinsep Street and Selegie Road. The community was drifting away from the synagogue which, by now, had been left in isolation. The leaders realised that the situation should be remedied as speedily as possible. Unfortunately, there were no active trustees at this critical time. Ezra Ezekiel and Nassim Joseph Ezra had died and the third trustee, Joseph Dwek Cohen, had left Singapore for Aleppo.

Joseph Dwek Cohen, while still in Aleppo in 1870, appointed Abraham Solomon, Joseph Joshua and his nephew, Manasseh Meyer as the trustees. Manasseh was away in India but his uncle was in Singapore. He was given the opportunity to purchase a piece of land to build a new synagogue. The trustees of Raffles Institution approached him for a contribution towards their own building fund to extend their premises.

In Chapter VI of Rev W Murray's book, *"Religious Singapore"*, he wrote that Joshua agreed to pay the $4,000 Raffles Institution needed, in return for a piece of their land large enough for the building of a synagogue. The money was paid and the title deeds were drawn up. But there was a proviso that the synagogue had to be erected within three years. Unfortunately, Joshua had to leave Singapore and no other leaders stepped in to assume responsibility. Abraham Solomon was ill and resigned his trusteeship. Rubin and Manasseh Meyer had not returned. The money needed for the erection of the synagogue was not collected in time. The option on the land was lost and the land reverted to Raffles Institution. Raffles Institution has recently moved to new premises, the ground being taken over by the government. Had the synagogue been built there, it, too, would probably

have been taken over. Our founders may have been blessed with greater foresight than at first appeared!

In 1873, Manasseh Meyer returned to Singapore. He immediately leapt into action on behalf of his community. He approached the Attorney-General, Mr Braddell (the grandfather of author and solicitor, Roland Braddell) for permission to sell the old synagogue and build a new one on a suitable site. Permission was granted and a site obtained in Waterloo Street. At that time, the street was known as Church Street because of the large Catholic Church (of Saints Peter and Paul), already built opposite the site for the proposed synagogue. Construction of the synagogue began as soon as the plans were drawn up and it was completed in 1878.



Sketch of Maghain Aboth Synagogue in Waterloo Street.



Interior of the Maghain Aboth Synagogue.

The name chosen for the fine new building was significant. It was named **Maghain Aboth** (Shield of our Fathers). It was built in a tree-shaded compound and a well was sunk for use as a *mikvah* (a ritual bath). The exterior of the main building was constructed of bricks and mortar with cream-coloured stucco, in the simple harmonious lines of the colonial style of that period. A dome over the west wall, where the *Ahel* was situated, contrasted admirably with the straight lines of the building. From the arched porch, a wide flight of steps, running the width of the facade, led to the main entrance which, as in all synagogues in the East, faced **west** towards Jerusalem. Through the three wide well-proportioned doors, one entered an airy one-storey spacious interior with a high ceiling. Finely carved wooden benches with backs and seats interlaced with cane were placed on three sides of the square, providing seating accommodation for a hundred male worshippers. No provision was made for the ladies at that time.

Gas lighting cast a glow over the many oil lamps lighted in memory of the departed. These were of a simple design. Oil wicks were placed in glass bowls which were suspended from a network of steel rods attached to the decorative pillars that supported the roof. The *bimah*, made of carved teak, was mounted in the centre of the hall facing the *Ahel*. Defining the *Ahel* were three large solid teak doors draped with three

embroidered *parochet* (fringed curtains) made of cashmere wool or rich velvet. Above the doors, the gleam of an ornate metal grill was enhanced by the glow of the *Ner Tamid* (the Perpetual Light) shining from within. The floor was of pale cream tiles with a blue border. The many windows and the height of the ceiling added to the impression of spaciousness and coolness.

The doors of the *Ahel* opened to reveal a splendid array of *Sepharim* (Scrolls of the Law). They were probably brought from Baghdad and Calcutta and presented to the community in memory of a dear departed, whose name and date of death, as well as the name of the donor, were inscribed on the casket. Sometimes an additional inscription was included, giving the donor the right to remove that particular *Sepher* (scroll). As a special protection against the climate, the scrolls were first encased in wood and then overlaid with velvet. Usually, an ornamental casket of beaten silver or gold completed the covering. All were adorned with silver bells and many were crowned with a little turret shaped like a minaret.

The consecration service was held on 4 April 1878 and was conducted by a certain Mr Lucunas or by Mr I J Hayeem Sherida or, perhaps, by both of them. Official sources reveal no more than their names. We have no detailed records of that memorable occasion. As far as we know, no artist or photographer was there to record the scene for posterity. But what we lack in records, we can surely make up for in vision. Let us imagine, for ourselves, the atmosphere in the **Maghain Aboth Synagogue** on that day. The congregants must surely have uttered heartfelt prayers of thanksgiving that the hand of Providence had brought them safely through their many trials to that historic moment. Many would be thinking of the relatives and friends left behind in far-off countries where they still suffered persecution. There must have been a hope that they would be spurred on to leave before it was too late. Some, who had left homes in peaceful lands, must have blessed the day their far-sightedness and enterprising spirit had urged them to risk the long and arduous journey to this hitherto unknown haven. They may have heard, deep within them, echoes of the Psalmist's words, "Peace within thy rampart, prosperity within thy palaces" and, joined lustily in the singing of *Hallel* (Prayers of Praise), filling every corner of their beautiful building with the chant: "This is the day the Lord hath made; we will be glad and rejoice thereon."

Chapter Three

Towards prosperity

"The warmth of the Singapore sun and the friendship of its people . . ."

— Sir Frank Swettenham,
Governor of the Straits Settlements, 1903.

The hopes and prayers of that small congregation at the consecration of the Maghain Aboth Synagogue were to be answered. By the turn of the century, whereas the total population census showed an increase of approximately forty-five percent, the population of Jews doubled. There were several factors at work to ensure that this favourable trend would continue.

The administration of the island had been transferred from the centralised authority of the East India Company in Calcutta to the more discerning Colonial Office in London and it was becoming increasingly evident that government policy was based on free trade, fair taxation and even-handed justice. Among the laws of 1875, was one that stated "in regard to the ownership and sale of property, aliens had equal rights with British subjects." Many Jewish settlers were able to take advantage of this privilege.

As a result of Admiral Sir Henry Keppel's victory over the pirates of the China Seas, shipping increased tremendously. The increase was accelerated when steam gradually replaced sails. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 brought more Europeans to the East and, they entrusted far more cargo to their Eastern-going shipping lines. Many Ashkenasi Jews were among the traders who used this new route.

Advances in the technology of cable and wireless provided a new impetus for the entrepreneur. When a cable was laid from Suez to Bombay, Singapore was brought into direct communication, via Ceylon through Suez, to Europe.

By this time, British protection had been extended to the Malay States and Singapore gained from the fast expanding tin-mining in that region. The powerful Hongkong Banking Corporation gave immediate backing to the production of rubber, following the successful planting in Singapore's

Botanical Gardens of the *Hevea Braziliensis* (Brazilian rubber seed) brought from Kew Gardens. The success of these two ventures helped turn Singapore into the greatest entrepot between Calcutta and Hong Kong. Ships now steamed through the Malacca Straits where before they had favoured the Sunda Straits between Java and Sumatra. But the voyages were still hazardous. A contemporary witness, John Cameron, editor of The Straits Times, while commending the skill of "the old Chinese sea dogs" who, up till that time, had skilfully navigated the sailing ships on the Singapore-Hong Kong run, went on to commiserate with passengers of this new era who, he commented, had to make their wills before entrusting themselves to the new captains!

It was this same Cameron, who lavished praise on the special character of this island colony. "For forty-five years, have the hands of man been busy accummulating wealth on its bosom, and yet, scarce a scar is visible," he wrote. Singapore was already the most cosmopolitan city in Asia and a welcome haven to people of all nationalities and creeds. This is how Arnold Wright described some of the new citizens: "Opulent Chinese *towkays* (rich merchants) in grey felt hat, nankeen coat and capacious trousers, Straits-born *Babas* as proud as Lucifer, easy-going Malays in picturesque *sarong kebaya*, picturesque Jews in old time gaberdine, Arabs in long coat and fez — the kaleidescopic procession is one of endless variety. East and West meet and the old is giving way to the new."

The busy scene of growing commercial prosperity was enhanced by an impressive backdrop. Singapore's first civilian architect. C.D. Coleman, realised that features of the Greek and Roman styles were also suitable for a tropical climate. He adapted the Palladian style and designed open arcades with well-proportioned pillars, supporting a covered way that provided shade from the glare. He built bungalows on stilts with deep, wide verandahs and louvred windows, which allowed the greatest possible circulation of air while giving protection from the heavy rains. These architectural idioms remained very much a part of Singapore for many generations. Buildings such as the Armenian Church, Raffles Institution, Killiney House (later known as Belle Vue House) and the **Chased El** Synagogue were either built by Coleman or in his style. One of his contemporaries described Singapore as an "emerald" among Britain's far-flung colonies. He praised the roads levelled out by elephants harnessed to heavy rollers

which, "whether along sea fringes or running into the interior of the island are so good, level and beautiful as regards their arboreal dressing that, it does not matter very much in what direction one turns."

The Botanic Gardens were landscaped to suggest "an English country park in an ancestral home" yet, the luxuriant savagery of the jungle was left apparently "on the rampage". The Thomson Road Reservoir was not only supplying fresh water, but also provided delight to the eyes with its thickly wooded slopes "gracing the banks of lakeland water." The Gap offered a two-hour drive over winding hills with a breath-taking sea-scape at every bend.

Singapore society began to extend its spheres of recreation and many clubs were formed. Notwithstanding the mutual respect with which the various communities regarded each other in the world of commerce, the clubs, for the most part, emphasised separation rather than congregation. On the *padang* (the green), the British frequented the Singapore Cricket Club (SCC), whose constitution was based on that of Merton College, Oxford. Among its regulations was one which allowed "a visitor", a non-member, to sit at meetings in an advisory capacity. It seems that there has been only one "visitor" to date, the present Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

The Eurasians, an important racial minority, whose antecedents could be traced back at least two hundred years to the colonising periods of the Dutch and Portuguese, founded their club, the Singapore Recreation Club, opposite the SCC. The Chinese established theirs in Hong Lim Green in Chinatown. The Sikh Association had a hockey club in Sepoy Lines and the Indians had one in Balestier Road. The Singapore Ladies (Europeans only) played hockey too, on the SCC padang. Billiards were popular in most of the clubs and were played also in the Boustead Institute in Tanjong Pagar. A race course was founded as early as 1845 and the Turf Club was the only one, apart from the YMCA, open to all races and denominations.

Among other pursuits, photography soon had a wide following which was fortunate for historians. One of the notable photographers of the period was a hotel proprietor, M Gaston Dutronquay. In 1843, he was already advertising in the press: "Complete Master of the Daguerrotype. Likeness taken in two minutes. Photographs taken while completely shaded from the sun."!

Gradually, the government became aware of the needs of the citizens. The tram was introduced to provide, at least, a measure of public transport. The rickshaw puller was free to ply his trade in the heart of the city and, sampans or small launches were commonly used on the outskirts as there were many small rivers and few bridges. The journey to Changi, for example, was usually made by sea as the land route led through the jungle where tigers still prowled. *Gharries* (hackney carriages) were on hire and the wealthy had their own *broughams*, which were soon replaced by the motor-car. The firm of Katz Bros imported the first *autocar*, very early in the present century.

Each new day was marked by the booming of a sixty-eight pounder gun, fired from Fort Canning, rousing Singapore rather brusquely out of its slumber at 5 a.m. At mid-day, the gun would boom again and the ships in the harbour would set their chronometers. At 8 p.m., it reminded peace-loving people that it was time to be safe at home and in bed. There were no daily newspapers, but The Straits Times appeared once a week. The editor, Robert Carr, added an unexpectedly personal touch to his column by his greeting, "Good morning to you, Kind Reader."

Fresh food was becoming more readily available. The *"Iceberg"*, a remarkably fine ship, made two equatorial crossings annually from the U.S.A. The voyage took four months with its precious cargo of ice, insulated simply with thick layers of white pine dust. Even in the 1860's , the demand for ice was nearly half a million tons. By the 1900's, consignments of frozen meat, butter and fresh fruit were coming from Australia, but there was no pure fresh milk until after the Second World War. The few cows on the island were usually in the hands of the Bengalis, who would milk their wretched specimens on your doorstep, if you so wished. But it is hard to realise that many were dependent on this "thin bluish-white liquid which was not infrequently flavoured with cow-dung and usually speckled with dead flies." So we are reminded that while the wealthy were growing wealthier, there were many poor people for whom mere survival was a constant struggle. It was on their labour that an affluent section of the society built its fortune. A great debt is owed to the *coolies*, who replaced convict labour in 1873 and, who provided a constant supply of cheap labour.

For protection of its citizens, a police force was formed from the nucleus of the "night watch", which could boast of

only one sergeant and nine constables. The new recruits needed special training to deal with crime in a multi-racial society. The greatest problems were connected with the ancient Chinese clan system and the secret societies that were incorporated into it.

But there existed a very different threat to justice. Many cases in the civil courts had to be dealt with through interpreters and, it was they who were often blamed for the miscarriage of justice. In an editorial, during that period, an almost libellous attack upon them was printed: "It is scandalous that the lives and liberties of men should be dependent upon chance misinterpretation . . . Away with those bungling, imbecilic old men!"

Fires were common hazards. They were dealt with, at first, by a brigade of volunteer citizens who had to douse the fires with few resources — even water was not always readily available. The warning system was the beating of police gongs and the pealing of church bells or the firing of a gun from Fort Canning. In 1889, the Hill Street fire station was built and by 1912, motorised vehicles and telephone alarm systems were installed. But the old alarm of firing a gun persisted for many years.

The government was slow to realise that public health was their responsibility. Municipal sewerage was not installed until 1914 and, in the same year, the Department of Sanitation took steps to deal effectively with the disposal of night soil. Tropical diseases were an ever-present menace — malaria, beri-beri, typhoid, cholera and dysentery claimed many lives. The death rate was fifty per thousand. Grave stones in the old Christian cemetery at Fort Canning told a sombre tale of the deaths of many young women and children. But the tale was not wholly grim. Other headstones showed that many men outlived their wives and many died at a ripe old age. Among the Far Eastern Dependencies, Singapore was even gaining a reputation as a "health resort". It became very common for Indian civil servants to come to the island to convalesce after an illness.

A variety of medicaments was available and newspapers did their best to promote them. Columns were bursting with advertisements professing to ward off or cure every ailment from corns to consumption. They may not have lived up to all the claims made, but at least, their presence in the medicine cupboard must have brought a little reassurance. A favourite advertisement was, "Your Household Treasure . . .

Holloways Ointment and Pills". Less prosaic was a recipe for "Eternal Youth": "Grind the leaves of a jambu (Eugenia pendens or posidium guava), mix with grated coconut and cook with rice or eat the leaves as a raw side dish . . . AND YOU WILL PRESERVE YOUR YOUTH."

But, besides these often suspect inducements to healthy living, there were positive signs that health was becoming a major concern. King Edward VII College of Medicine was established in 1905. Mission Hospitals supplemented the excellent work carried out by Government hospitals. The herbal dispensaries operated by the Malays and Chinese, steeped in ancient lore, were of invaluable service to the community at large. All helped to improve the general stamina of Singapore's rapidly increasing population.

Education was also advancing, but slowly. It seems that there were no administrators in this field who had inherited Raffles' breadth of vision so that little was done to draw on the richness of the traditional cultures of the various races in this new society. Instead, a superficial sense of unity was imposed through the promotion of English as the *lingua franca*. Vernacular schools, mainly run by the different communities, were where many children began their education. If their parents could afford the cost, they were sent on to secondary schools initiated by the government or missionaries where the medium of teaching was English and vernacular languages appeared nowhere in the curriculum. There was no free education except for the Malays, whose fees were paid for by the government in accordance with the terms of the original purchase agreement between the ruling sultan and the East India Company. British and European children had little opportunity of mixing with their Asian contemporaries as they were sent "home" to the United Kingdom or Europe at the age of seven to avoid the climate which was considered injurious to their health. Yet, despite these drawbacks, many children received a sound education.

Raffles Institution became a first-class grammar school. Mission schools struggled "at birth", but survived and grew strong. King Edward VII College of Medicine was beginning to earn a fine reputation. A splendid library had been opened and a well-planned museum, adding extra dimensions to the educational scene.

Singapore was in many ways developing along the lines of its original charter. In a letter to a friend, Raffles had written of his hope that the island would become "a great commer-

cial emporium and a fulcrum whence we may extend our influence politically as circumstances may hereafter require."

For all its shortcomings, Singapore did not fail to engender the excitement and even romance of commerce. This was to make up, in large measure, for the lack of an intrinsic culture.

Chapter Four

New ventures

"One must attempt to accommodate himself to the world as he finds it, rather than expect the world to accommodate itself fully to his human wishes and his human dreams."

— David Max Eichhorn,
Contemporary American Reform Rabbi.

In a predominantly commercial society, it was far from easy to succeed in other ventures. There were few, to my knowledge, who made the attempt.

David Jamilly was one of the exceptions. At an early age, he had been fascinated by the "magic lantern". As he reached his teens, he keenly followed the progress of experiments in motion pictures. As soon as he was old enough, he managed to raise a small capital and, with a certain Mr Solomon, began touring the Malay peninsular with a "Kine Show". This was only a few years after Edison had built his first "movie studio" in New Jersey in 1893, a mere "tar-paper shanty" known as the "black Maria".

David Jamilly's small company, equipped with a tent, motors and generators, could cope with over a thousand spectators. Our information about his experiences at this time is mainly gleaned from an article he wrote in 1909. He was honoured on several occasions, when the sultans summoned him to their palaces to put on shows "within their innermost, jealously guarded precincts where no strangers may enter."

Spurred by success, they travelled to India and Borneo. They used a coastal boat to cover the little known parts of Borneo and it was here that they met disaster. They were set upon by pirates who captured their boat and equipment. The company could not survive this loss but, David's interest in the cinema was in no way diminished. He left for England in 1906 and, eventually built a thriving business in Soho. At first he hired out one-reel comedies, but later, built his own cinema which was used mostly for trade shows. During those years, besides proving himself a hard-working and astute

businessman, he also built up a reputation for helping struggling young actors and directors.

Nissim N. Adis' achievements lay within the more conventional sphere. He was the son of a Calcutta merchant and as a young man he was articled to Messrs Templeton & Carapet, Attorney-at-Law and Notary Public. However, after two years he abandoned the law and ventured into stock-broking. It was then that Singapore beckoned. By the early 1890's, after many reverses, fortune finally smiled. In December 1895, he married Leah Judah, the grand-daughter of B.R. Belilious (C.M.G.) of Hong Kong and when he built stables behind the old race course to house other owners' horses during the racing season, he named the country road leading to them, **Belilious**.

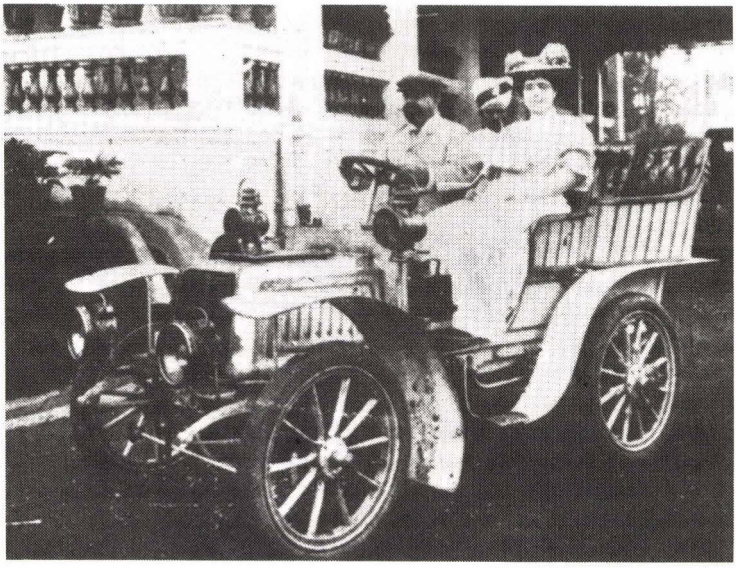
In 1907, he built a fine mansion on top of Mount Sophia which he called Adis Lodge and the road leading to it became Adis Road. It so happened that our modest home was at the foot of the hill, bordering the outhouses of the Adis estate. Shortly after the mansion was completed, I remember hearing my *amah* calling out, "*Rumah t'baka*! *Rumah t'baka*!" (House on fire!) I saw the flames leaping into the sky and I was sure that the whole hill-top was burning. To everyone's amazement, when the fire was extinguished, the house was virtually unscathed, only the outhouses and stables were charred.

Adis Lodge and its hospitality became almost legendary and a contemporary described Adis Lodge as "one of the most magnificent mansions east of Suez". It was eventually sold to the millionaire-philanthropist, Eu Tong Sen. Although much has been changed, Nissim's monogram, NNA, can still be seen on the iron railing, marble floors and ornate decorations.

Another building in Singapore is connected with Nissim Adis. The land where the Supreme Court now stands was previously owned by him. There he built a hotel that was to become well-known to travellers from many parts of the world, the Grand Hotel de l'Europe.

The whole area covered an acre. Part of it was named Adis Building, with a shopping complex on the High Street side and facing the Esplanade was the arched facade of the Grand Hotel. Nissim installed an Otis lift, one of the first of its kind, to service the three floors and roof garden. The hotel could accommodate 120 guests and earned a reputation for its comfort and fine cuisine. Somerset Maugham, on one of his

many visits there, commented: "You may *stay* at the Raffles, but *dine* at the Grand!" The comfort of its guests was considered so important that when they complained that their sleep was disturbed by the chimes of the big clock on the Victoria Memorial Hall, the Municipal Fathers volunteered to silence it between 9 p.m. and 7 a.m., provided the management would supply the necessary mechanical part for the purpose. The part was supplied!



Mr. N. N. Adis in his 10-12 H.P. Chenard Walcker car.

Nissim was a motor-car enthusiast. A Straits Times photograph shows him in the driver's seat of a Chenard Walcker, 10–12 H.P. at one of the earliest car rallies. In 1918 for the Armistice Day Parade, he transformed one of his cars into a "dove of peace" and his pretty young daughter, Gracia, rode in it, dressed as a fairy. He was exceedingly proud to be the first Jew to become Master of the Lodge of St Andrew's in the Far East, in the order of the Free Masons. He enjoyed life to the full, travelled widely and won for himself, as an individual and as a Jew, many friends and great respect.

In 1898, a very young and unassuming lady arrived in Singapore by chance. For me and my family, it was a lucky

chance. Rachel Ezekiel was born in Bombay of a poor, but very religious family. Their home was ever open to visiting Talmudic scholars and Rabbis. She was taught Hebrew and Arabic at an early age, but the little English that she learnt was through her own efforts. Her parents could not afford to send her to an English school so, Rachel knitted socks and sold them to pay for a few hours' attendance. When her father died, she was in her early teens and was sent away to stay with her father's relatives in Hong Kong. Here, her education in English continued. Being uprooted from her place of birth, particularly from her mother, caused her great homesickness but it also developed in her a strong and somewhat stubborn will that was to stand her in good stead later in life. After a year or so, she decided to return to her mother in Bombay. She had very little money and left Hong Kong on one of the old sailing vessels as a deck passenger in the care of the captain. He played an unusual part in her plans. He was a gentlemanly Scot who took a fatherly interest in her from the start of the voyage. He did not let her sleep on deck, but found her a cabin at no extra cost. When the ship berthed in Singapore for a few days, the captain arranged for Rachel to stay with a Jewish family in Prinsep Street. His intervention changed the course of her life: while she was a guest of the family, the *shadchonim* (matchmakers) stepped in. They introduced Elias Nathan to her. He was immediately impressed and proposed marriage. She agreed to marry him on condition that she could send for her mother to live with them. This was not an unusual request. It was the custom in the East, with Jew and gentile, for more than one generation to form part of the same household. Elias willingly complied with her wish and the marriage took place on 30 August 1898 in the Maghain Aboth Synagogue. Meanwhile, a message was sent to the captain informing him that Miss Ezekiel would not be completing her voyage, as she was about to become Mrs Nathan. Delighted at the news, he gave them his pet parrot as a wedding gift!

My mother cared for my grandmother for her long life and with great tact, she also cared for many needy families in the community. In my early childhood, I remember going in a rickshaw with her on a Friday to distribute food for the *Shabbat*. She bore my father six children, before he died at the age of 61. At that crucial time, the strength of character and resourcefulness which she showed from her early youth age helped her in the awesome task of bringing up a young family

in what was still to her, a strange country. She encouraged us to be observant Jews and take full advantage of the educational and social opportunities available. She was in many ways untypical of her generation and allowed us more freedom than many young people of that time. At home, she made sure we knew where our roots lay. I am sure that my subsequent involvement in communal affairs owes a great deal to her guidance.

For me and my contemporaries, early childhood was a comparatively carefree time. The sun shone brightly on our little island and on the British Empire, and we basked in its glory. We were all royalist, had pictures of the Royal family prominently displayed on our walls, wore red, white and blue rosettes proudly for a celebration and black crepe armbands dramatically for a death. We were unaware of racial tension — were we not *all* British? — and we were almost unaware of differences in class and religion. Yet, change was in the air and our community was developing in line with it.

Wealth, or lack of it, had by now created three fairly distinct groups. In the synagogue, the tendency was for the wealthy to congregate on the left of the *bimah*, the shopkeepers and the small merchants on the right and the poor behind. As the wealthy moved further away from the synagogue area, the divisions became increasingly apparent. Land was still comparatively cheap and the very prosperous, such as Nissim Adis, built their homes in spacious grounds on hill-tops or on the newly-developed coastal roads where the jungle had been cleared. The moderately rich built their homes within walking distance of the synagogue, but not in its immediate vicinity. Their houses were often in the traditional colonial style — the first floor raised by pillars, and the ground floor left for servants' quarters, poultry and stables. The first floor provided the living quarters of the *Mem-Tuan* (master and mistress) and their family.

The arrangement of rooms was usually simple: leading through half swing doors from the large central hall used for dining and relaxing, were the bedrooms and verandah. The design allowed for maximum ventilation which was most important in the heaviness of the humid tropical heat. For this reason, there were window frames without windows. Shutters took the place of glass and in the mid-day heat, when not the tiniest breeze stirred, the sun had to be shut out and the house was cast in darkness. The furnishing was becoming a blend of western and oriental. Although far less

cluttered than the typical Edwardian home, oriental *objets d'art* were a notable feature.

Fresh water was not readily available, but a servant would usually store water in Shanghai jars. There would probably be a servant, too, to keep the *Mem-Tuan* cool by working a *punkah*, a large swinging fan familiar to the British Sahib in India. When the evening brought a hint of coolness, hand fans of every description would flutter gently, still scarcely disturbing the heavy air.

Nearer the synagogue were the houses of the less prosperous. The small shop-keepers, clerks and pedlars lived in two-storeyed terrace houses with two rooms up and two rooms down, some having verandahs on the upper floor. The rooms were often almost bare of furniture.

Water was procured from the wells and sanitation was minimal: in fact, night soil buckets had to be carried through the front rooms for collection! There were few comforts and no luxuries but the *slar* (House of Worship), was on their doorsteps and that was enough. Their Judaism, though narrow-minded and parochial to a degree, was steadfast. Had it not been for their faith, there might have been no communal history to write. There would have been Jews scattered over the lush areas of the island, but there would have been little communal life.

Many of the dwellers in the vicinity of the synagogue — Waterloo Street, Selegie Road, Prinsep Street, Dhoby Ghaut and Bencoolen Street — were known to me in my childhood. Some were great characters and much loved. I can still smell the *roti Istambul*, the crispy, flat round bread baked for the *Shabbat* by *Itzhak Habaz* (Isaaac the baker). He baked it in a kiln which he built in his home in Prinsep Street and would personally deliver it carrying it in a basket balanced on his head. He reminded me of the hapless baker, our forefather Joseph met in prison, in Egypt but he had a more fortunate life! He was strong, kindly and tough. His wife, Mazalla, was an admirable lady who not only helped her husband in every way, but also was of invaluable assistance to my mother in bringing up her mischievous brood. I must have been fond of her for I remember a jingle I made up about her in Arabic:

Mazalla, Mazalla, chosh Mazalla,
Woosh halu tulah Mazalla!

when freely translated, it means: Lucky one, lucky, kind one. How fine and tall you are, Oh lucky one!

At No 233 Bencoolen Street, there was another bakery

known as The Crown Bakery, run by the Solomon family. They excelled in many kinds of baking, but it is their Shabbat pastries I remember most. On Fridays, the shop would be packed with customers who whisked away the pastries as soon as they were placed on the shelves.

The services of a good, caring midwife were essential. To the women folk of this small pioneering community, her role was almost as significant as that of the midwives in the time of Moses! After all, the strength of the community ultimately depended on her. Such a midwife was at hand in Madam Simcha Bechore, midwife extraordinaire. She had a commanding personality, a keen wit and a very sharp tongue. From the days when she delivered her first babies, families held her in great respect, if not awe. I am sure that as a child, I was convinced that she had supernatural powers and so, dared not cross her path with my impudent teasing for fear she would refuse to leave us the baby we were promised. It was only much later that I realised her scant knowledge of hygiene had, indeed, been supplemented by magic powers for, how else could we explain the survival of most of the babies she brought into the world? Eventually, David J Elias took an interest in her and arranged for her to take a course in mid-wifery. Her reputation soared. She remained queen of her domain for many years and lived to the ripe old age of 95 — a formidable character till the time of her death.

Meanwhile, pulling themselves up little by little, cent by hard-earned cent, the dwellers in the synagogue area were following their various trades and callings. Members of the Reuben family who, today, have undoubtedly become the largest Jewish "tribe" in Singapore were already, in the 1900's, so numerous that if you offended one of them, you made enemies of a dozen.

There were many Jewish hawkers, and among them was a certain Solomon. He was known as "lima satu sen" because he cried out his wares — the essential camphor balls — at "five a cent" in Change Alley. Others became importers, trading especially with islands in the Java Sea and a few traded with countries further afield. Sassoon Sadka, descendant of a line of *Torah* scholars and *Tsadikim* (the righteous), imported dates from Basra and was a pioneer in the fresh fruit trade from Australia. Moshe Elias became known as the "Copra King of Minado". Yacoub Ballas, members of the Ezekiel family, Naim Nassim, the Messiah family and the Elisha brothers made the often treacherous crossing to and

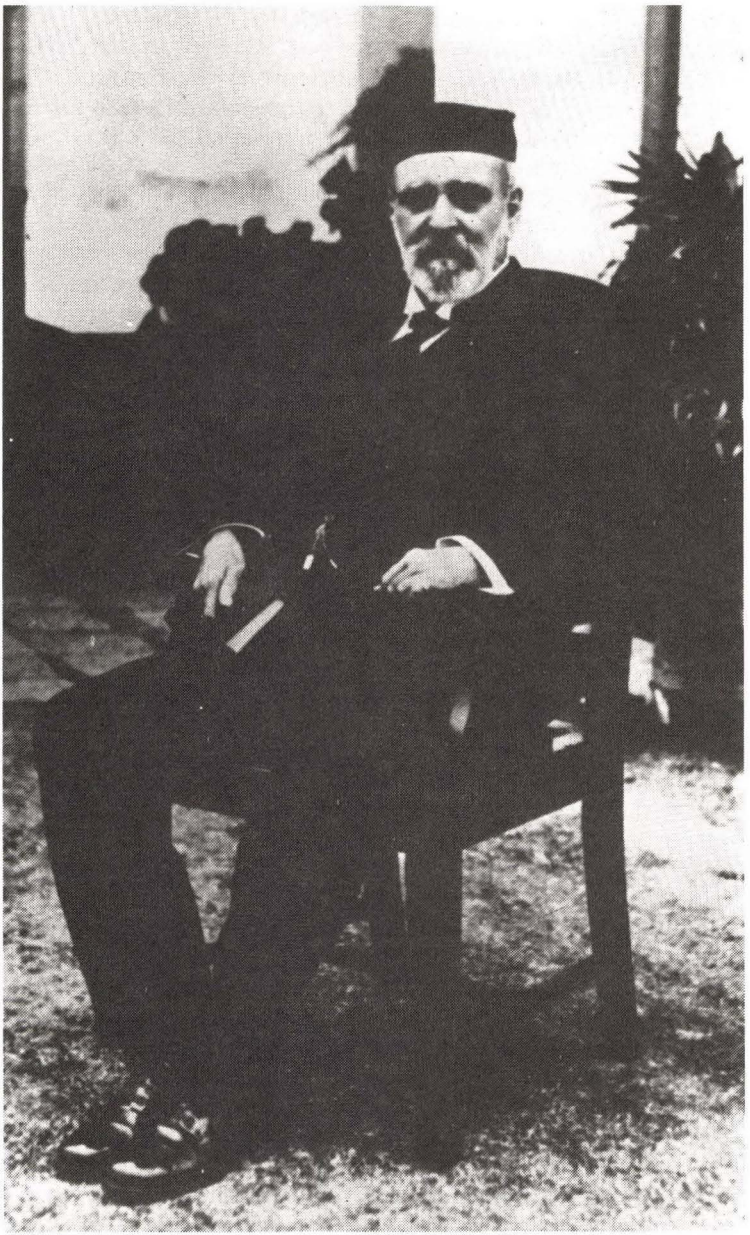
from North Borneo and Sarawak to sell crockery and household goods.

Mr and Mrs Cohen, a well-beloved couple in Singapore, set up shop in Sandakan. It was there that Agnes Newton Keith, authoress of *"Land Below the Wind"* and *"Three Came Home"*, met them. In *"Three Came Home"*, we find a most moving tribute to Mrs Cohen and a delightful description of her appearance and character: "Her eyes were melting, her features fine, her expression dramatic, her tears quick and her emotions real . . . From her handsome head flowed chins and bosoms, from bosoms flowed draperies . . . Her heart like her body, was large and soft and lovable. No one ever asked her for anything and was refused: time, sympathy, money or help . . . No wedding or funeral or birth was complete without her." During the Japanese occupation in Borneo, she was accused of conspiracy in connection with the escape of some Australian prisoners of war. She did not survive.

Sion Lelah became the first Jew to trade in Kuala Lumpur where he also set up a haberdashery shop. In Singapore, Raheem Pinhas followed his rickshaw filled with bales of cloth, haberdashery and slippers from Batavia, shouting: *"Kain, kain batek, slipper Batawi"* (batik cloth, Batavian slippers). Raheem soon made enough money to open a shop for himself and his son, Abraham, in Selegie Road. Nissim Saleh traded from his haberdashery shop in High Street.

In the early years of the twentieth century, Saul Marshall entered the property market, E Nassim & Sons were watch dealers in North Bridge Road, the Garehs, Simons and Isaacs became successful importers and exporters and, spreading their roots firmly in various commercial enterprises, were the families of Baruch David, Nassim Reuben, Aaron Elias and Abdullah Shooker. Serving the synagogue as *shammas* (beadle) was Ezra Rahameen, whose prodigious memory for names and faces became legendary and the minister at that time was the highly respected Joseph Sherida from Baghdad.

On 21 December 1900, the trustees of the synagogue, Manasseh Meyer, Raphael Sassoon, Saul Nathan and Ezra Nathan, purchased a large plot of land in the Moulmein district for $5,407.12, their faith in the *life* of the community matched by their concern for the *dead*. Three years later, Manasseh bought an adjoining plot for $8,681.40. After World War I, he presented it to the community, reserving one plot on which he built a mausoleum for himself and his second wife, Rebecca, who died on 15 January 1915.



Sir Manasseh Meyer

By the 1900's Manasseh, though small in stature, was already regarded as a giant in business and communal affairs. His brothers, Rubin and Elias, had returned to Calcutta where the latter built a synagogue and *Talmud Torah* (school for religious instruction) and became renowned for his philanthrophy. Manasseh already owned three-quarters of the property available in Singapore. From 1893–1900, he served as Municipal Commissioner and a little later, was appointed to the State Currency Board. He bought the elegant Adelphi Hotel in town and on the coast the Sea View Hotel, naming the road on which it stood, Meyer Road. His properties in Coleman Street and Raffles Place were called, Meyer Mansions and Meyer Chambers. On the keystone, over the main door of Meyer Chambers, he inscribed his name beneath a *Mogen David* (Shield or Star of David). His philanthropic work began well before the turn of the century, and continued throughout his long life. For his community, he set up the Manasseh Meyer Trust, which was later renamed the Sir Manasseh Meyer Trust.

Many educational and charitable institutions benefitted considerably from his benevolence. Raffles College received a handsome contribution and he also donated a massive sum to the war effort between 1914–18. Roland Braddell paid him a well-deserved tribute in his book, *"One Hundred Years of Singapore"*. He praises "his public benefactions and his generosity to any worthy cause in Singapore." He notes his "private charities and kindliness". He was so impressed by his attributes that he wrote, "Of his character, as a true citizen, it is difficult to write in adequate words." The British recognised his unique qualities and awarded him a knighthood.

Manasseh bought a fine mansion on the hill-top of a 173 acre estate for himself and his family. He named it *Belle Vue*. The original name was *Killiney House*, which was bought over from the East India Company by a well-known government surgeon, Dr Oxley, after whom the approach roads of Oxley Road and Oxley Rise were named. There were large stables, a cow-shed, poultry yard and dove cotes. The house itself was built in Regency style and commanded a splendid view of the deep blue China Sea studded with emerald islands and multi-coloured sails. Manasseh added a new wing which included a ballroom and spacious reception rooms. In fact, the new wing dwarfed the original building, but it fitted easily into the grounds. He was happy that he had provided

ample living space for his wife, Rebecca, his family of three sons — the twins, Jacob and Isaac, and Reuben and four daughters — Hannah, Rama, Rachel and Mozelle.

The servants' quarters were large enough to house a retinue of Chinese house-boys, Indian cooks specially trained in the laws of *kashrut* (dietary laws), Malay *kebuns* (gardeners), a syce (driver or chauffeur) and, before proper sanitation had been installed, a *tukan ayer* (water closet servant). The gardens were beautifully landscaped, gay with the brilliant exuberance of tropical vegetation and plants, fairest among them the bougainvillea in every conceivable colour. The main feature of the terrace was an open pavilion of wrought iron tracery. Every year, in honour of the Festival of *Succoth* (Tabernacles), it underwent a transformation — palms and coconut leaves were intertwined to form festoons and from them, hung fruits and flowers in profusion and at nightfall, twinkling lights made it a place of enchantment.

Manasseh supervised the secular education of his children, but this did not mean that they were educated privately. He did not fear the impact of other religions on his family nor did he bring them up to mix only with their own race. He felt sufficiently secure in his own faith to encourage his children to broaden their horizons. He had been educated in St Joseph's Institution and he sent his sons there, too. He chose the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus for his daughters. The Jews and Catholics held each other in mutual respect. The Reverend Mother went out of her way to make special arrangements for her Jewish pupils, even to the extent of setting aside a special room where Manasseh's sons could join their sisters for the *Kosher* lunch brought from *Belle Vue*.

Manasseh undertook the religious education of his children. He was strictly observant and *kashrut* was so important to him that he took a *shohet* with him on his travels. His youngest son, Reuben, sometimes preferred to do the cooking himself, but his dishes were not always served as he had planned. Once on a visit to Egypt, the steward, wanting to honour Manasseh, decorated the dish prepared by Reuben with *ham*!

Not all the members of the community were able to teach their children the fundamentals of religious knowledge. The trustees therefore set up a small *Talmud Torah* in a shophouse in Dhoby Ghaut with a certain Mr Puth as teacher. One of the original pupils, Charlie Ezekiel, still lives in Singapore today. His most vivid recollection is of the luscious

tropical fruit the students gobbled in the break between study periods. Chuckling, he admitted that the fruit was more a bribe than a reward! To give more children the opportunity to attend, Manasseh had the property adjoining the synagogue converted into classrooms. For a short time, my brother Maurice and I attended the school. I was only six, but I remember clearly sitting around the table with one or two of the older boys, while at another table, the rest of the older boys intoned the *Torah*, in a chant similar to the one Moslem boys use when they learn long passages from the Koran! I remember the sound of heavy breathing as the *starrd* (teacher) nodded off to sleep. It was left to the older boys to count our mistakes and report our progress to the *starrd* when he awoke. I can still hear the crack of the cane as a young offender received a stroke for every mistake spotted by his peers! It certainly conjures up a Dickensian scene abhorrent to us today, but apparently acceptable to the majority of the families at that time. My own attendance was cut short, but not directly because of the system. It happened that I was given permission to go to the toilet and another young lad, Elias Moses, followed. We were both mischievous rascals and when we came to a large Shanghai jar filled with drinking water, he dared me, "Do it in there. I dare you!" On the third challenge, I gave in. At that moment, Elias let out a yell, "Starrd, starrd, Eze Nathan *baal bil* jar!" Need I translate? The *starrd*, unceremoniously awakened from his slumber, bore down on me with the cane. Swish! swish! The cane swung down on my fingers and a torrent of Arabic assaulted my ears. I was sent home in disgrace. As soon as classes were over, the *starrd* came to see my mother. She immediately offered to buy him a new Shanghai jar and assured him that I would never do such a thing again. He was not satisfied and demanded to be paid $50, a small fortune in those days. At this, my mother's attitude changed. She told him that there would be no jar and no money, but instead, she would report the incident to *Signor* Meyer. The mention of the great man's name silenced him. He left without a word and I went no more to the *Talmud Torah*. I was then taught privately by a learned and gentle elder, Sahul Haftaya. Sadly it was not long before he was teaching Maurice and me to recite the *Kadeesh* (mourner's prayer), as my father died suddenly on the eve of World War I.

Chapter Five

The pattern emerges

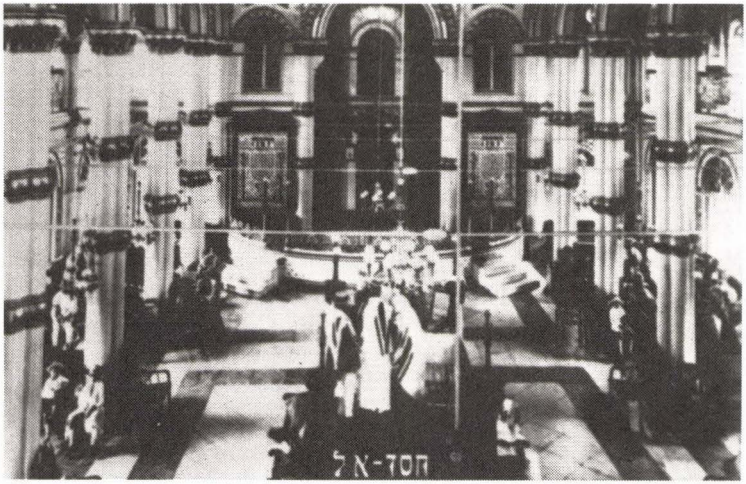
"For if to labour is noble, of our own free will to pause in that labour — which may lead to success, to money or to fame — may be nobler still."

— Thoughts on Observing the Shabbat
by C.G. Montefiore

The years preceding the outbreak of World War I were years of growing prosperity for the entrepreneur and the merchant. Rubber and tin were a boon for the stock-broker and investor. Population was on the increase and in the 1910 census, Jewish residents numbered approximately 500.

In this climate of enterprise and hope, it was not surprising to find a second synagogue established. But the reason for it was not entirely due to an increase in numbers. With more members, there were more arguments as congregants with different backgrounds found it hard to agree on the order of service and specific ritual. The *Hazan* (minister or reader), Rev Joseph Sherida, could converse only in Arabic while his flock, becoming more westernised, now spoke mainly English. *Siddurim* (prayer books) were originally printed in Baghdad and were in Hebrew, but now copies of *"The Book of Prayer and Order of Service according to the Custom of Spanish and Portuguese Jews"* were ordered from London. They had an English translation based principally on the work of the late Rev D.A. de Sola, Minister of the Congregation of Bevis Marks, London, 1901. They soon replaced the Baghdadian *Siddur*.

This, however, did not mean that there were less arguments and in fact, the atmosphere in the Maghain Aboth Synagogue was far from ideal. Manasseh Meyer was exceedingly sensitive to these disorders and so he dealt with the situation in his own way. His first move was to purchase a property in Albert Street, between Prinsep Street and Short Street. Here, he held services which he conducted himself. Meanwhile, building work began on a site at the foot of the hill leading up to *Belle Vue*. A *mikvah* was sunk into the ground of one of



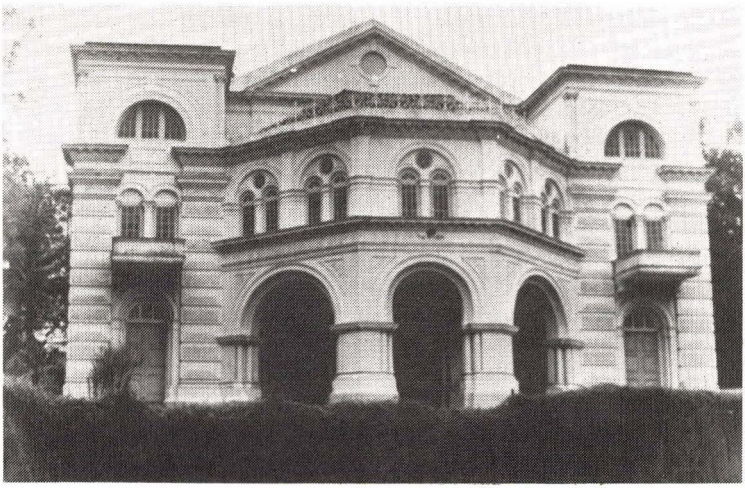
Interior of the Chased El Synagogue

the existing out-houses and the synagogue itself was completed in 1905. Manasseh named it *Chased El*, a beautiful name that defies translation, as the Hebrew embraces all the attributes of the Almighty from loving kindness and mercy to righteousness.

The synagogue has great elegance. A simple white plastered exterior of traditional design stands out against the brilliant green of the surrounding trees and gently sloping hillside. The interior is very spacious. The doorways, windows and pillars lure the eye upwards from the white marble floor. The gold motifs add an unobtrusive richness.

Large cane armchairs are arranged in sets of eight on all sides of the *bimah*, which is in the centre facing the *Ahel*. A gallery provides seating for the womenfolk and the total seating capacity is 370. Gas lighting was installed at first, but this was replaced by electricity as soon as supply was available. Electric fans, suspended from the high ceiling, were installed at the same time.

For himself, Manasseh had a special chair placed in an alcove near the *Ahel* and around this his family would be seated. The services were originally conducted by two readers, a certain Mr. Solomon from Penang and Ephraim Manasseh, who was also employed as a clerk in Meyer Brothers. When Mr. Solomon returned to Penang, probably in



Chased El Synagogue.

1909, Manasseh brought Ezra Meir, as *Hazan*, from Baghdad. Israel Cohen, in his "*Mission to the Far East*" (1918), comments: "The grey-bearded Hazan, who wore a fez and striped gaberdine bound around with a girdle, gabbled away at a rate and in an accent that made it difficult for me to follow." It must, indeed, have seemed strange to a Westerner unfamiliar with the traditions of the Eastern Jew. However, the overall decorum was good. Manasseh's ruling on any controversial issue was usually accepted — not unnaturally — with respect.

Ezra Meir was also in charge of the *Talmud Torah*. It was he, whose wrath I had incurred when for a short time I was one of his pupils. He had his shortcomings, but he also had considerable learning and was able to discourse in Arabic on many aspects of Judaism. Perhaps, more important to a small community cut off from the main stream of Jewish life, he was authorised to perform marriages, arrange *gets* (divorces) and give rulings on *Halitza*, the laws concerning the duties of a widow and her late husband's brothers. Before his arrival, the community relied mainly on Calcutta for such services and young couples were often kept waiting for months for their *ketuba* (marriage certificate) — among them, I remember, Joseph Elias and Rama Gubbay.

Although *Chased El* was filled with worshippers for the

High Holydays, there was less enthusiasm for the daily and *Shabbat* services. Manasseh then decided to adopt the custom of having professional *minyan* men. This custom was not new. It came into being when in earlier days and in other realms periods of economic stress led to a temporary weakening of religious fervour, so that the quorum of ten men was not readily available for the daily service. The *minyan* was itself an essentially humane and democratic institution revealing the Jewish conviction of the importance of every person in the eyes of the Almighty. There is a saying, "Nine *Rabbis* do not make a *minyan*, but ten *shoe-makers* do!" As it happened, there were at that time in Singapore the equivalent of the "ten shoe-makers" — impoverished elderly men, staunchly observant and often learned. Manasseh paid them to be present at all regular services and ensured that any Jew who wished to pray in a formally constituted congregation in his synagogue would be able to do so. Initially, they were also given a transport allowance for their attendance at the daily services but later, they were picked up by a mini-bus. The system worked well apart from engendering a little animosity among fellow Jews from the Maghain Aboth Synagogue where a "*professional minyan*" was never necessary.

As a child, I was often a guest at *Belle Vue* on *Shabbat*. I remember that after lunch, the elders gathered round Manasseh on the airy shaded verandah where they read from the Book of Psalms. Then at 4 p.m., we would walk down the 400 yards to *Chased El* for the *Mincha* (afternoon service). This would be followed by discussions and story-telling in the courtyard of the synagogue. They spoke Arabic and, though I could only understand a few words here and there, I was intrigued to watch the gestures and listen to the excited inflections in the voices. It seemed to me high drama and my imagination filled in the gaps in my understanding. As the tropical sunset streaked the evening sky, the stories ended and all would re-enter the synagogue for the *Ma'ariv* and *Havdalah* (evening and conclusion services).

My family remained loyal to the Maghain Aboth Synagogue. From the age of eight, my brother and I attended morning and evening services to recite the *Kadeesh* for our late father. The private lessons my mother had arranged for us enabled us to read Hebrew fairly fluently. I did not find the attendance irksome as, although I was very young, I was impressionable and sensitive to the atmosphere created by the behaviour of my elders. I think I must have been a little

precocious because it was not long before I sensed that all was not as it should be. I was stirred by the mystery behind the outward form of service, but I was exasperated at being prevented from following the ritual and the melodious chant of the *Hazan* by the noise of dissension among the congregants. The *Hazan* was Elias Joseph Sherida, the son of the former *Hazan*, Joseph Sherida, who retired in 1903.

Elias had come with his brothers, Isaac and Abraham, who later settled in Java. He had a very dignified appearance bearing an extraordinary resemblance to King George V. Fortunately for the community, he was skilled both as a *shohet* (ritual slaughterer of animals) and *Mohel* (performer of circumcisions). But despite his many outstanding qualities, he lacked authority — or he was not given the support necessary to assert it.

Apart from the lack of decorum during the services, there was one particular custom which, while providing me with a great deal of entertainment, left me with a most uncomfortable feeling which I recognise with hindsight, as a feeling of shame at the lack of respect shown for our place of worship. It was the custom of auctioning the *aliyoth*, the privileges accorded to certain congregants during the Reading of the *Torah*. Of course, I soon realised that the auction was held to raise money for the upkeep of the synagogue as there were no membership fees in those days, but that did not justify the strange performance.

In the interval between *Shachrit* (morning service) and the Reading of the *Torah*, the *shammas* (beadle) stood up at the *bimah*, called out the name of the *Aliya* in Arabic and asked for bids. There was often uproar during the bidding so that when he named the man he considered to be the highest bidder, pandemonium broke out! The *shammas* was accused of favouritism, nepotism, pretending not to hear or merely being a fool and, there was a rich variety of epithets used to describe his own defects and those of his ancestors! Unfortunately, quite often the ill-feeling did not end after the auction, but lingered on and sometimes even led to family feuds.

While I was a boy, I was not aware of this and could look on and enjoy the theatrical performances of the "actors". First of all, there was the *shammas* himself. To me, he seemed a very ancient man who could have stepped out of the "*Arabian Nights*". Dressed in Baghdadian style, he wore a red fez on his silver hair and a kaftan in a rich embroidered

cloth flowing round his thin figure. His gentle manner added to his unease in the presence of his protagonists, the main one being Yahya *Yemani* (the Yemenite) Abraham, who worked as a collector in the firm of E.S. Manasseh. He was a small man with an unusually loud voice. He had a small goatee beard and a peculiar goat-like habit of working his jaw as if he were chewing over his words before he "butted" them at the *shammas* or anyone else involved. He had a prodigious memory and was proud of being able to recite the *Torah* by heart, translating readily into Arabic or English. He was convinced that such prowess gave him the authority to decide on all matters of religious observance and in fact, although he held no office in the community, the sheer energy with which he shouted down all those who disagreed with him often won the day. After he died in 1927, it became amazingly quiet in the synagogue.

David Joseph or David *Panjang* (the Lanky), as he was affectionately known, was a very different individual. He was, indeed, very tall, with a thin face, pointed nose, ambling gait and a high-pitched nasal chuckle. He seemed to us youngsters half wizard, half *Pied Piper*, but it was not rats or children he was concerned with, but NEWS. It was he who met the congregants on the synagogue steps to give them the news of the day — in Arabic — a boon for those who still had not acquired sufficient English to read the daily press. With editorial licence, David gave the news much embellishment. But he was not only concerned with public news, he could sniff out any gossip that was circulating and make it his own. He was a gossip columnist, letter writer, inscriber for tombstones and even interpreter in the law courts when his services were required. Inside the synagogue, he would be there at the auction as a self-appointed overseer to watch the bidding, sometimes calming adversaries, but often adding his own shrill notes to the din.

So began my love-hate relationship with the Maghain Aboth Synagogue. I saw Hazans come and go, each giving loyal services to the congregants as far as his talents permitted, but none able to influence their thought and aid their spiritual development.

Elias Joseph Sherida returned to Baghdad in 1924 where he died shortly afterwards. His only son, Shalom Sherida, remained in Singapore, but he turned his attention to business. Later, being well-versed in the *Torah*, he assisted in the services in *Chased El*. For two years Menahem David, a

layman of great charm and modesty, was acting Hazan and Sion Daniel, one of the most pious of our members, helped to fill the gap. During this time the community was without a *Mohel*, but was fortunate in having Yakob Shalom and Rubin G'loomi as acting *shohetim* with special *semichat* (certificates) for the slaughter of poultry. Rubin became the patriarch of five generations of Singapore Jews. We came to know him as *Bapa* Rubain (Papa Rubin). He was of humble stock and humble in his dealings with his fellow men, but to me he seemed very different. Whenever I met him trudging — or rather gliding — mile after mile, from house to house to perform his duties, dressed in a long kaftan bound round the waist with a broad band, red fez on his head, I was somehow afraid to meet his piercing gaze that seemed timeless and beyond space.

In 1926, the trustees brought yet another Arab-speaking Hazan from Baghdad, Eliyahu Isaac Shalome. He served the community for many years as *Hazan*, *Shohet*, *Mohel* and performer of all the usual offices from birth to death. His tuneful chanting led the congregation in prayer for nearly 16 years until his death on 5 February 1941. For a short time before his death, he was assisted by Moshe Bibi, a sincerely observant Jew with a most pleasing singing voice. Moshe Bibi's son now lives in Manchester and on a recent visit, I heard a recording of his son's *Bar Mitzvah Maftir* (reading from the Torah and the Prophets). His voice was so like his grandfather's that, I was momentarily transported to the best of pre-war days in the Maghain Aboth.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the social life of the community centred around the festivals which were joyfully anticipated. In almost every home, traditions hallowed by antiquity were observed. Welcoming the *Shabbat* was of prime importance. In the home, the mistress of the household ensured that cooking was completed by sunset. In a tropical climate, sunset varies only a few minutes throughout the year, so that it falls between six and seven, a very convenient time for welcoming the *Shabbat*. When all was ready, the *triah* was lit. This was usually a circular holder, big enough to contain seven small glass tumblers filled with water and a little coconut oil and having a small metal base, into which a wick made of cotton wool wound around a straw was inserted. It was suspended from a hook in a safe place so that the lights would not be shaken. Evening service attended by the menfolk was at 6 p.m. Offices and

shops were closed in good time and often remained closed for the weekend. When he arrived home, the father blessed his children in the traditional way, placing his hands on their heads and reciting these words:

To his sons: "May the Almighty make thee as Ephraim and Manasseh!"

To his daughters: "May the Almighty make thee as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah."

Then followed the Priestly Blessings: "The Lord bless thee and keep thee, the Lord make his face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee. The Lord turn his face unto thee and grant thee peace." (Numbers 6.24).

Now, he turned to his wife and praised her with the beautiful verses from *Proverbs*, beginning *Ashiet Haiel*, "A woman of worth, who can find? For her price is far above rubies."

The traditional greeting exchanged was, "*Shabbat Shalom*". *Shalom* is usually translated as Peace, but its ancient meaning is an *ideal* peace of which the main attribute is well-being. The response was "*Shabbat Shalom 'mvorach*!" A Sabbath blessed with peace. Then followed the traditional blessing over wine and bread.

The *Shabbat* meal was a feast. The first course was a dish of vegetables stuffed with rice, fish or chicken and richly spiced, known as *mahasha*, served with home-made pickles of *halba* (fenugreek seed), cucumber and green mangoes. This was followed by crisp roasted chicken with *pilao* (lightly spiced rice) and *alumakala* (whole potatoes fried in oil, crisp on the outside and meltingly soft inside). There would probably be a variety of sweet-sour dishes, popular among them a casserole of *balmya* (ladies' fingers). After such a meal, fruit was the ideal dessert and, there was always a plentiful supply of local or regional tropical fruit, papaya, mango, pineapple, mangosteen, passion fruit and rambutan to name a few. At last, after reciting the *Baruchot Hamazon* (blessings after a meal) it was bed-time.

The morning service began at 8.30 a.m. In the introductory portion, two young boys would chant psalms alternately a pleasing invocation to devotional prayers. When the *Sepher Torah* (Scroll of the Law) was taken out from the *Ahel*, it was raised on high, and the day's reading was marked out by a young boy with a silver pointer. It was then re-rolled and carried to the *bimah*. As far as I know, our service followed the order used by the Sephardi in other parts of the world, apart from minor differences of emphasis or repeti-

tion introduced as a result of disagreement among the congregrants!

We returned from synagogue to a home fragrant with the aroma of *hameem*, a prince among dishes. Chicken or a whole chicken skin is stuffed with rice and a subtle blend of spices, often garnished with hard-boiled eggs, bananas and red beans. All these were cooked through the night over a charcoal fire. After this leisurely and satisfying meal came the *Shabbat* siesta. Later, friends would gather, before prayers heralded the sudden fall of the tropical night, ending a truly *Shabbat Shalom* and, we prayed, the beginning of a *Sh'vooh Tov* (a good week).

Chapter Six

The festive days

"These are the Feasts of the Lord, the Holy Convocations which ye shall proclaim in their appointed seasons."

Leviticus, Chapter XXII

Jews all over the world consider the unique Festival of *Pesach* (Passover) the supreme family festival. But its message goes beyond one's immediate family, to the families of the community, the state and the world. For it is the festival that for 3000 years has proclaimed the right of the individual to be free with all that that implies, beginning with freedom from want. As Singapore Jewry numbered some needy families among its congregants when the preparations for *Pesach* began, we tried to provide each family with everything they needed to ensure they shared in the celebration. Meanwhile, in our own homes everyone was involved in making the home ready for the first night.

Most of our customs echo those in other lands and are observed by Ashkenasi also, but some are, I think, specifically Sephardi in origin. Although foods containing *leaven* are forbidden during the eight days of the festival, Sephardi are allowed to eat rice, and as a child, *Pesach* was heralded for me by the arrival of the Indian rice grinder. Ground rice was used for many tasty dishes and for *Pesach* the grinding was done in a special room set aside for the purpose, with a white sheet spread over the floor. His visit brought with it a sense of expectancy. We could hardly wait till Mother called us to help her mix the ground rice with coconut milk and then to stand by and watch her shape flat rounds of bread. As soon as they were placed over a charcoal fire, there was a marvellous, mouth-watering smell that was almost as good as the taste. We enjoyed another type of bread at this season also for as well as the *Matzoth* (unleavened bread) that was imported from the U.S.A., we could buy a local variety baked in the synagogue kiln and it was this fine crispy *matzoth* that had pride of place on the *Seder* table on the first nights of the festival.

On *Seder* nights, our ceremonial dishes were filled with foods symbolising the hardships our forefathers suffered as slaves in Egypt, and, ironically, the one we enjoyed most represented the cruellest of their tasks — the making of mud bricks under forced labour conditions! To simulate the colour of the bricks, we made a delicious concoction of date juice and nuts — *Hallech*, the Sephardi equivalent of *Charoseth* which Ashkenasi make from apples, nuts and wine.

In an Ashkenasi household, the long prayers are not interrupted by the meal, but for us it was easier. Early in the service a blessing was made over hard-boiled eggs, symbol of immortality, and we were allowed to eat them as a kind of *hors d'oeuvre*. Then the story-telling and prayers continued.

Certain parts of the *Seder* service were designed especially to stimulate the interest and curiosity of children. In every Jewish community it is the privilege of the youngest child to ask four significant questions, beginning with "Why is this night different from all other nights?" I think it is only in Sephardi households that children act a little playlet before the questions are asked. The play was very short but the excitement at taking part was great. First, we were all sent out of the room. Then one of us was chosen to knock loudly on the door. Father opened the door and called out, in Arabic,

"Whence come you?"

"We come from Egypt," we answered.

"Where are you going?" asked my father.

"To JERUSALEM!" we shouted.

Then all joined in with the wish, "Next year in JERUSALEM!" We were then welcomed into the house and invited to take our places at the table.

After asking the questions, the youngest child was given a piece of the *matzoth* to carry in a sling on his back, representing our forefathers snatching up the unrisen dough from the embers as they escaped from Egypt. Another piece of the *Afikoman* (the last cake of *matzoth* to be eaten as part of the dessert) was hidden, so that the children were encouraged to stay awake until they were allowed to hunt for it at the end of the story-telling, the *Haggadah*.

So, we ushered in the seven weeks of devotion that took us from *Pesach* through the 49 days of the counting of the *Omer* (offering in the days of the Temple) to the shortest, but in many ways the richest, of the Pilgrim Festivals, *Shavoo'oth*, the season of spiritual redemption. The significance was accentuated by an all-night vigil on the eve, when we read an

anthology from the *Torah* and post-*Torah* literature and sang Solomon Ibn Gabirol's beautiful version of the *Azharot* (613 Commandments and Warnings). This service was the most impressive part of *our* observance. The more spectacular aspect, the decoration of the synagogue with flowers, was not one of our traditions.

The High Holydays of *Rosh Hashannah* were observed with a mingling of solemnity and rejoicing, as in other parts of the world. Families gathered around their festive tables and when the menfolk returned from the synagogue, the traditional blessing over bread was made with sugar instead of salt, symbolising our hopes for a "sweet year". But we recited other blessings also: dishes of dates, spinach, pomegranate, long beans, marrow, apple preserve and the shank bone of a lamb were laid on the table, each representing a different blessing — life, health, fertility, prosperity and peace of mind. Before we tasted them, we said the appropriate prayer of thanksgiving.

In the morning, we rose early as the service often lasted six hours, including the "entracte" for the auctioning of the *aliyoth*. We never lacked a *Baal-tokeah* (one who blows the *shofar*, the ram's horn). And, however inattentive we might have been during the first part of the service, as soon as he put the *shofar* to his lips, a deep silence fell. By the time we had heard the hundred ageless notes, I doubt that any congregant remained unmoved. Maimonides expressed the effect of the blowing of the *shofar* in these words: "Awake, ye sleepers, and ponder your deeds; remember your Creator and go back to him in penitence. Be not of those who miss reality in their hunt for shadows, who waste their years in seeking after vain things which cannot profit or deliver! Look well to your soul and consider your acts; forsake each of you his evil ways and thoughts and return to the Lord that he may have mercy upon you!"

In a somewhat chastened mood, yet refreshed, we returned home for a celebratory meal. In the afternoon, we visited a friend who had lost a dear one during the year. We recited psalms together and shared a simple meal which always included fruits of the earth, fruits of the trees and pastries called *kaka* and *sambusak* so that we could recite the blessings over the work of creation and the Almighty's gifts to mankind. Soon it was time for the *mincha* (afternoon service) and the ceremony of *Tashlik*. For this, we would go either to the spring water of the well in the synagogue grounds or to a

stream nearby. With a fervent prayer that we would receive Divine help in casting away our sins, we threw pebbles into the running water.

On the eve of the ninth day of Penitence, in my youth, the ceremony of *kaparoth* was still observed. This, too, as the Hebrew word denotes is closely bound up with penitence. In the *Torah*, a goat was usually chosen to bear away our sins, but in our times, a fowl was taken for the same purpose. There would be a white fowl for each member of the family — a cock for the males, a hen for the females. A *shohet* came to the house to perform the rites. Swinging a fowl round the head of each person, he uttered a prayer that this sacrifice might make atonement for our guilt. The fowls were then usually given to a family in need, thus fulfilling one of the requisites of repentance — charity. The *shohetim* were very busy that night — I remember being woken up at 2 a.m. to witness the ceremony.

On the day of *Kol Nidrei* (the ninth day of Penitence), it was the duty of the womenfolk to light a wick in the synagogue in memory of a loved one. Although it was a sad duty, it was mingled with pleasure. A throng would gather under the tropical sunshine outside the ante-room where the *shammas* and the *tamby* (our Indian care-taker) awaited them. The exchange of greetings and news made the air throb with the kind of excitement that precedes a special party when the host and hostess are hoping that everything would go well for everyone involved. This is not strange, as *Yom Kipur* (Day of Atonement) is not only a solemn occasion, but also a festive one when the guest of honour, whom we hope to please, is the Almighty! That morning, charitable offerings were made to the staff of the synagogue and for the benefit of those in need.

By the time the *Kol Nidrei* service was due to begin, the synagogue was ablaze with lights. Although it was a splendid sight, the coconut oil used for burning and the heat given out by the wicks caused some discomfort as the night wore on, the women in the gallery being particularly susceptible! But, to complain would have been considered a sign of weakness. All eyes focussed on the *Ahel*. As it was opened, seven elders approached and were handed seven *Sepharim* which they held with pride and dignity on behalf of the congregants while the *Hazan* intoned the prayer hallowed by martyrdom from the time of the Middle Ages, *Kol Nidrei* (All my vows).

That night, mats were spread on the floor of the anteroom

for those who chose to spend the night there. For the rest of us, it was early to bed and early to rise, so that we could present ourselves once again for a day of devotion and self-searching. I remember the strange stirrings within me, even as a boy. Dressed in white shirt and trousers, I joined the other congregants in their white tropical suits and white canvas shoes filing through the great doors. Everything was designed to add to the sense of purification and awe. Just before the *Musaph* service, mats were brought in for the devotional kneeling that occurs only on this Holyday. The concluding prayers ended with the thrilling Sephardi melodies that make the spirit soar. With the blowing of the *Shofar*, we were momentarily suspended between Earth and Heaven and then, we were released again. Once more, we were people of flesh and blood and aware of the pangs of hunger. Outside, in the porch, a table was laid where all who wished could break their fast and this was especially welcomed by our less fortunate brethren who could eat without feeling isolated or humiliated.

The Fast over, we were soon busy helping to build the *Succa* in the synagogue grounds, in readiness for the lovely pastoral festival of *Succoth* (Tabernacles). A new *Succa* was built every year. It was made of intertwined palm leaves, twigs and wooden poles; no nails were used. An oil light was suspended from the roof through which the tropical moon and stars gleamed. The lamp remained lit throughout the eight days of the Festival. After the services, everyone was welcomed into the *Succa* to partake of wine, fruits and the traditional bread and apple dipped in honey. Of course many observant Jews — particularly the *less* well-off — built their own *succa*. It was a special day of joy for the children and a tropical downpour only added to the adventure — I remember "walking the plank" laid down on the sodden grass between the house and our frail shelter. The *ethrog* always came from *Eretz Yisrael* (Land of Israel), but the *Lulav* (the twined symbolic branches) was the handiwork of the *Hazan*. Children and grown-ups would watch him at work, his hands unusually deft and his dedication to his task complete.

Hashannah Rabah (Prayers for Salvation) was a well-attended service. We had faith that our prayers for forgiveness would be answered. As we made the seven circuits around the *bimah* in the names of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Phineas and David and the additional branch of the willow shed its leaves, we had a deep-seated hope that our

sins, like the leaves, would fall away. The evening before *Hashannah Rabah* was a night of vigil, *Hatima*. In the synagogue or in the home, candles were lit in memory of the departed and Psalms and *Selichoth* (Penitential prayers) were read. On this night, it was said, the very tombs opened to release the dead. We also *wanted* to believe another piece of folklore — that exactly at midnight, the Heavens parted momentarily to reveal its wonders. As children, we never ceased to think that the only reason we had *not* witnessed this miracle was because our attention had wandered just at the stroke of midnight! We comforted ourselves with the thought that next year, we would not fail.

Shemini Hag Ha'etzereth (the eighth day of Solemn Assembly) was ushered in by a congregation most anxious to fulfil all its obligations. The children found it hard to contain their excitement as *their* day, *Simchat Torah* (Rejoicing of the Law), approached. On the eve, we gave thanks that we had once again completed the reading of the *Torah* and were beginning the new cycle with the reading of the incomparable first chapter from *Bereshit* (Genesis), the Creation.

The synagogue was adorned with *parochet*, hanging not only in front of the *Ahel*, but also around the pillars and on the walls. We danced and clapped; the ladies threw sweets and scattered the blossoms of orchids and the twirling, twisting frangipanis. There was movement, light, colour and joyful sound.

This was the one festival in the year when the auctioning of *aliyoth* seemed entirely appropriate. It was a light-hearted affair handled in a most entertaining way by Ezra Zakoo. His exuberance and pleasure were transmitted to all present. He made sure that anyone who wanted an *aliya* was given one and encouraged the highest bidders to hand over their *sepharim* to the very young. At the end of the seven circuits, in which he led the singing and dancing, his energy was undiminished.

On the morning of *Simchat Torah*, before the reading from the Prophets, some of the elders escorted the *Maftir* (the reader of the day's portion) to the *bimah*. He was invariably a boy about to celebrate his *barmitzvah* (confirmation) and the little procession was greeted by the spontaneous, untutored singing of Hebrew songs and the *killilli*, the song-of-joy-without-words, strings of vibrating high-pitched notes performed by women who hailed from the Middle East. Then, down from the gallery, came a shower of sweets and choco-

lates, spices and flowers eagerly snatched up by the children below. The synagogue pulsated with delight in the *Torah* a delight which was even greater if a *Sepher Torah* was to be donated, for this would be the day chosen for its presentation. The congregants would pour out of the synagogue into the street to meet the donor. With dancing and singing, they would escort him to the *bimah* where the *Hazan* would bless the *Sepher Torah* and the donor, before placing the scroll in the *Ahel*.

Hanukah and *Purim* did not go unobserved, although it was not until after the Second World War that they became associated with parties for the young and fund-raising dances. On *Hanukah*, we lit the eight candles during the eight days of the Feast of Dedication of the Temple (after the victory of the Maccabees) and lustily chanted the hymn *Hanayroth hahlaylu ahnachnu madlikim*. "These lights we kindle to commemorate the miracles" and Psalm 30, "Song for the Dedication of the House". On Purim (the casting of Lots) we read the story of Queen Esther, the *Megilla*, in the synagogue. We were encouraged to vent our wrath against the *Hamans*, who appear too often in our history, by noisily drumming each time *Haman* was mentioned, symbolically blotting out his name! It was a time, too, when the needy received presents and, in the home, children were given small gifts, and joined the grown-ups in games of chance, played for small stakes.

And so it was, that through our religious observances we, the Jews of Singapore, became aware of our identity and were linked with communities throughout the world by the invisible yet, immensely strong and precious, thread of tradition.

Chapter Seven

Alpha and Omega

"A Time to be born
And a Time to die.
A Time to weep
And a Time to laugh.
A Time to mourn
And a Time to dance."
"To everything there is a season
And a Time to every purpose
under Heaven."

— Ecclesiastes, Chapter III

The religious rites and customs adhering to the festivals were the main spring of our communal life, but they were not the only ones we observed. Birth, *barmitzvah* (confirmation) and marriage had their own forms of celebration and we followed strict procedures for divorce, and when death occurred.

The birth of a baby was often greeted with tribal jubilation, the whole community being involved in one way or another. As soon as the baby was born, according to time-honoured custom, cloves of garlic and strings of amber beads were hung on the crib, some said, to ward off the evil eye! On the eve of the seventh day, or as we called it in Arabic, *leilt el sitti*, all the children were invited by the grandparents to a party.

When my sister and brother were born, I remember seeing crowds of children arriving in rickshaws, or on foot, at the gate of our home. As they came up the driveway, they chanted, "*Shasha, shasha, kuba mahasha*!" which, roughly translated, means: "Gifts, sweet and good . . . And plenty of lovely food!" My grandmother greeted them and handed round trays of little bundles, frangipani flowers and tiny roses. The children made haste to open their bundles and, out tumbled sweetmeats and silver coins. Expressions of delight filled the air and our voices mingled with theirs until we were, at last, quietened down. If the baby was a girl, the naming ceremony usually took place that night. These were her blessings: "O my dove that art in the cleft of the rock, in the covert of the terrace; let me see thy countenance, let me hear

thy voice; for thy voice is sweet and thy countenance comely." This was followed by, "May he who blessed Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah and Miriam the prophetess, bless this beloved child, and may her name be called . . . at this auspicious occasion and in a blessed hour; and may he let her father and mother behold her joy."

If it was a boy, the name was given on the day of the *brith mila*. Preparations began on the eve of the eighth day. From the synagogue, the specially carved *chair of Elijah* (Elijah is believed to be the guardian of every Jewish child) was brought to the house. It had a velvet cushion covering the seat which was table high, and an embroidered cloth adorned the back and arm rests. Bells were hung at the corners and sprigs of *hadassah* (myrtle), a feature of religious ceremony since the time of the Temple, were scattered over it. Iraqi Jews find a mystic symbol in the similarity between the Arabic name for myrtle, *el yas* and the name of the Prophet, *Khidr Elyas*.

The chair for the *sandik* (the godfather) was also brought to the home. The *sandik* sat on it as he held the baby for the circumcision. It was shaped like a table with arms and a back and it, too, was decorated with bells. At night, there would be another gathering. After the customary blessings, the godmother chose one of the guests to carry a tray of lighted candles to the mother's bedside. The guests followed singing and dancing and cries of *kilililili* pierced the night air. At last, the guests left, wishing the mother a sound sleep.

On the morning of the eighth day, preparations in the home began early. By ten o'clock, the guests had arrived and as a *minyan* was formed, the chanting of psalms began. When the *Mohel* arrived, he would call three times for the baby to be brought in, with the traditional blessing, "*Ben haben k'vod*! ("May the son come with honour!") The godmother, carried him on a pillow, and handed him either to the father or the *Mohel*, who placed his head on Elijah's chair reciting the prayer. "May this baby be born in a propitious moment and be as a flourishing garden . . .". The baby was then placed on the *sandik's* lap for the *milah*.

"Blessed art thou, O Lord, King of the universe who has sanctified us by thy commandments and commanded us concerning circumcision." After the *Mohel* had recited this blessing, the father responded, "Blessed art thou O Lord, King of the universe who has sanctified us by the commandments and commanded us to introduce him into the covenant of our father Abraham." The baby was given his name

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and received a further blessing and a few drops of wine after the *kiddush* (sanctification). The *kiddush* cup was carried to the mother and the ceremony was over. Everyone was invited to a festive meal before leaving.

So the baby was ushered into the very heart of the community. But he was not taken out of the house for 30 days. If he was the first-born, his first outing would be after the ceremony of *Pidyon haben* (redemption of a son) on the 31st day of his life. This ceremony derives its origin from two passages in the *Torah*: "The Lord spoke unto Moses saying, 'Sanctify unto me all the first born. Whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both man and beast, it is mine." (Exodus XIII, verse 2) and, "Those that are to be redeemed from a month old, shalt thou redeem for the money of five shekels." (Numbers XVIII, verse 16).

A Cohen, descendant of the priestly tribe, officiated at this ceremony. The father handed over silver coins to the value of five shekels to the Cohen, who placed them over the baby's head, saying: "This instead of that." He went on, "I received from thee these five shekels . . . and behold, he is therewith redeemed according to the law of Moses and Israel . . . May it be the will of the Almighty that, as thou hast been privileged to redeem this son, so mayest thou be privileged to perform all the precepts of the Law."

The five shekels were then returned to the father to do with as he pleased. Usually, if the father could afford it, this sum with a little more added, found its way into the pocket of a needy person. The ritual duly performed, all present were invited to a simple meal, the main purpose being to recite the appropriate blessings of thanksgiving.

The social life of the baby followed the pattern of his festive initiation. There was always someone around to cuddle and cajole — an extended family of relatives and, in most cases, a loyal and loving servant, probably a Chinese baby *amah* or an Indian or Malay *ayah* (nurse-maid). As he reached school age, he would learn to read the *Torah* and by the age of 13, he could read it fluently. He was, therefore, ready to be accorded the full status of a member of the community.

On the *Shabbat* nearest to the date of his Hebrew birthday, he was welcomed into the synagogue by the elders and called up to the *bimah* to read his portion from the *Torah* and the Prophets. The father recited a prayer expressing his gratitude to the Almighty that his son had now reached the stage of personal responsibility. This was the signal for the ladies in the

gallery to introduce a joyful note into what was, until that moment, a very solemn occasion. Down from the gallery, would come showers of sweets and flowers and the sound of *killililili*.

The next day, at the home of the *barmitzvah* (son of the commandment), friends and family witnessed his laying on of the *Tephillin* (phylacteries, prayers encased in small boxes to be worn at morning prayers on the head and arm). The *Hazan* placed a box on the *barmitzvah's* arm and the father placed the other box on his son's head. Then the young initiate would read part of the morning prayers, including the blessings, the Song of Moses and the *Shema*. The religious aspect of the occasion was stressed throughout and when parties were held, they were usually far from lavish.

By the time young people had reached the age of 18, the match-makers were already on the prowl. Most marriages were arrived at through the offices of a go-between, though not always by a professional match-maker. In the negotiations, the young people were often left out and sometimes, though this was rare, they did not meet until the day of the *kiddushim* (the betrothal, or sanctification, the original meaning of the word). Of the utmost importance at this time was the question of dowry. Once this was agreed upon, preparations for the *kiddushim* began. The ceremony was binding in Jewish law, so that, if the young couple changed their minds, they had to go through the whole process of a Jewish divorce.

For the ceremony, the bride's parents gave a party to which all were welcome. Early in the evening, the groom's parents sent a tray to the bride, on which were laid a piece of jewelry, flowers and sweetmeats, all covered with a brightly coloured cloth. The bride's acceptance of the gift was the signal that everything was in order and the party continued. The *ketubah* (marriage contract) was then drawn up, detailing the rights of both bride and groom and the amount of the dowry with any other settlement. This was the only documentary evidence of the marriage apart from the Hazan's inscription in the communal records after the *Chuppa* (the wedding service performed under the nuptial canopy). Marriages were not recorded by the civil authorities until after World War II.

The *Chuppa* followed shortly after the drawing up of the *ketubah*. It could take place in any convenient place, although the synagogue was usually chosen. On the *Shabbat* before the *Chuppa*, the groom would be *called up* in the syna-

gogue, reminding us of the custom observed at the time of the Temple: in those days, the bridegroom passed through a special gate and was greeted by well-wishers with congratulations and blessings. In the Maghain Aboth Synagogue, the groom received the traditional shower of sweets and flowers as he walked to the *bimah* and prayers were offered for his well-being. On the eve of the *Chuppa*, the bride's toe and finger nails were stained with henna. I have not been able to discover the reason for this, but it was considered important enough to be witnessed by members of the family and those who had helped in arranging the marriage.

On the morning of the *Chuppa*, the bride took her *mikvah*, with the same witnesses in attendance. The *Chuppa* itself was conducted in a less than formal manner in the presence of the whole community. Relatives jostled for a position nearest to the bride or the groom under the canopy, their noisy altercations often interrupting the services, but adding to the entertainment of the guests!

The service began with the recital of the traditional seven blessings, and this was followed by the reading of the *ketuba* in front of witnesses who, with the bride and groom, were the signatories. The officiant then took a glass of wine, recited the blessing and offered it to the bride and groom. The wedding ring was shown to the witnesses, and the groom, placing the ring on the forefinger of the bride's right hand, declared, "Behold, thou art wedded to me by this ring according to the Law of Moses and Israel." A second glass of wine was blessed and handed to the newly wedded couple. After drinking the wine, the husband crushed the glass underfoot in memory of the destruction of the Temple, and as a symbol of the sorrow that is ever mingled with joy. Cries of "*Mazeltov*" mingled with the sound of splintering glass — and the ceremony was over. After the party, there would be a honeymoon trip for the affluent, but for many, it could not be contemplated. Many young couples went straight home to the groom's parents and might never have a home of their own. But this was the custom and it was for many years acceptable.

Moving into a new house was celebrated with a short service of dedication, *Chanukah ha bait*. First, a *mezuza* (special prayers placed in a small case) was blessed as it was nailed onto the outer doorpost and the doorposts of the living rooms. Then, selected prayers were said reminding the new owners that a home should be an altar dedicated to serving the

Almighty by our consideration for our fellowmen. Included in the prayers was the injunction from Deuteronomy XXII, "When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof that thou bring not blood upon thine house if any man fall from thence." Many new house owners added a custom of their own to ward off the "evil eye!" A small defect, such as an unfinished piece of workmanship or a tiny blotch in the paintwork was left so that visitors, about to express their admiration for the perfection of every detail, would come upon it and moderate their praise!

Cracks in the structure of a house might be easily repaired, not so the cracks in a marriage. When it was obvious that a marriage was breaking down, every effort was made to reconcile the partners but if reconciliation proved impossible, then divorce could be granted on the grounds of incompatibility. Once a decision had been reached, the Hazan was asked to draw up a *Get* (a bill of divorce). The civil authority was not involved so that the whole process was comparatively simple. Incompatibility was sufficient grounds, unless there was flagrant transgression of Rabbinical Law, such as adultery or refusal to grant conjugal rights. The signing of the *Get* ensured that both parties agreed to the separation. The commitment of the husband, written into the *ketuba* ("I will take all the responsibility for myself and my heirs . . ."), now guaranteed the maintenance of the wife and children unless there had been transgression on the part of the wife.

Death brings with it shock and anguish, but the wisdom of the ages, crystallised in religious philosophy provided, if not the answer to the question of the bereaved, "Why has this happened to me?" at least support for the crushed spirit. Each Jewish community takes from the store of Rabbinical knowledge best known to it, what it needs. Our community was no exception. The rites observed by us may, to an outsider, have seemed lacking in dignity, with no pomp and little ceremony, but for many years they served their purpose.

The *shammas* (beadle) was largely responsible for the arrangements for the funeral and mourning. As soon as he was informed of a death, he would send a small group of the *Havra Kadisha* (burial committee) to the home of the deceased to perform the ritual of the *Ta'arah*, the purification of the body by bathing. At the same time, certain women began sewing the simple shroud. As soon as the body was prepared, the bier was sent round to the home. It was a very practical framework of solid wood, like a large crib with

extended shafts. The body was placed in this and a *parochet* was thrown over the whole bier so that the body would not be visible. As the mourners and the pall-bearers left the home, the women, who were discouraged from going to the cemetery, began to wail giving free vent to their emotions. Psalms were chanted as the funeral procession made its way on foot to the cemetery. In the early days, the burial procession might well have been enlivened by "beaters" whose job it was to precede the procession, beating tins to scare away any tigers that might be roaming in the marshy area on the fringe of the jungle where the Orchard Road Cemetery was situated. From the home to the graveside, the bearers stopped seven times before setting down the bier. Seven is a hallowed number from the seven days of Creation. The seven pauses were made, in respect for the dead and as a plea to the Creator to show mercy to one of his creatures.

The grave was prepared in a special way. The sides were bricked to the height of about 18 inches on either side. The body was laid directly onto the earth and concrete slabs were then placed over it, resting on the bricked sides. Concrete was then poured into the grave to fill the spaces before the ritual throwing of shovels of earth onto the grave was carried out by the mourners. In this way the body was protected from wild animals and birds of prey at a time when the jungle still formed the boundary of the cemetery and the custom became hallowed by observance. After the burial, the bier was turned over three times. It was thought that it was a symbol of the hope expressed in Psalm XXX, "Thou has turned for me my mourning into dancing." Also, the numerical value of the Hebrew letters of the word for bier, *mittar*, is the same as the word for judgement, *din*, which having three letters, encouraged those who observed this custom to believe they were ensuring a merciful judgement of the soul.

As a symbol of their grief, the mourners made a rent in their clothes. A very strange custom was observed on the homeward journey. Mourners and friends would stop at a shop and, as it was usually at one of the many small Chinese *kedais* (stalls or shops), the Chinese shopkeepers considered it brought them luck! The mourning period began with the return home. The mourners sat on mats on the ground and ate a simple meal, which always included hard-boiled eggs, symbol of eternal life. At night, for the seven days of the *shiva* (the first week of mourning), they slept on mattresses laid on the floor. During the *shiva*, services were held night and

morning at home, after which the mourners would attend service in the synagogue. During these first seven days, visits from friends and family, ritual prayers night and morning, talking of the loved one, all helped to make the loss suffered by the bereaved, bearable.

To prevent a too sudden and complete return to the ordinary business of life and possible neglect by the community during the ensuing weeks, a reminder of their duties came in the special prayers on the twenty-second day after death, known in Arabic as *Shahr el Narkish* (the incomplete month) and again, on the thirtieth day. Before the full year of mourning, on the eve of the twelfth month, *Sant el Narkis*, there were also special prayers. After all these services, the usual refreshments were laid outside the synagogue so that the mourners received support from the community, the appropriate blessings could be said and the needy were provided with a meal.

On the first anniversary of death, *Yom el Sanah*, prayers were said once more and the tombstone was then erected. Thereafter, prayers were said and a candle lit on each anniversary. The Hebrew words, *Zichronim liv'bracha* (May their memory be as a blessing) are added whenever we mention a loved one who has died and, we pray that the dead are "bound up in eternal bliss at the right hand of the Almighty." We try, in the words of Rabbi Brasch, Chief Minister of Temple Emmanuel in Sydney. "To render even death an inspiration and a force for good." At every *Yahrzeit* (anniversary), a service of re-dedication was held at the graveside following a week of attendance at synagogue services.

"And so, to everything there is a season
And a time to every purpose under Heaven."

Chapter Eight

The Ashkenasi contribution

"I made me great works;
I built me houses;
I acquired men-servants
and maid servants."

— Koheleth (Ecclesiastes)

Ashkenasi Jews traded with Singapore from the very early days. In the first records of the Chamber of Commerce, dated from 1857, we find the names of a small number who were members of the Chamber. Their business houses must, therefore, have been well-established by that time. From the 1870's we can trace the arrival of many more. The opening of the Suez Canal had brought Europe closer to the Far East by nearly 5,000 miles and shortened the sea journey by at least 14 days.

Persecution was, alas, another reason for the arrival of more Ashkenasi immigrants. Pogroms in Poland and Russia made life in those countries, at the least insecure and at the most, intolerable. To cite only one example, in March 1881 when Tsar Alexander II was assassinated by socialist revolutionaries, Jews were made the scapegoats. By the end of 1881, more than 200 communities had suffered from looting, burning and devastation which left 100,000 Jews without any means of livelihood and 20,000 without homes. Many Russian Jews fled East to Manchuria, but when Russia began increasing her influence there, Jews sought refuge in Shanghai and some came to Singapore.

Ashkenasi acted as agents for overseas firms, importing essential and luxury goods, furniture, building materials, food, clothing, etc. They exported whatever the Far East produced of interest or value to the West, and also acted as agents for Eastern and Western products in the Far East and Australia. Not many made Singapore their permanent home. Though a number of graves in the Orchard Road Cemetery bear Ashkenasi names, most Ashkenasi, in common with other Europeans, retained their roots in their country of origin where they returned on retiring and ultimately, ended

their lives there. They sent their children "home" to be educated and often they, themselves, travelled back and forth, unless persecution gave them no option but to leave their country for good. It was not surprising, therefore, that, with a few exceptions, they took little part in the management of the communal affairs of their co-religionists. In fact, they remained, on the whole, separated.

Arnold Wright in his "*Twentieth Century Impressions*", remarked: "There was always a certain element of antipathy between the Ashkenasi and the Sephardi Jews which found expression more often in the first generation than in the second . . . The Baghdad Jews have two synagogues which they frequent, the German (or Ashkenasi) Jew keeping himself strictly apart and being as often as not rationalist." This account is only slightly exaggerated.

In my youth, I was very aware that a division existed: a tone of disparagement was easily detectable, when certain European Jews referred to the Jews from India as Arab or Oriental. The British Administration unintentionally encouraged the separation by doing little to bring the various races and religions together socially; it was natural, therefore, for the Ashkenasi to join clubs and associations organised by their compatriots rather than seek the society of the local Jewish residents with whom, although they shared some religious traditions, they had few cultural links.

Wealth, however, sometimes provided a common factor that acted like a magnet attracting rich Sephardi and Ashkenasi towards each other. The factor of wealth, in determining racial groups, was even officially endorsed on some occasions; it was not uncommon to find, in official guest lists, printed in the local newspapers, under the headings, European and Oriental, that prominent Jews, such as N.N. Adis and E.S. Nathan, appeared in the *European* list, although the former came from Calcutta and the latter from Iraq!

While it is undoubtedly true that the Ashkenasi played a minor role in the life of the Singapore Jewish community, it is equally true that they played a major role in the development and prosperity of the island so that, indirectly, their co-religionists benefitted from their energy and enterprise.

Arnold Wright gives an account of the establishment of the firm of *Behn Meyer*, which was started by August Behn and Valentin Lorenz Meyer of Hamburg.

"Theirs was the first German commercial firm to make a bid for the share of the growing trade in the East in a large and

thoroughly well-initiated manner. Starting with the hire of a small godown, they worked steadily to discover the needs of the Chinese population and, as early as February 1841, they were able to charter a small English brig and load it with tea, China-root, camphor, gutta and pepper. It made an astonishing profit on its arrival in Hamburg. Then, before a single European building was erected, they went to Hongkong, were successful, returned to Singapore and bought a small Chinese house in Market Street which they stocked, principally with glass and ironware."

In 1844, one of the partners visited Shanghai and the coast of China. He disposed of his cargo of Western goods and loaded up with Chinese tea. Arnold Otto Meyer, Valentin's brother, joined the firm in Singapore in 1848. They moved their head office to Collyer Quay. It was one of the original buildings characterised by the five-foot way in front and a walkway overhead, giving shade to the pedestrians below.

They soon added to their import-export trade, banking interests, engineering projects, insurance and shipping. In shipping, their first venture was as agents for the German Nord-deutscher Line. They competed successfully for the Borneo run and were praised for their excellent fortnightly service from Singapore. The German-Australia Steamship Co agency followed and then, the Hamburg Line. Their cargo became even more varied. From Western Australia, they brought horses, sheep and sandalwood. They shipped pilgrims to Mecca, and to the California goldfields they shipped portable wooden houses and a variety of colonial products. Thus, they took advantage of the extending trading facilities offered by Singapore and put their own stamp on its commercial life.

The firm of Katz Brothers became prominent from its foundation in 1865. There seems to be no irrefutable proof that the brothers were Jewish, but it is certain that Heiber Katz donated the iron gates and railings erected across the front compound and driveways of the Maghain Aboth Synagogue and that there is a grave in the Thomson Road Cemetery inscribed with the name "Esther Katz" and the date "6.11.1913." For these reasons, it does not seem amiss to include their achievements here. Heiber Katz secured the contract to supply the Dutch army with stores during the Dutch-Achinese war of 1874. The success of this venture encouraged him to charter ships for supplying the Dutch and exporting to Europe the main produce of the East — spices,

rice and tea. Eventually, his firm became the chief exporter of spices.

As trade increased, Katz built a series of godowns and a fleet of small cargo ships. He soon controlled the production of rice and later held the agencies for the largest oil refineries in Asia. Although he retired in 1896, August Huttenbach, who had joined the firm earlier, took over the company and made it one of the leading trading houses in the city. By the time they opened new premises in Raffles Place in 1912, they had added to their numerous agencies *velocipedes* and imported the first *auto-car*. The 1914–18 war interrupted their commercial activities and the Custodian of Enemy Property handled their affairs but after the war, they were able to resume trading and the firm is still thriving today.

In the half a century, from 1880 to 1930, many Ashkenasi names appeared in various branches of commercial and public life. H. Schutz was managing director of the Grand Hotel de l'Europe, A. Kuhn and S. Komar had a fine shop in Adis Building where they sold articles made of silver, gold, lacquer and cloisonné. There were many diamond merchants and among the foremost were Wolskel, Adolf Flinter and S. Grinberg, Rene Uhlman and Weill & Zerner. The name of the latter firm changed to Weill & Montor, when Alfred Montor joined them. As well as importing the first methylated lamps and the Roskoff Waltham watches, they were the importers of the famous Kimberley diamonds. Later, they added the National Watch Company, Parker Pen and Revlon to their numerous agencies.

Ashkenasi were associated with another branch of the hotel industry. The Burlington Hotel in Coleman Street was first owned by A.P. Puhlman and later, by his widow. The hall of the hotel became well known as the *Tingle Tangle Hall*, where a Mr Finkelstein was the musical entertainment director. A group of very demure young ladies, most of them from Vienna, acted as hostesses. Mr Finkelstein died in 1888 and was buried in the Orchard Road Cemetery.

The *Tingle Tangle* entertainment moved to the Hotel de la Paix, at the corner of North Bridge Road and later, to Victoria Street where it became known as the *Tingle Tangle Club*. The chief violinist was Leon Hackmeyer, who also played in the amateur Philharmonic Orchestra and the concerts they gave in the Town Hall were well received. Leon's nephew escaped from the Nazis and joined his uncle for a short while. Leon himself died during the Japanese Occupation and was

buried in the Thomson Road Cemetery. The *Tingle Tangle's* own existence came to an end in 1929, when it appeared no longer possible to replace the dancers who had either married or left Singapore. The Burlington passed into the hands of Stamford Judah, a Sephardi, under the management of Solomon Kaufman and Jimmy Kenlay.

Some Ashkenasi Jews who made Singapore their permanent home enjoyed very good relations with our Sephardi community. J. Brisk, a professional watch repairer and jeweller, who arrived in 1891, had a shop at 7B Battery Road. For many years he was the sole watch repairer but, gradually, the Chinese mastered the skill. Maurice Zimmerman was a well-known saddler with a livery stable in Queen Street. His son, Alfred, was a keen sportsman and he was my first scout patrol leader. Joseph Baker was the proprietor of a popular ice-cream parlour and bakery at the corner of Bras Basah Road and Victoria Street. The delights of his *challahs* and continental pastries linger in the memory. His son, Harry, was at one time the billiard champion of the Singapore Cricket Club and another son, Max, was in the cinema business and introduced American movies.

The Fisher brothers were also connected with the cinema. Julius was the manager of the Capitol Cinema and, in *The Lights of Singapore*, he was described as "the doyen of exhibitors". David Kleinman owned a sports shop in Raffles Place. He was a popular member of the SCC and organised many of the club's tennis tournaments. His grandmother, Mrs M Evenbach, died at the ripe old age of 106 and was buried in the Thomson Road Cemetery.

In the 1909 Directory, an entry reads: "J. Levy . . . Ship Chandlers & Wine Merchants, 10 Robinson Road. Suppliers of sausages for German ships and Navy." Joseph Levy lived in "Crow's Nest", Wilkie Road, where he kept "open house." It commanded an excellent view of the island and was indeed well-named. He regularly attended the Shabbat services at Maghain Aboth. He and his wife, a stately woman of determined disposition, were memorable and popular characters. They were ardent Zionists and, eventually, emigrated to Palestine. Leon Hackmeyer, the violinist, then bought over the business.

Another entry of the same year is M. Bolter, proprietress of a firm of importers of special Russian and French wines and ship chandlers. Their assistants were E.M. Rahamin and L. Zack. Henry Bolter and his two sons were welcome guests at

our communal functions. The community grieved with the parents when both their sons were killed during the Japanese Occupation. Max died on the Burma railway and Norman was presumed drowned.

A broker, Mr Sternberg, came to Singapore from Manila. He bought a special communication-receiver from our firm, M & E Nathan, which enabled him to receive the Manila Stock Exchange news bulletins every morning. With the information, he negotiated some very successful business deals that won him a measure of fame.

Isaac Ellison, known as Iky, was a Rumanian Jew. He opened a bar in the arcade, leading from Raffles Place to Collyer Quay, where brokers and speculators congregated. The arcade was generally referred to as the "sharkade" for obvious reasons and *Iky's Bar* was a well-known rendezvous for a varied clientèle. Designed to resemble a London pub, with Iky as the genial landlord, it enjoyed an excellent reputation for many years. Iky married into a Sephardi family and had five boys and five girls. He proclaimed his Jewishness publicly by using the Mogen David as a motif on all his properties.

From Palestine came A. Aman, generally known as Aman, a stocky man lively and shrewd. He soon made his presence felt both in the business world and in our community. He built an iron foundry in Serangoon which proved a gold mine. Before his arrival, most iron products had to be imported, but he was able to supply builders with iron window frames, gates, railings and a variety of goods needed in the building trade. His foundry was well-equipped and well-staffed. He also had a contract with the military authorities, but at the outbreak of the Second World War, his foundry was commandeered.

In the community, he was an ardent spokesman for the Zionist cause. Although he was unsuccessful in raising enough support for a Zionist organisation, he was unremitting in his attempts to rouse us from our apathy. I remember at a meeting, addressed by a representative of the *Keren Hayesod*, he was so dismayed by what he considered a poor response to the appeal that he offered to double the amount collected by the community and he was true to his word. At the outbreak of the war with Japan, he left to make his home in England, returning to Singapore for only a brief stay after the Japanese Occupation.

Among the most industrious and best loved Ashkenasi

were the families of Clumeck and Frankel. Victor Clumeck's first venture into the commercial life of the island was as a member of the pineapple preserving firm of Joseph Bastiani. Although the firm went into liquidation in 1891, Victor was able to turn, what might have been a misfortune, into a challenge.

He had already discussed with Alfred Clouet the possibility of setting up their own import business and by 1892, the partnership was incorporated under the name of A. Clouet & Co. For their food imports, they chose the brand name, *Chop Ayam*, and it proved lucky for them. Soon, there was scarcely a grocery shop or household that did not display the perky little chicken, *ayam*, on their tinned products, sardines being a particular favourite. Later, A. Clouet & Co extended their range of imports to include building materials and ironmongery with equal success. Trading from their premises in Collyer Quay near Telok Ayer market, they became exceedingly well-known, respected and prosperous. Victor married Marie Frankel and they were blessed with a family of three boys and three girls. The partnership continued until 1925 when Alfred Clouet, whose health had deteriorated, retired to live in Cairo. Victor Clumeck then became the sole proprietor of the firm.

During World War I, Marie was awarded the MBE for her services to the Red Cross and other charitable work. It was a great loss to our community and the community at large, when she died at the early age of 47 on 27 April, 1923. Sadly, it was not long after, Victor himself died on 16 August, 1929. His eldest son, Ned, took over the helm and remained head of the firm until 1955, when it was finally sold to the firm of Denis Frères.

Meanwhile, Ned's grandfather on his mother's side, Abraham Frankel, had also established a thriving business in Singapore. Abraham and his wife, Rosa, came from Russia in 1878. He was a skilled cabinet maker, but he started out in Singapore in a very different capacity. It was he and Rosa who opened the bakery at the corner of Victoria Street which was later sold to Joseph Baker.

But by 1899, Abraham had returned to his original trade and opened a furniture emporium in Victoria Street which was already a furniture centre. At number 51, there was another Ashkenasi, Adolph Sternberg and Abraham took No. 375. He imported teak wood from the East Indies and furniture and marble from Europe. Alfred Clouet and Victor

Clumeck worked with him for a short time until their new firm was on its feet.

Abraham's eldest son Julian went to Copenhagen on an apprenticeship course in cabinet making. On his return in 1911, he married Tina Storch in the Chased El Synagogue and then launched into business on his own at 166/1 and 101, Tank Road under the name of Julian Frankel Furniture Co, with a factory and store at 13 Lloyd Road. He worked in close co-operation with his father who by now had taken premises at the corner of Orchard Road and Tank Road, opposite the entrance to Government House.

By the outbreak of World War I, Julian was joined by his brother, David, and his brothers-in-law, Adolph and David Storch. David married Esther Elias, sister of Joseph Elias, a well-known member of our community and a trustee of the Maghain Aboth Synagogue. Julian's youngest sister, Esther, married Leslie Goodman, who was vice-president of the American Jewish firm of Getz Brothers. Another sister, Ada, married H. Aaron, originally proprietor of the Kelvinator Company at 10–16 Robinson Road and later, assistant manager of Getz Brothers. Anna married Julian Israel, a member of Frankel & Co. His nephews, Numa and Max Lewis, came to Singapore and later, Max married Gracia, the daughter of Nissim Adis. Numa was tragically killed by Arab terrorists in Israel.

By 1919, the Frankel family had amalgamated their businesses as a limited concern with offices in Orchard Road and Victoria Street. They were now a household name with their slogan. "Everything for Everyone Everywhere", appearing daily in the press. This was one of their adverts.

APRIL 1919

Thanks to
THEIR MAJESTIES THE SINGAPORE PUBLIC

—

YOU HELPED US GROW!
JULIAN FRANKEL FURNITURE CO.

1911 ..... 1,200 sq. feet space
1919 ..... 28,000 sq. feet space

shortly adding
60,000 square feet
every inch selling

DEPENDABLE GOODS
Our goods sell —
we don't stock.
QUALITY PRICE SERVICE
PROGRESS CAMPAIGN
From end of month. Help us grow!
New Features in House Furnishings
Watch our next announcement.
The originators in the East of
EVERYTHING FOR EVERYBODY
EVERYWHERE
New Departments continually added
WATCH US GROW

Business was booming for many years and Abraham invested in property. He purchased a very large acreage of coconut plantation in Siglap and decided to build his home there. He built bungalows for himself and Julian and donated part of the estate for the use of the Singapore Volunteer Forces. The scouts were allowed to camp there and I was one of the many who have fond memories of the area. On 26 March 1922, after a full and happy life, Abraham died and was buried in Thomson Road Cemetery. His estate was divided between his family and became the Frankel Estate. Today, Frankel Lane, Frankel Avenue, Frankel Terrace are but a few of the street names that commemorate a lovable man and a most worthy citizen of Singapore.

In Julian's capable hands, the business continued to thrive. Adolph and David Storch eventually resigned and started their own firm, Storch Brothers. They specialised in diamonds and silver ware and had branches in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Penang. Julian had one daughter of great charm and beauty. She married Kurt Lawton, the grandson of the famous Berlin choir-master and composer, L. Lewandowski, and settled in England. Kurt's family were confectionery manufacturers, trading under the name of *O.P. Chocolates*. Sadly, Anita was widowed while comparatively young and she died in London in 1981, maintaining to the end her courage, wit and grace.

Julian was a big, burly man, thick set — the ideal physique for his favourite sport, boxing. He became a boxing promoter, helping anyone who was interested in the sport. To the under-privileged, he became champion and hero. During his lifetime, he promoted matches with Japan, Australia, Manila

and India. When he died on 28 June 1938, the sport suffered a blow from which it never recovered and the Singapore boxing fraternity mourned the passing of one of its most colourful and sympathetic characters.

Among the members of the Colonial Service, who were appointed to Singapore, were three Ashkenasi. H. Weisberg was appointed Colonial Treasurer, Straits Settlements. His signature appeared on the ill-fated *New Malayan Dollar* note, which was printed just before the fall of Singapore. It was despatched to India to await the outcome of the war and was brought back for use by the British Military Administration after the Japanese surrender. Mr Weisberg was interned in Changi Jail and Sime Road for three and a half years, after a short spell as acting Colonial Secretary. He was repatriated to England on his release from camp.

Dr Landau was appointed to the Singapore Medical Service. He was a highly esteemed member of the General Hospital staff and a welcome worshipper at Maghain Aboth. He, too, suffered three and a half years of internment and was repatriated after the war. Lazarus Rayman was appointed chairman of the Municipal Commissioners before the Japanese Occupation. He was so popular with his staff that they petitioned for his return after his internment and repatriation. The Colonial Office re-appointed him, but for one term only, to the disappointment of his staff and the chagrin of our community.

Our Ashkenasi brethren, in their various ways, made their contribution to the life of Singapore and added colour to the fabric of our communal life.

Chapter Nine

The second generation

"Some people think of business when they are in Synagogue. Is it too much to ask then that they think of the Almighty when they are at business?"

— Nachman of Kosoov, an early Chasidic leader, died 1746.

The First World War brought little change to Singapore, neither did it greatly affect our community. The property market suffered a temporary setback and, in some streets, there were rows of empty shops. The previously prosperous thoroughfare from North Bridge Road to Arab Street, for example, seemed abandoned. The Jewish and Arab landlords found it hard to re-let their properties. Speculation, however, continued to lure those with money to spare and those prepared to take a risk for a tempting turnover. So, a few lost a great deal but for most, the market proved profitable. Some of the wealth was naturally channelled into the war effort. In a Straits Times report, the Jewish community was praised for the $28,000 collection which, it stated was the highest percentage per capita in the island.

The majority of Singapore inhabitants continued to accept British supremacy unquestioningly. The under-privileged were apathetic, for the most part, accepting their situation, while those who had found a comfortable niche in society, considered that they owed loyalty to the country that gave them peaceful protection and opportunities for advancement.

The Western way of life was beginning to shape the mode of living not only of the wealthy, but also of the increasing number of citizens who could be termed middle-class. But paradoxically, as non-Europeans moved up the social ladder, they became more aware of the barriers that existed between themselves and their European counterparts. In addition to the areas of social restrictions, they also experienced racial discrimination. For example, at the outbreak of the war, Asians volunteered for enlistment in the British forces, but were turned down solely because of their race. Sephardi Jews,

with few exceptions, were classed as either Asians or Orientals and suffered the same experience. Mothers might have rejoiced that their sons were saved from military action, but the distinction left a scar on society. An anomaly occurred when a Singapore Sephardi enlisted in England and was granted a commission. He was Stamford Judah's brother, H.J. Judah and sadly, he was later killed in action in France.

India, where loyalties were divided, was already the scene of ugly incidents of insurrection and the unrest spread to Singapore for a short while. Units of the Indian Army mutineed. The British showed some insensitivity in handling the situation and aroused ill-feeling among the local communities when they evacuated Europeans to ships at anchor in the harbour. Unable to quell the mutiny on their own, they turned to the Japanese and Russian navies for help: for a brief spell, the "island fortress" seemed distinctly vulnerable. But once the mutiny was over, the whole affair rapidly faded into the past.

Discrimination was also evident in large European companies. Only expatriates could be appointed to top positions; Asians remained on the lower echelons. It was the same in education. Members of the colonial service were appointed principals of schools and of King Edward VII Medical College. Heads of departments were recruited from the United Kingdom. Only a Teachers' Training Course was available for the training of local teachers so that their academic qualifications could not rival their superiors, though their teaching ability might be excellent.

In the sphere of religion, there was no discrimination and very few signs of intolerance. In school, there were a few fights among children over such taunts as, "Jaudi Jew, brush my shoe. Bring it back at half past two!" But a black eye and a swollen fist soon restored good relations. The *blood accusation*, that Jews sacrificed gentile children for their festive meal on *Seder* night, was occasionally levelled against us by members of the mainly Catholic-Eurasian community. There was certainly no outbreak of violence nor even a breakdown in friendship over this insubstantial fairy story for that is what it really was. It grew up alongside the Malay folk tale of the *pontianak*, (the *belle dame sans merci* of Malay folklore), the blood-thirsty tales of the ghostly pirate, Khoo Sheng Fee and the *djinns* of the Arabian Nights. Such tales were told to ward off evil spirits or frighten naughty children into obedience!

In all schools, almost without exception, leave of absence was granted to Jewish pupils to observe the High Holydays, provided their parents made their requests beforehand. There was one occasion when permission, for no apparent reason was withheld. The boy was a pupil of St Joseph's Institution. He stayed away from school to observe *Yom Kipur* and on the following day, returned to school. The principal made it plain that his attendance was no longer acceptable. This was an exceptional incident, the more so in that this boy was David Saul Marshall, who grew up to bring honour to his community and Singapore when he later entered politics and became Singapore's first Chief Minister.

Just before World War I, an attempt was made to form a Jewish social club, similar to those run by other nationals. The sons and daughters of some of our affluent families took over the Sassoon property at 15 Mount Elizabeth and launched the *Myrtle Club*. It had billiard, card and mahjong tables, a tennis court, bar and library. It ran successfully for five years. Dances were held to raise funds for various charities including the war effort. Weddings, too, were held there and among them was the wedding of my cousin, Meda Sayers, to Joseph Simon. After the war, hotels began to expand their facilities and the Myrtle Club gradually gave way to them.

The minor anxieties of the war years were soon forgotten and Singapore society flung itself, whole-heartedly, into the pursuit of pleasure. Most of Malaya had, by now, come under British protection and provided a further stimulus to investment and trade. New technical developments brought benefits worldwide and Singapore was not slow to take advantage of them.

By the early Thirties, improvements in radio and telephone communication were bringing the rest of the world much closer. Many more families were able to invest in cars and a new car on the market was greeted as a major event. I remember how the first Baby Austin was given VIP treatment by Rupert Reuben and four of his friends, when they noticed one parked outside the Sea View Hotel. They decided that it deserved a more impressive parking place, lifted it bodily and set it down in the centre of the ballroom. The row that followed was a small price to pay for the pleasure gained from this prank, which was typical of the rather schoolboy, varsity humour of those days.

On 4 December 1919, a Vickers-Vimy aircraft landed on

the old race course. In 1927, the first air passengers took off in a Dutch Fokker 7A monoplane from Singapore for Batavia, in the Dutch East Indies. The K.P.M. had its first Singapore passenger, Mr Van Lear Black of Baltimore. On 18 May 1930, Singapore fêted Amy Johnson, who was on her historic solo flight to Australia. By the mid-Thirties, Imperial Airways and Qantas linked Singapore with the world.

The island welcomed these sensational advances, but remained on the whole conservative. There was, for example, a great deal of moaning when one of the old landmarks changed. Johnston's Pier had, for many years, held up its *Lampu Merah* (red lamp) as a warning to ships in the roads. When it was replaced in 1933 by Clifford's Pier, taxi-drivers, trishaw riders and pliers of sampans refused to acknowledge the change and unless you gave the clear direction "*Pergi lampu merah*" (Go to the red lamp), you would be unlikely to reach your destination.

Great strides were made in the field of health. Malaria was virtually wiped out, sewerage was installed, large reservoirs were built and the Singapore Improvement Trust made a start on slum clearance. Mission and government hospitals provided medical care that ranked among the best in the world. One particular hospital, the maternity hospital — perhaps a little too aptly named, *Kandang Kerbau* (Cow Fields), after the area in which it was built — was to be the birth place of many a Jewish baby including, much later, my own two sons. When it was completed, it was said to be the largest maternity hospital in the world.

Culturally, Singapore left much to be desired. In fact, it was probably in the 1920's that the description "cultural desert" was first applied to our island, by "birds of passage". But, we were compensated by 365 days of sunshine, sparkling sea, wonderful food and attentive service. If this sounds like the blurb of a modern travel brochure, I make no apologies as this was how it seemed to us then. We made our own entertainment, applauding each other's efforts generously, if uncritically. The amateur Philharmonic Orchestra, whose string section included Ruby Meyer and Leon Hackmeyer, gave regular concerts, the musical society produced *Gilbert and Sullivan* and the dancing academies showed off our talented young ladies. The cinema gave us movie idols and, if we wanted to sample Eastern culture, we could visit the Chinese *wayang* (folk opera), and the Indian Cultural Centre. We could enjoy Malay *ronggeng* (dancing) and marvel at the

inventiveness of the *babas* (Straits-born Chinese), whose *kronchong* (improvisations sung to the accompaniment of a violin or a type of banjo), could delight the ear and on a moonlight night, fill the air with romance.

Parties and picnics were arranged to celebrate any and every occasion and we did not have to be wealthy to indulge in them. Nor did age matter. When my family bought a small property at *Pasir Ris* (Whispering Sands), it seemed perfectly natural for it to become a picnic place for the young-in-heart as well as the "flapper" and her "beau". Many picnics were memorable. There was, for example, the time when Yahya Cohen's 90-year-old grandmother fell out of a sampan that was taking a party to Tanjong Rhu and was rescued by Saleh Deborah. Picnickers at Eddie Nathan's bungalow in Pasir Ris ran for their lives, when on one occasion they heard the growling of a tiger only to discover that it was Uncle Edward camouflaged in the fork of a tree. Moments later, a real tiger was spotted just beyond the compound. Some years later, a picnic ended in tragedy. We had travelled over the causeway to *Kota Tinggi* (High Waterfall), in Johor. The water became unexpected swollen from the recent heavy rains and Uncle Edward was swept away in the torrent. He did not survive the ordeal and the memory of our home-coming that evening haunts me till today.

Clubs and hotels provided a different style of entertainment. Goodwood Hall, known earlier as the Teutonic Club, was a popular rendezvous. It was bought and re-decorated by the three Manasseh brothers, Eze becoming the managing director. Tennis on the lawn, tea on the verandah, fancy dress balls, tea dances and concerts enlivened the social scene and I believe Gracie and Ralph Bridges were the first couple to hold their *chuppa* there. Gracie was the daughter of E.S. Isaac of Penang, who moved to Singapore in 1906. She and Ralph fell in love but Ralph was not of the Jewish faith. However, he chose to be converted and underwent circumcision. On 7 May 1920, their wedding was solemnised at Goodwood Hall according to Jewish lore. The party that followed was a wedding present from Eze Manasseh. Gracie and Ralph proved to be a happy and devoted couple. Even the Japanese invasion did not separate them for Gracie refused to leave and eventually, she and her husband were interned. In 1929, Goodwood Hall became Goodwood Park Hotel and during the Occupation, it suffered two dramatic changes of fortune: in 1942, the Japanese commandeered it as a residence for

senior Japanese officers and in 1945, after the surrender, it was the scene of the Japanese War Criminals Trials.

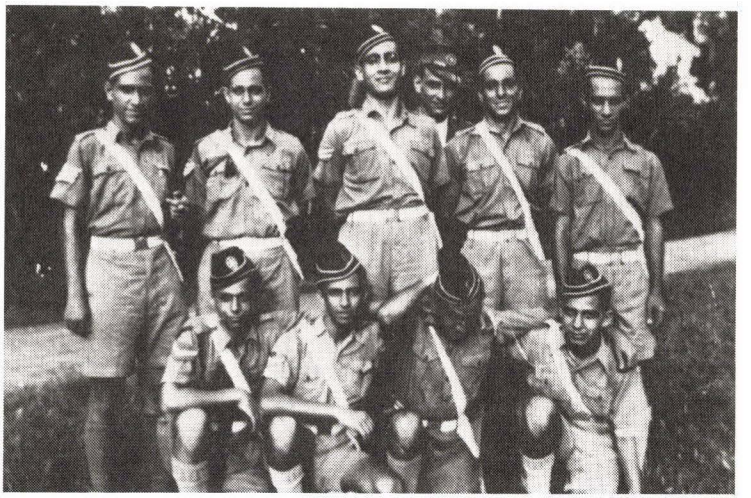
During those comparatively care-free days between the wars, the pursuit of outdoor life and sport became increasingly popular. For many young Jews, the YMCA and YWCA provided excellent facilities. My contemporaries have every reason to remember, with gratitude, the good fellowship of the first general secretary, Mr Jefferson and his successor, Roland Lyne. We had the use of the swimming pool at Fort Canning Rise, the sports ground in Balestier Road and tennis courts at Fort Canning and Dhoby Ghaut.

During the Japanese Occupation, the YMCA completely changed character: It became the headquarters of the sinister activities of the Kempetai, the secret police. Roland Lyne was taken prisoner in Thailand. He survived and returned to Singapore to render good service to the association until he retired in 1968.



Jewish members of the Raffles Institution cadet unit.

Tennis became a major interest in the 1930's. We could boast a few players of great promise. In 1934, for example, Reggie Nathan was the singles and doubles champion of Raffles School. He also won the men's singles in the Junior Jewish Tournament, organised by Eddie Simon and Jack Solomon at the YWCA. In that tournament, Maisie Isaac,



Boys Brigade.



Lady members (Jewish) of the Y.W.C.A. tennis section.

Gracie Bridge's sister, won the ladies' singles. Jack Solomon was the winner of the Sime Darby doubles championship many times. In 1934, Shooker Abbot won local acclaim in the Singapore Cricket Club and was dubbed "wonder man" by The Sunday Times for his performance. He entered six

events, played 243 games on consecutive days and reached the semi-finals in four matches.

Swimming was, of course, a general pastime, but few took it as a serious sporting activity. Exceptions were Sonnie Khatena and Elias Reuben, who were outstanding swimmers. Sonnie's prowess was the more to be praised, as he triumphed over a congenital weakness in one leg. Hockey was played by both sexes and the girls fielded a good team in netball. In quite a different "field", we had our racing enthusiasts. David Mordecai, Eze Manasseh and Joe B David, all owned horses. E.S. Sherida was a horse trainer-owner. One year, six members of the community went *kongsi* (shared the cost) and bought a race-horse named, *Row-Boat*, which won the Turf Gold Cup.

Hunting and fishing attracted a small number of our generation. The Sultan of Johor, Sultan Ibrahim, was a radio enthusiast and, through our mutual interest, we became friends. When he learnt that some of my friends were keen on hunting, he gave me a licence to hunt wild boars in his territory. I was not a hunter myself, but I accompanied parties, keeping well to the rear! On one occasion, a member of the party caught a *pelandok* (mousedeer), one of the fascinating fauna of the region. He intended taking it to the zoo, but fate favoured the *pelandok* when my friend tripped over a sapling and the little fellow made his escape.

Cecil Reuben was a crocodile hunter. The swamps of the Jurong River were a favourite haunt for crocodiles and he landed many a trophy there. Reuben Meyer, Manasseh Meyer's third son, was an expert fisherman. He often took a party with him on deep-sea fishing expeditions, usually near the Horsburgh Lighthouse. Once we landed as many as 200 beautiful *ikan merah* (red fish), a delicacy of the Malayan waters. Reuben shared out the catch between the Salvation Army, Children's Homes and his hotel, the Adelphi.

When a flying club was formed. Sonnie and Reggie Nathan joined it and obtained their pilot's certificates. Later, Sonnie flew his own plane to and from Ipoh where he worked. His peace-time flying was not without danger and excitement. His worst experience was a crash landing on a tree in the jungle. Somehow, he managed to emerge almost unscathed.

Many of us found scouting a safer pursuit. Frank Cooper Sands, a printer with the Methodist Publishing House, was the founder of the Singapore movement and its Commissioner. He was exceedingly well-liked from the early pioneer-

ing days until his retirement. Until its recent move to Clemenceau Avenue, the headquarters was in Zetland House, at the corner of Armenian and Loke Yew streets where the American Embassy now stands. My brother and I became members of the First Singapore Troop. A particularly colourful memory from those early days was in 1922, when we acted as guides at the Malayan Borneo Trade Exhibition held in Anson Road in honour of the visit of Prince Edward, the Prince of Wales.

One of our first jobs was to build our huts and fence in our enclosure. Little did I think that, some twenty years later, I would again be building huts, but in very different circumstances — under the eyes of a Japanese guard in Sime Road internment camp. It is strange to recall that 1922 was also the year when the Anglo-Japanese Treaty ended and construction of a vast naval base began in the Straits of Johor to counter the threat of Japanese naval supremacy in the Far East.

But in Anson Road, we had more pleasant things to occupy ourselves. We manned a transmitting station and were proud to send a morse-code greeting of welcome to the Prince before he landed. Also, we had the responsibility of bringing lorry loads of happy schoolchildren from different parts of the island and depositing them on the playing fields of St Joseph's Institution, where they sang lustily for the royal visitor.

Five years later, my brother and I were fortunate to be in England for the Jamboree, held that year in Birkenhead. Frank Sands had asked us to represent Singapore. It was a marvellous experience, not the least because we were able to meet Jewish scouts from many parts of the world and exchange our experiences. I have an odd recollection connected with the home at which we were billeted. At breakfast on the first morning, we were impressed by the silver articles on the table. By chance, my neighbour held up a jug he was passing rather high and I read the inscription at the bottom — *Raffles Hotel, Singapore.* It was my first introduction to the length to which souvenir hunters will go!

It was in the 1920's that Moshe Gareh suggested forming an all-Jewish scout troop. I may have been wrong, but at that time, I did not support the idea. To me, one of the chief pleasures of scouting was to enjoy the company, within one's own troop, of young people of all races and beliefs. By that time, I was a Rover and the leader of the First Troop. I felt it was all-important in a multi-racial society that we should learn about each other and to live with one another. There

seemed no clash between this idea and our loyalty to Judaism. Many years later, in 1937, a *Jewish Lads' Brigade* was formed. The time was then ripe and sixty boys enrolled under the leadership of Isaac Manasseh of the Bechore family. It ran successfully until the eve of the Japanese invasion. I remember making use of this willing group of boys in 1938 to help me draw up a census of our community. After all their hard work, the records were lost during the Occupation.

Choosing a career, during this period, did not pose too many problems. We were growing up in a commercial environment and it was to commerce that most of us turned. We had, before us, examples of the success that hard work and initiative could bring. Abraham Penhas, the son of Rahamin, who had himself moved up the scale from pedlar to shopkeeper, was an astute and ambitious man. He found that the haberdashery trade was virtually controlled by six European firms, among them, the Borneo Company, Guthries, Boustead and Sime Darby. When Abraham tried to compete in this market, he found his way blocked. He was convinced that this sort of monopoly was unhealthy for the trade in general and was, certainly, not in *his* interest. He petitioned the government and they upheld his plea. He was now free to enter the market. He chose, as his trade mark, the Mogen David. It could not have been more apt for, in his own sphere, he was taking on six giants. To symbolise that the power of the six had been broken, he placed in the centre of the triangles the number 777. He made the most of his new opportunities, instituted the system of commission trading, secured important agencies for British and European firms and built himself a flourishing concern.

Abdullah Shooker was another memorable and successful merchant. He gained valuable experience in the offices of Manasseh Meyer before opening his own business in Malacca Street. His accent and very broken English belied his Iraqi origin of which he was proud, but he came to work, dressed immaculately in the Summer garb of an Edwardian gentleman complete with waistcoat, flowing tie and gold watch and chain. His fluency in Arabic, Hindustani and Malay were an advantage. He trained his loyal Chinese clerk to record his accounts in Arabic and they made a formidable team against their competitors.

He was a generous man and in 1927, when Dr Alexander Goldstein came to Singapore on a Far East mission to raise funds for the *Karen Hayesod*, I took Dr Goldstein to see him,

feeling sure that he would receive a handsome donation. To my great embarrassment, we were received coldly. Mr Shooker explained to me in Arabic that he had received reports from Palestine that the Ashkenasi were discriminating against the Sephardi. Dr Goldstein attempted to refute the charge, but his words had no effect. There was nothing we could do, but leave. As we were approaching the door, Mr Shooker called me back. He asked me in Arabic, "Are you Eliahu Nathan's son?" I replied that I was. He then told us courteously to wait while he returned to his desk and wrote out a cheque. When he handed it to me, I was delighted to see that the amount was $2,000, which was one of the largest single donations. I blessed the inherent kindness of Abdullah Shooker, and also the memory of my dear father. That incident reminds me of one that occurred over twenty years later after the Second World War.

I was once again collecting for an appeal for Israel and, this time I had my four-year-old son with me. We came to the home of a lady of decidedly strong character, some affluence and a determination to hang on to her wealth. She showed no willingness to respond to the appeal. "Let's go, daddy," said my son, with tears in his eyes. "I don't like this lady. She's very unkind." At that, the lady took out her cheque book, picked up my son and pressed a cheque into his hand. This time, it was the father's turn to bless his son!

Abdullah Shooker married Flora Raymond. They were both respected in the community for their staunch Judaism and for their charity. When they died, having no children, they left a considerable amount of money in Trusts for charitable causes in Palestine and Singapore; later they became known as the Abdullah and Flora Shooker Charitable Trusts.

Joseph Elias, known as Joe, was an enterprising young man who prospered in a variety of business ventures. His parents, Aaron and Serena Elias, were blessed with a large family of four boys and three girls. None of the boys married, but all three girls married into local Jewish families. Becky married David Frankel, Esther married Allan Manasseh and Miriam married David J Elias. Serena was a true matriarch, who provided many a poor Jewish girl with both husband and dowry. When she died on 23 November 1925, she left a legacy of $15,000 which was invested in Trust for twenty years. In 1941, with additional capital from the family, the Trust was given the family name, *Amber*.

Joe made a great impact on Singapore society, as a suc-

cessful businessman and as a personality. One of his early ventures was to manufacture aerated and mineral waters in Seletar where the rock formation produced hot springs. There, visitors could take a dip in the pools and drink the water and so, he called his product *Seletar Hot Springs*. Another company of his, *Tampenis Tiles Ltd*, was sold to one of his competitors when competition from Chinese firms became very keen. He was soon director of several companies investing in a wide variety of products, including the increasingly valuable tin and rubber. He was made a Justice of the Peace and in 1920, appointed Municipal Commissioner. It was not long before a local magazine appeared with the headline, "Joe Speaks." Apparently, he rarely took part in discussions and when he did intervene, it was usually to register disapproval with a monosyllabic "No!" When he made a longer speech, it became newsworthy!

The refrigeration business attracted him and he established a refrigerator, iceworks and depot by the docks at Keppel Harbour, forming the *Fresh Food and Refrigerator Co Ltd.* He followed up by opening a retail store to compete with the Singapore Cold Storage in Orchard Road. His service was soon recognised as "the best that money can buy", but the price-cutting war and the depression caused him to sell his firm to the Singapore Cold Storage in 1931. He took over the newspaper, *Malay Tribune*, which became noted for its outspoken editorials. His property deals were very rewarding and the family name, *Amber*, appeared over the block of flats and business premises, *Amber Mansions*, at the corner of Orchard Road and Penang Lane. The road linking East Coast and Meyer Road was also named *Amber*.

He could be a very good friend, but a dangerous enemy. He was quick-tempered, autocratic and generous. I have reason to be personally grateful to him, as he helped our firm, *M & E Nathan*, to move from our small shop in North Bridge Road to larger premises in Amber Mansions. He did not play an active part in communal affairs but, behind the scenes, he rendered service to individuals and to the community. In this way, he carried on the benevolent work of his mother, Serena, to whom he was devoted.

For those whose inclinations led them away from the mainstream of the commercial world, the choice of a career was limited by various factors. It was rare for an Asian to rise to a high position in the administration and government. The sons of the wealthy could seek higher qualifications abroad

but, for the majority, this was almost impossible. There were a few engineering apprenticeships, but even with a good academic record or first class training, it was unlikely that an Asian would receive promotion above a certain level. Correspondence courses were a poor substitute but, in a few cases, they led to full-time study abroad. Despite such drawbacks, the posts obtained by my contemporaries showed initiative and diversification.

For girls, it was particularly difficult, as they were expected to lead a social life until their marriage. My sister, Gladys, was one of the first to become a full-time secretary and Esther Manasseh to take up teaching. A career in teaching attracted few of us; exceptions were Max Menaham and David Tweg, who proved to be very fine teachers. David was ultimately lured into commerce and joined his uncle, Sassoon Sadka, in his fruit importing firm. During his teaching career, he was called in to help deal with a rebellious form, who demanded more time for sport. David decided to give the boys what they wanted. He stopped all academic teaching and took the boys out all day for games and athletics. After a few days, the boys were clamouring for a normal school day and so were their parents!

There were a few openings in the Municipality. Jacob Ephraim worked in the Town Cleansing Department; Saul Saul, with his 160-words-a-minute shorthand speed, was invaluable as a shorthand reporter for the Legislative Council. Alec Manasseh worked for the Improvement Trust and his brother, Jack, for the Transport Department. Jack Solomon worked in the accounts department of Sime Darby. He had a phenomenal gift for figures and when he was told that adding machines were to be introduced into his department, he stated politely, but firmly, that they would not improve his accounting. He was challenged to prove his claim; he was asked to add a five-figure column, while a colleague added the same with a machine. Jack had worked out his total before his colleague was half way through.

M. Ezekiel & Sons came from Java to establish their firm of opticians in Singapore. I believe they gained their skill entirely through correspondence courses and I can vouch for their expertise. They had a prominent and very successful stand in the Malayan Borneo Trade Exhibition in 1922 and they never looked back. One of the sons, Abe, bore a strong resemblance to Groucho, the wise-cracking Marx brother, with the loping gait. The similarity was not only in appear-

ance, his wit and repartee had a decidedly Grouchian style. Later, when he was introduced to Groucho in Hollywood, where he lived for some years, they exchanged wise-cracks in front of reporters.

Electrical engineering correspondence courses were popular. Being so far removed from the great capitals of the world, we appreciated the inventions that could at least update our way of life. Many of us were amateurs of the radio — crystal sets were produced, Heath Robinson fashion, in outhouses and lofts and amateur radio stations were set up. Eventually, Sonny Nathan and I opened our own electrical, radio and gramophone shop.

My brother Maurice's correspondence course and apprenticeship with United Engineers and later with the Electricity Board, enabled him to go to England in 1926 where he took a four-year course in Faraday House in two-and-a-half years. He helped to support himself by doing a variety of jobs including repair work on cars and radios. He graduated from Faraday House as D.F.H. and Grad I.E.E. (Graduate Institute of Electrical Engineers). His war work for the Admiralty and the Ministry of Defence brought him his M.I.E.E. and C. Eng (Chartered Engineer).

Only one member of our community qualified as a doctor at this time. Yahya Cohen was awarded the coveted Queen's Scholarship to study in England. He became an F.R.C.S. and since the end of World War II, has risen to the top of his profession in Singapore.

Emily Sadka, the eldest daughter of Sassoon Sadka was also a Queen's Scholar. She read History in Oxford University, gaining a First Class Honours in 1941. She stayed on to do research in Malayan History, completing her work later as a professor in Canberra University, Australia. Her rewarding career was cut short by her untimely death. One of my dearest friends, she introduced me to my wife, Nina (nee French), who had become a close friend of Emily's at Oxford. We both have very personal reasons, therefore, to remember her with gratitute and heartache. Emily's younger sister, Mercy, was educated at Cheltenham Ladies College. She, too, qualified as a doctor and is, today, a well-known neurologist in Perth, Australia.

A cousin of Emily's, David Saul Marshall, enrolled at St. Andrew's School after he was virtually expelled from St. Joseph's. He was at this time aggressively Jewish and could not tolerate any Jewish jibes. He was provoked by the son of a

prominent Wesleyan minister, flew into a rage and punched him severely. The principal felt he had no alternative and once again, David was in search for a school. It was to his credit that the principal of Raffles' Institution was willing to enrol this young firebrand. I do not think he ever regretted his decision, although there were times when David's interventions gave him an uncomfortable time. One such occasion, I remember well. David was, by now, a prefect and a star of the Literary and Debating Society. On the day of the annual general meeting and the election of officers, the expatriate master, responsible for the society, declared to everyone's dismay that there was no need to hold an election, as he had already chosen the committee. Before he could read out the first name on the list, David rose to his feet. He upbraided the master for his astonishingly undemocratic action and demanded a free election. The master refused to give in and the meeting ended in confusion. The next morning in assembly, the principal announced that he had a very distasteful task to perform. A certain prefect, he said, had grossly abused his privilege and he had no alternative, but to withdraw his badge. He named David. David's strike for democracy had not been in vain however. At the next annual meeting of the society, the election of officers was strictly democratic.

I think that it was shortly after this event that David contracted tuberculosis, a disease that was to remain a scourge in Singapore until some years after World War II. David's parents managed to send him to Switzerland and it was a great relief to family and friends when he returned to Singapore restored to health. By now, he had decided on a legal career but his parents' resources were somewhat limited and, in any case, he preferred to rely on his own efforts. He decided to take a job to earn enough for his passage to the U.K. He became a very successful car salesman and by 1934, he had saved enough for his purpose. Before he left Singapore, he made another characteristic move. With a few optimistic friends, he produced the first magazine for our community. Although he was passionately Jewish, he was not an ardent Zionist. The name for the magazine symbolised David's idealistic attitude to his heritage rather than hopes for *Eretz Yisrael* (The Land of Israel). The name was *The Israelite.* David was also cosmopolitan in his outlook and I think he believed, as many Jews did before the tragic disillusionment that Hitler brought to the world, that Jews were the ideal

world citizens. As he said in his editorial: "Our community is drawn from every part of the world — England, Austria, Germany, Russia, Poland, Spain, Palestine, Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, Australia, Shanghai, the Philippines and America. We should be able to build on these cultures."

But what had the magazine to offer? Most of the purchasers were primarily interested in the sports and social columns and would skim through the rather superficial articles on religion, philosophy and the arts. Some poems and stories showed originality, but the standard was not higher than the average school magazine. The editorial staff made a gallant effort, but this attempt to graft culture onto stems that were still immature were doomed to failure. David left for England and after a few more issues, we ceased to publish.

David was admitted to the Middle Temple in London. He paid his way by working as a waiter and teaching French and chess. He was called to the Bar in 1937 and set sail for home. There were German passengers aboard and during a celebration, David noticed Nazi flags amongst the decorations. Without a thought for the consequences, he tore them down and threw them overboard. The captain told him that it was nothing short of a miracle that only a minor scuffle ensued and that David himself had not been lynched.

On his return, he joined the legal firm, Battenberg and Talma, as a junior lawyer. In Singapore, there are no barristers and solicitors can plead their own cases. David's temperament was admirably suited to the drama of the courts and soon, he became a well-known figure, regarded with respect bordering on awe. Even a judge was known to quail before his scathing tongue and intense gaze.

He was soon able to invest in his own home. He chose a house in Changi Road and called it by the island's ancient name, *Tumasek*. There, every Friday night, he invited guests for a convivial evening of discussion. To encourage the thrust and counter-thrust of debate, on which he thrived, he always invited two new people from different walks of life, race or creed. David worked tirelessly to make people aware of their gifts, the richness of their heritage and their rights and to wean them away from a purely materialistic or apathetic response to the challenges society presented.

He foresaw a great future for Singapore and he wanted Jews to help shape it, but he also wanted independence of thought. He became incensed when Aman, a passionate Zionist, used the public press to attempt to bludgeon the Jewish com-



Family party in Katong. Among the guests is David Marshall (extreme right, standing, in the costume of a sultan)

munity into observing the month of *Av* as a period of mourning. They were urged to fly the Jewish national flag at half mast and to respond to a house-to-house appeal for funds for *Eretz Yisrael*. Most of us agreed with David on this occasion that our efforts for the Holy Land should be made *within* the community and our loyalties to Singapore and the British should not appear questionable. This was not surprising. We were far removed from the centres of Zionist activity and had more in common, in many ways, with the small *provincial* communities of the Commonwealth than with those of the great capitals.

While David was making his mark in legal and social circles, he held a somewhat tenuous brief for the affairs of his community. It was still left to our elders and, particularly, to Manasseh Meyer to act on our behalf. Manasseh was at the helm until the day of his death, at the age of 87, on 11 July 1930. Under his guidance, in 1924 the trustees, Raphael Elias Sasoon, Saul Jacob Nathan and Ezra Ezekiel Nathan, planned extensions to the Maghain Aboth Synagogue. They enlarged the *mikvah*, extended the Ark to hold fifty-five *sepharim* and increased the seating capacity to 200, widening the ladies' gallery to seat ninety.

Our synagogue was well maintained but, with hindsight, it is easy to recognise that little was initiated for our spiritual

growth. The errors made by our leaders were ones of omission. A spiritual leader, with the necessary strength of character to inspire trust, was not found nor was a true educator for our children and, as no incentive for self-help was introduced, the poor tended to get poorer.
the intention of improving the general welfare of children and their parents. Serena Elias, Flora Sassoon, Rosa Frankel and Marie Clumeck, under the leadership of Mozelle Nissim, Manasseh Meyer's daughter, did a great deal of charitable work. But they were not able to change the attitude of the needy, who tended to look upon them as rich benefactors with a constant supply of money to dispense.



Mrs. Mozelle Nissim.

By this time some poor people had turned into "professional" beggars while others would be ready to perform a religious duty, a *mitzva*, in the hope of being paid for it! For example, two men would recite prayers through the night, beside the body of the deceased and in the morning, they would receive an offering. I remember a character, who decided he could improve his chances — he suggested to the bereaved family that there was no need to have *two* readers as he was quite prepared to spend the night alone. His offer was accepted. When morning came, he was handed the usual money. In a shocked voice, he reminded them that he should

be paid double as he had performed a double *mitzva*! At the grave side, there was also a chance to receive "charity". A *minyan* of the under-privileged would congregate and money would be placed on a stone nearby. It was horrifying to see how they swooped down on the money like vultures.

Change was necessary but who could bring it about? In 1931, I returned from England with the melodious chanting of *chasan*, choir and congregation in the various synagogues I had attended, still ringing in my ears. I had been particularly inspired by the services at Lauderdale Road Sephardi synagogue and did not think it was impossible to improve the decorum in our own. A few friends and I decided to put up a notice at the entrance of the synagogue, asking the congregants to show proper respect for their house of worship. Maurice Ezekiel tore it down and threatened me with violence if I put it up again. I realised that I had chosen the wrong way. Other attempts fared no better.

E.B. Solomon and Saul Ezekiel petitioned the Trustees to convene a meeting of the whole of the community and to present their accounts. This had *never* been done before.

The meeting was duly called, but only one trustee turned up, Joe Elias, who took the chair. Alas, the meeting had not been properly planned and there was no agenda. Joe, himself, was completely unprepared for the mood of the members. The meeting came to a quick and noisy end. Was anything gained? It was the first attempt by the community to come to terms with their responsibilities. It was a beginning.

The island, too, was slow to share responsibility. Norman Mailer said, "There is a law of life so cruel and so just", which demands "that one must grow or else pay more for remaining the same." Tragically, it was the Japanese invasion that forced us all to change and, it was not until after the Occupation, that we realised the price we had paid "for remaining the same".

Chapter Ten

The invasion

"Our Empire was born in the skill of our explorers, the martial prowess of our yeomanry, the innovative genius of our scientists and engineers. We stole a march on the world that lasted two hundred years. Lulled by the long peaceful protection of the great fleet we built, we thought it would last forever. We dozed."

— Extract from War and Remembrance, by Hermand Wouk.

On 30 January 1933, Hitler became Chancellor of the German Reich. On 21 March, his anti-Semitic policies were promulgated. In the East, warmongering generals seized control of Japan and were baying for blood. In 1937, Japan, Germany and Italy signed the Anti-Comintern Pact. Japan renewed her attacks on China, without declaring war, on 7 July of the same year. That act of aggression was to be the precursor of many in the ensuing years. In Europe and the Far East, the dogs of war had been unleashed.

But in Singapore, cushioned by years of peaceful growth, the darkening skies were still hidden by the sun. Our daily routine was scarcely affected by the increasingly grim headlines in the daily press. But in 1937, on the boat coming home from a business trip to Penang, I met a Jewish couple who had escaped from Nazi Germany. When we landed in Singapore, they came to our flat for lunch. We heard, at first hand, what it meant to be a Jew in Hitler's Germany. They were a brave pair, stalwart in their Judaism. We felt helpless before the threat they outlined for us and momentarily we were plunged into the horror from which they, mercifully, had escaped. We saw them off for Shanghai where they hoped to make a new life for themselves.

We now intensified our boycott of German goods and organised a committee to raise funds for refugees. Not many came our way. Martin Gilbert in his book, "*Exile and Return*," stated that eighty-eight came to Malaya. They had

to suffer close surveillance until the British authorities were satisfied they harboured no spies in their midst. They had barely begun to feel free again when, on 3 September 1939, England declared war on Germany. They became "enemy aliens" despite the fact that their passports bore the stamp **J**.

My neighbour, Werner Baer, had formerly been the organist at the principal Reform Synagogue in Berlin. In Singapore, he had taught music and arranged concerts for an appreciative audience, but now on 3 September, the police called at his flat and pinned a poster on his door informing the occupants of their new "*status*". They were asked to report to Police Headquarters and prepare for internment. However, Providence seems to have intervened. For most of these refugees, their place of internment was not to be Singapore, but Australia, a continent spared the full horror of war and occupation.When peace returned, they were able to rebuild their lives under a fundamentally fair-minded, democratic government. Not all the refugees were sent to Australia. Some found they were bound for Shanghai and for them, life proved increasingly difficult. A few remained at liberty, free to stay in Singapore and share the days of our adversity. Dr Carl Engels was among them.

Just before the war, Moses Cohen and his young wife, Hilda, came from Shanghai to live in Singapore. The insurance company for which he worked, moved its head office from Shanghai when the Japanese occupied the city and Moses moved with it. He was by disposition one of nature's true gentlemen. In addition, he had a deep love and knowledge of the *Torah*. He was a welcome new member of our community while peace still reigned and in time of war and occupation, he gave invaluable service.

In 1940, my sisters Gladys and Dorothy were in London. Gladys was working for the Czech Refugee Trust Fund, concerned especially with the welfare of Sudetenland refugees. Here, she met a young Jewish medical student, Paul Merory and his wife, Mereile, both Czech refugees. They became friends but, after Gladys left for Singapore in 1940, they did not meet again until 1959. By this time, Paul had become an eye specialist practising in Sydney. David Marshall, on a visit to his brothers in Sydney, was introduced to him and brought Gladys a warm greeting from Paul and Mereile. Some years later, Paul found he was going blind. Far from resigning himself to an early retirement, he took up psychiatry. With the help of his wife and a *reader*, he not only qualified, but has

since become eminent in his field.

Dorothy and Gladys faced the Battle of Britain with true Londoners' grit. Like thousands of others, they seemed to acquire nine lives. On one occasion, they were dining with friends when the sirens went off. The friends tried to dissuade them from leaving, inviting them to stay the night in a small room that was partly converted into an indoor shelter. But Dorothy and Gladys had developed a sixth sense and declined the offer. That night, a land mine exploded near the friends' house and wrecked that little room.

They began to think of returning to Singapore, the "unassailable fortress". As they were "overseas persons", they had only a limited time in which to make up their minds. They made their plans accordingly and managed to get passages aboard the liner, *Nakanda*, an R.A.F. troopship. In the somewhat zany manner of those times, they did not sail in a convoy and had only a Lewis gun to protect them from air and sea attacks. When this solitary gun was tested, it fused all the ship's lights! Luckily, there were no major incidents on the voyage and they arrived in Singapore in January 1941.

From 1939-41, leader writers in the local press had been trying to rouse our leaders and the public from the general apathy. Jimmy Glover, managing director and editor of the *Malayan Tribune*, whose wife was a French Ashkenasi, was convinced that the British under-estimated Japan's ambition and resolution and her disdain for the British. He and his fellow journalists constantly placed before our eyes these simple facts. Japan aimed at nothing less than the conquest of South-east Asia so that a grandiose design, a Co-prosperity Sphere, could be formed under her leadership. As China would be pacified, she would play her part and the whole area would work in "glorious" partnership with the "magnificently masterful" Reich. The U.S.A. in Japan's view was scarcely worth considering as, although she might enter the war, she would quickly tire and make a face-saving peace. We read the papers, we nodded our heads in agreement, we lamented the terrible loss of lives suffered by civilians and the forces and approved the sincerity of Winston Churchill in his appeal for steadfastness in the face of even greater ordeals and deprivations. Yet in Singapore, it all seemed remote. We were observes at a safe distance. The war had scarcely touched us. We continued to run our lives as if time and place still belonged to us to do with as we wished.

It was quite natural, therefore, that in November 1941, re-

quiring treatment for a rather severe sinus infection, I booked a passage to Java where I had friends and knew of an eminent ENT specialist. I underwent a minor operation and, while recuperating, started to enjoy my holiday. I was out pony-trekking in the mountains one day and was struck by the beauty of the scene. I dismounted and took out a camera. I had just taken a few shots, when I was pounced upon by a Dutch policeman. "Do you not know that you are photographing defence positions in a prohibited area?" he asked. I was then taken to a police station where they listened to my explanation. I think they believed it, but they were taking no chances and confiscated my film. I was considerably shaken by the realisation that the Dutch were taking the threat of a Japanese invasion very seriously. How different it had been in Singapore, where I had actually seen Japanese taking pictures in the naval base itself. In fact, it later emerged that installations and the movement of ships, in and out of the base, had been recorded on film by many Japanese "tourists"! When I think back on it now, it seems incredible.

Despite the incident in the mountains, I cannot remember feeling the need to change my plans. I probably convinced myself that the Dutch had over-reacted. I left on the pre-arranged day and had an uneventful voyage home. When we reached the roads of Singapore harbour, the newspapers were brought on board. It was 8 December, 1941. We read the headlines, unwilling to believe our eyes. On 7 December Japan had made a pre-emptive attack on Pearl Harbour with devastating results. In the early hours of 8 December, that very morning, the Japanese had made a landing in the North of Malaya, at Kota Baru and at the same time, taken totally by surprise, Singapore had been bombed.

My brother, Ivor, met me at the wharf to assure me that our family and friends were safe. He told me that one of his main anxieties during the raid — which at first he had thought was merely a practice as there had been no blackouts and the lights were blazing on the island — was the safety of Dorothy and Gladys. They had been spending the weekend in a bungalow at Changi Beach and they had actually been allowed into an area *where there were vital military installations*.

Apparently, at about 4.15 a.m., they had been woken by the unusually loud drone of planes. Then came the ear-shattering sounds of explosions. They had heard enough. They made a dash for home and reached there shocked but

unharmed. Oh yes, the news was grave. But we were still gullible. We attributed the casual reaction of those in command to characteristic British phlegm. Had we not been brought up on the Kipling ethos, the superiority of the unflurried, brave, innovative amateur over the unimaginative professional? The air raid would prove to be an isolated incident, a vain attempt on the part of the bungling Japanese to scare us. The R.A.F. was merely lying low and would be ready to give the Japs a terrible pounding, if they tried it again.

While I had been in Java, all sorts of stories about the Japs' ineptitude had been circulating. Their planes were virtually made of paper tied together with a string. They had no tanks. The soldiers had to march barefoot and if they were lucky, there might be a bicycle or two to share. Such an ill-equipped army could not traverse the jungle, the nearly impenetrable jungle, which formed a natural deterrent in the North, while in the South, we had the sea and the approaches were guarded by strong shore emplacements of every kind.

We held fast to our belief in the impregnability of our island and news bulletins were already being issued to feed our credulity. The landing at Kota Baru had been repulsed with heavy casualties inflicted on the enemy we learned, as we stopped on the way to our flat in Amber Mansions to get the latest news. By the time we reached my shop, our mood was exceedingly optimistic. I found all my staff there, except my good friend and employee, Katsuki. He had been rounded up as an enemy alien with a few thousand Japanese, including Mr Mimatsu, a World War I colonel, who had been seconded to Singapore as an official photographer to the forces! I accepted the loss of Katsuki as an essential war measure, but it certainly did not occur to me that I would never see him again.

That evening, for the first time, the public was notified that a strict blackout must be observed. We were also advised to take other ominous measures — to collect sand for sandbagging, board up our shop windows and improvise air raid shelters. Improvisation was the keynote as auxiliary fire, medical, police and air raid precaution services were hurriedly set up. The leadership, we soon found out, was inadequate, the red tape too plentiful, but we did what we could to comply and did so uncritically.

On 11 December, two shattering communiques were issued. The first announced "with regret" that *HMS The*

Prince of Wales and the *Repulse* had been sunk off the east coat of Malaya on their way to Kota Baru. The second, that the island of Penang had surrendered to the Japanese. Almost immediately, came two other communiques. One stated that large reinforcements of Hurricanes and Spitfires had arrived and were being assembled at Tengah, the main air base. The other brought the news of the imminent arrival of a 40,000-strong U.S. force. We took heart from these announcements, as we were meant to do. We did not realise that wishful thinking turned reverses into victories, withdrawals into strategic regrouping of forces and mere hopes into actualities. We lost no time in volunteering for national service. To our amazement, we were told that we were not needed. This seemed to us a greater blow than any we had yet suffered. We were outraged by the sudden awareness that race and colour had become factors at a time when we were urged to face all odds *united*. Shortly afterwards a directive was issued stating that Jews born in the Straits Settlements were considered Asiatic and were exempt from military service. This was a most unwelcome echo from World War I.

We had no time to nurse our wounded pride. The air raid on 8 December, far from being the rash act of a fool-hardy foe, was followed by well-planned nightly raids for the next ten days. Among the hundreds of tragic victims of those attacks was a Jewish family in Joo Chiat Road. The family of four was wiped out. We sought to give them at least the dignity of a Jewish burial, but found their dismembered bodies torn off and lumps of flesh strewn on telegraph wires, roof tops and drains. No burial was possible. The sight and stench of war was brought home to us and the memory would stay with us always.

We were prepared to make any contribution we could to mitigate the horror. A few even managed to side-step officialdom, and were accepted into the armed services, despite the directive and the earlier rebuff. David Marshall and Charles Simon, who had been members of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Corps (SSVC) in peace-time, were able to continue their service in time of war. Moshe Gareh was accepted in the Second Battalion, North Lancashire Regiment. Meyer and Reggie Nathan and Ned Clumeck joined the Malayan Air Force and Ivor Ellis, the Navy. Terence Sassoon, a grandson of Raphael Sassoon, was in London when war broke out and joined the R.A.F. Others took on non-combatant duties in the various emergency services. Leon

Simon was, I think, the only Jewish auxiliary policeman. I found my hands full. My firm was under contract to install, service and repair electrical equipment for the forces. We were on call day and night. In any spare time I had, I worked with the Scout Troop, assisting in tasks that became more heart-rending as the true nature of the war unfolded.

In the days that followed the outbreak of the confrontation, the almost care-free life we had enjoyed so recently faded into the distant past. Every night, enemy planes appeared and took their toll. Then as suddenly as they started, on 19 December, the raids ceased. But within a week, on 25 December, we heard that Hongkong had fallen and the Japanese were thrusting forward into Sarawak and Borneo. We grew more despondent as we heard that train-loads of wounded were arriving from Malaya. At the same time, a steady stream of refugees escaping from North Malaya by train, steamer, small craft, car, lorry, cart or on foot were making their way to Singapore. Meyer Grand was among them. Until the surrender of Penang, he had had a jeweller's shop and had been the leader of the tiny Jewish community there. Now he came to join his relatives, the Sadka family, to face the increasingly uncertain future together.

He immediately enlisted in the M.A.S. and worked as a stretcher bearer in the General Hospital. From him we learned, at first hand, what had happened in Penang. Penang had proved an easy prey for the Japanese. It had been virtually undefended. Its citizens, the majority of whom, as in Singapore, were loyal Chinese, had flocked into the streets when they heard the planes approaching, thinking they were the R.A.F. Mesmerised by shock when the bombs started to fall, they were killed in their hundreds. Many who survived the bombs succumbed to bullets, as the Japanese flew in low and fired their machine guns indiscriminately. Later, survivors discovered that Military Orders had been circulated secretly the night before to evacuate troops and Europeans immediately, as Penang was on the point of surrender.

As we listened to Meyer's words, we recalled the broadcast made by Churchill's special envoy in Singapore, Sir Alfred Duff Cooper. We had not realised the significance of his words until then. He had said that "It had been necessary to evacuate many of the civilian population", and towards the end of his speech, he had expressed thankfulness that so many "had been safely removed." It had not occurred to us that Duff Cooper had referred only to Europeans.

The Governor immediately became aware of this blundering misrepresentation of the truth. He called a meeting of representatives of the Asian communities and apologised in person. Had he not done so, irreparable harm might have been inflicted on racial harmony, more crucial to maintain now than ever before in the history of the Straits Settlements. Meyer also told us that, in their haste to carry out the evacuation, the Command had left behind an oil refinery, oil and petrol depots, scores of small craft and Penang Radio Station in full working order, undreamt of bonuses for the occupying and invading forces.

The full measure of our vulnerability was at last becoming apparent. We now realised that even if Singapore could hold out, the civilian population would face enormous dangers. We began seriously considering the evacuation of our womenfolk and children and waited daily for the government to announce its plans. We knew that in Hongkong, a successful scheme had been carried out and expected a similar one to be introduced for us. But we waited in vain. Ships were leaving the harbour half empty and the government maintained its silence. A few members of our community made up their minds and bought their passages to Bombay or Perth.

Then, in early January 1942, the raids began again and with increased ferocity. Now, daylight brought no respite. At 10 a.m., with devastating regularity and accuracy, the bombs were unloaded onto their targets. The strict attacking formation of the planes was rarely broken up by allied interception. The R.A.F. was hampered by their aircraft, the cumbersome obsolescent *Buffaloes*, known to us as *peanut specials*.

As the days wore on, we became more fatalistic and did not always take shelter. I remember the strange fascination of watching aerial combat. It was as if we were watching the graceful movement of birds until the sky lit up with a terrible glow and we were jerked back to the awful reality of death and destruction. In the Waterloo Street area, Hannah Moses, Maurice Ezekiel, Joseph Elias and Albert Deborah were killed. This time, we were able to recover their bodies and we gave them proper burial.

Queues outside the offices of shipping agents lengthened daily with each new influx of refugees. The government intervened, at last, but only to announce that in the interest of safety, all passages were to be booked at the P & O office, which was moved from Collyer Quay to the manager's re-

sidence in Cluny Road. That was all. Early on the morning of 30 January, Gladys and Ivor arrived home exhausted and dishevelled after night duty with the M.A.S. They were just on the point of snatching an hour's rest before going to work, when a phone call from a friend forewarned us that at last evacuation was to be made official. He urged us to secure passages immediately. We felt as if a burden had been taken away from us.

Dorothy and Ivor drove off to the Australian Immigration office for permits. Dorothy filled in the forms and handed them to the official. Just as he was handing her the permits, Ivor came up to the desk. "Is this your brother?" he asked. "Are the rest of the family as dark as he is?" It happens that Dorothy is the fairest in the family, while the rest of us are in various shades of brown. The permits were withheld on grounds of colour. Dorothy and Ivor were speechless before this lack of compassion and unforgivable act of discrimination. But time was precious and they could not waste it in a vain attempt to change Australian Immigration laws. They went straight to the P & O office and managed to get passes for embarkation.

They returned to the flat to prepare for departure. With a single suit case, £10 sterling and a few jewels of modest value, they were ready to leave. Ivor and I took the womenfolk to the wharf. We learnt that troops had just disembarked from the *West Point* and that the captain, on his own initiative, was taking women and children aboard without passes. When Ivor heard this, he rushed off to fetch our cousins, Meda Simon and her daughters, Emma and Renee. Hilda Cohen and her baby son, Meyer, Meda Winser (nee Ellison) and Esme Nathan were already on board. The ship was bound for Ceylon. Farewells were short. Within hours of our leave-taking, the rumour was spreading that the Japanese had sunk the ship. That was the last we heard of the *West Point* until 1945. We lived with the dread, but not the certainty. So hope remained.

Chapter Eleven:

The last post

"Feel the tribulations of the individual and of the multitude and implore the Almighty to ease their burden."

— Nachman of Brazlav, Chasidic Rabbi, 1772-1811.

During the last days of January 1942, across the 1,100-yard causeway linking Singapore with mainland Malaya, came 30,000 allied troops retreating before the Japanese. The enemies were at our gates; they had reached Johor Baru and were within forty miles of our homes. Despite the reiterated assurances of the government that the enemy could only attempt a landing on the well-fortified southern shores, we were now full of foreboding. The news had reached us that the northern shores facing Johor had been left almost without defences.

On Saturday, 31 January, at 8.15 am, the Command played its last trump — the order went out to breach the causeway. Water began gushing through a sixty-foot wide gap. The Governor addressed the people and warned of grim days ahead. The breaching of the causeway would give us only a brief respite in which to recoup our strength and prepare to meet the enemy face to face. He asked us to remain calm and united. There were food supplies stored in the two large cinemas, the Capitol and the Pavilion, cattle had been imported from Bali, two years' medical supplies would be available and our three reservoirs could provide 17 million gallons of water a day, more than sufficient to meet our needs even with a population swollen to more than a million. Other countries, he reminded us, had faced the ordeal with determination. He had confidence that his people would be equal to the needs of the hour. We listened. I doubt if any of us mustered a great deal of solace from his words.

A portent of imminent defeat came in an unexpected way. My doctor's clerk came and requested that we settle our account. At the same time, *chits*, the time-honoured form of credit given to customers in bars, clubs and shops by the

trusting owners became unacceptable. Only the Allies' imminent surrender could have produced such a complete turn-about.

Meyer Nathan came to say good-bye. On his last reconnaissance mission in Johor, he had seen fires around the airfield. Thinking it had been bombed, he nose-dived into a ditch outside the perimeter only to discover later that the fires he had seen were blazing oil dumps. The order had been issued to destroy all equipment and evacuate the base. Worse, the much vaunted Naval Base at Seletar was also deserted. The Malayan Air Force had orders to fly their flimsy Tiger Moths to Sumatra, which the Allies still hoped to hold. Fervently we wished him "God speed".

The days that followed had the inexplicable confusion of a nightmare. They were full of contrasts and incongruities. While bodies of bombed victims began to rot in the stifling heat and typhus became a threat, the Goodwood Hotel continued to advertise "for visitors and tourists". While the army was demanding a rush job to issue new bank notes, Jacob Ephraim, of the town cleansing department, witnessed the demise of five million dollars in notes in the incinerators.

When the Free French ship, the *Felix Roussel*, was waiting for its quota of evacuees to get through the traffic and bombs, relatives who had managed to come aboard to say goodbye enjoyed free drinks in the bar, as they had always done in peace time. While waiting, it was bombed three times and was unable to take on provisions, but eventually, it left the harbour and sailed safely for Bombay.

As the Colonial Secretary's residence in the grounds of the Government House shuddered under the impact of a direct hit, the administrative staff dived under the dining room table, while "the boy" continued polishing the glasses and laying the table for a formal luncheon. While many businesses collapsed, Change Alley's sales soared as soldiers spent all their money on souvenirs. Luxury items were no longer champagne and caviar, but salt, ginger beer and sardines.

The Ziegfield Girl was screened to packed houses at the cinema and one of the "Worlds" (amusement parks) was still in business and attracted throngs of visitors. Bookshops were amazed that their sale of *serious* books trebled. As planters' wives from Malaya queued at the office of *P & O* in pitiful disarray, Raffles Place suddenly became a blaze of colour, as if a host of giant butterflies had been released as children,

dressed in bright new clothes, the gift of Robinson's manager, filled the sun-baked square. It was the same firm that initiated credit so that no one was turned away for lack of funds. Customers were merely asked to sign I.O.Us.

Queues could now be seen in unlikely places. Outside the veterinary surgeries, owners with masked expressions were lining up to hand over their pets for the last time. At the General Hospital, as well as the harrowing procession of the wounded and the stretcher bearers, there were queues of people carrying babies or holding hands of children, who had been orphaned by the bombing.

Dr Cicely Williams saved scores of babies and continued to devote herself to "her children" throughout the siege. She became a world-renowned paediatrician in the post war years and in 1968, she received the Joseph Goldberger award for her work in nutrition. Now in her late eighties, she travels the world, bringing help and advice wherever it is most needed.

In the midst of the daily toll of tragic events, two joyful occasions, involving fellow Jews, were celebrated. One was the marriage of Helen, the daughter of Zeke and Dinah Elias, to Raymond Tax in the Maghain Aboth Synagogue. The other, in a very different setting, was the wedding of Dr Philip Bloom to Freddie, a young American journalist. Philip, the son of the President of the Durban Hebrew Congregation, was practising as a gynaecologist in the United Kingdom when war broke out in 1939. He immediately volunteered for full-time war service and was commissioned into the Royal Army Medical Corps. In December 1939, he was sent to Singapore to take up the post of Gynaecologist and Families' Specialist, Malaya Command, with the rank of major. When the Japanese invaded Malaya, the service families were gradually evacuated and Philip was posted to the General Hospital as a Medical Officer commanding all service casualties.

It was at this time that Jimmy Glover introduced Philip to Freddie. She had been married, for a tragically short period, to an officer in the Indian Army who had been transferred to Penang. Through a visit to Meyer Grand's shop to have her earring fixed, she and Meyer became close friends. Her husband's death led Freddie to leave Penang and return to Singapore. She began working on the staff of the English newspaper, Malayan Tribune, but the Japanese advance brought that to an end.

Meanwhile, she and Philip had become inseparable. He presented her with an ultimatum, either to leave Singapore or

marry him. She chose marriage and on 6 February, Philip went in search of a ring. In more peaceful times, he had made friends with an Indian street vendor with whom he used to bargain and chat and now he found him at his usual spot. But enemy action had robbed him of most of his stock. He had only one ring left, a star sapphire which Philip gladly bought. The ring remains one of their most precious possessions today.

The wedding took place in the hospital and among their "guests" were survivors from the troopship, *Empress of Asia*, destroyed by bombs that very morning. Clutching towels round their waists with one hand, with the other, they toasted the bride and groom with mugs of tea.

From 7 February, we suffered a new terror. From Johor, with the help of balloonists, the Japanese artillery kept up a continuous barrage of fire aimed at Fort Canning to the rear of Amber Mansions. The shells came so close that after each shelling, we were amazed to find the building still standing. A giant billboard with the words, JOIN THE ARMY AND SEE THE WORLD, survived in the midst of the wreckage in Orchard Road.

Pathetic processions of refugees began to fill the streets. Stragglers, from the outskirts appeared carrying their few possessions as best they could — in bundles, in hand-carts, even in coffins. From 8 February, Japanese landings brought the end nearer. But communiques still spoke of offensive actions taken "to mop up the enemy." Then reports became fewer. News bulletins were posted up, from time to time, on the walls of the Cathay Cinema and the Supreme Court and crowds braved bombs and shells to find out the worst.

I was at the RAF headquarters in Sime Road, when the order came to dismantle electrical and telegraphic equipment and despatch as much as possible to Sumatra, while the rest was buried or destroyed. General demolition work started as the fighting drew nearer. Young soldiers, caught in a rear-guard action in Tanglin, collapsed on our doorsteps helpless and dazed but amazingly cheerful. The inner yard of Amber Mansions became a haven for them, especially at night. The tenants gave them food, drink and help. In the early morning, after a night's rest, they struggled back to the fighting. On 12 February, one of them called out to me, "If we don't return tonight, the war is over."

We heard a rumour that out of a force of 4,000 Indian soldiers, only 800 had survived. Other reliable sources were

soon to prove that a general massacre was taking place. Yet I witnessed a British officer rebuking two haggard Indian soldiers for not saluting him! Bystanders, shocked by his behaviour, abused him roundly!

On 13 February, the black night was pierced by brilliant red and blue flashes far to the north, the flamboyant signal that the 18th Chrysanthemum Division had crossed the repaired causeway and were entering Singapore. That day, the water mains received a direct hit. With gallons of water running to waste, hospital doctors and nurses had to use soda water for washing. Many of us tried digging for water. I managed to dig through two feet of reclaimed land before hitting rock and swamp. McRitchie Reservoir fell to the enemy and our last hope of maintaining a water supply had gone.

On 15 February, a sudden quiet fell on the city. The shelling and the bombing had ceased. On his way back to Government House, the Governor's car had a puncture outside our shop. While it was being mended, I asked him, "Will the Jews be singled out for special humiliation?" He answered, "Accede to all their requests. Obey all orders. You must realise that the Japanese are members of the Axis."

In the silence, a cry was suddenly heard, "The river's on fire!" Blazing oil, floating up the river, set sampans, junks and, finally, the steel girders of the Pulau Saigon Bridge ablaze.

In the General Hospital grounds, there were terrifying screams, "The Japs are coming!" With fixed bayonets, the Japanese soldiers charged into the wards. All the patients who could move were ordered to leave. The hospital was to be vacated and all the patients were to be transferred to the Mental hospital, twenty miles away, later renamed the *Miyako* Hospital.

While the first Japanese orders were being obeyed and the first Japanese names coming into use, British soldiers were walking aimlessly through the emptying streets. Then, someone started singing, "There'll always be an England."

Chapter Twelve

Occupation

"And now I know that first and foremost I shall require courage and cheerfulness."

— The Diary of Anne Frank, 1942–44.

"I speak to you all under the shadow of a far-reaching military defeat. It is a British and Imperial defeat. Singapore has fallen. All the Malay peninsular has been over-run. This is one of those moments when the British nation . . . can draw from the heat of misfortune, the vital impulse of victory."

With these words relayed to the world on 16 February 1942, Churchill sought to bring some vestige of hope to the defeated and the threatened. As we listened in Singapore, we felt only numbness.

The day before, Singapore had witnessed the tragi-comedy of surrender. In the morning, Hugh Fraser, the acting Colonial Secretary and his chief Administrative officer, Brigadier Newbiggin, were sent by General Percival to Bukit Timah Road to meet the Japanese High Command in the hope of arranging a truce. It was naively believed that the victors would offer the vanquished honourable terms of capitulation. The two men picked their way through the mined area of Adam Road and at the appointed place, they waited.

Eventually, a group of Japanese soldiers arrived. They soon made it clear that they had come to enjoy their hour of triumph. They produced their cameras and demanded that the British emissaries be photographed with them. For hours, Fraser and Newbiggin stood in the steaming heat, while groups of exultant Japanese arranged and re-arranged group photos. At last they had used up the films and only then did the soldiers inform their superiors that the British emissaries had arrived. The reply came: Yamashita would treat only with General Percival.

Accompanied by three staff officers, General Percival was marched under enemy escort to their headquarters at the Ford Motor Factory in Bukit Timah. There, Yamashita refused to agree to anything less than unconditional surrender. The time appointed was 8.30 pm. The disarming of the Allied

troops was to take place immediately. Only one hundred were allowed to remain under arms. On the following day, 16 February, the victors would enter the city.

We had viewed their entry from our balcony in Amber Mansions. What we saw was a ragged procession of worn out, unkempt figures scarcely recognisable as soldiers, let alone victors, more indeed in keeping with the stories circulating *before* the Japanese victories in North Malaya! These were the opponents, the supermen, who had forced us to capitulate.

At the rear were two tanks with heavy guns and seven smaller tanks. We were to become very familiar with this armoury. As the tanks made their appearance, disappearance and reappearance in the first days of the Occupation, I was reminded of a school production of Julius Caesar where the same few schoolboys, masquerading as a full army, marched boldly onstage, then off, dashed around behind the filmsy back-cloth to reappear from the other wings.

The sense of unreality persisted and probably helped us to adjust, almost imperceptibly, to the change in our lives. From what we ourselves saw and from what we heard from witnesses, an ominous pattern emerged. We saw misery stalking the streets as groups of peasants, who had fled from their kampongs as the enemy approached, now clutched their few possessions and sought shelter. We heard how others had desperately jumped aboard small craft, leaving the island under gunfire, in the faint hope of reaching one of the neighbouring islands.

We listened to the official Japanese broadcasters urging us, in their smooth tones, to carry on with our normal life, reminding us that British officials were remaining in their posts and that business was carrying on as usual. Of course, there would have to be the slight inconvenience of a curfew from 6.00 pm to 6.00 am but this, we were informed, was for our own safety. We were also asked "as a courtesy" to bow to every Japanese sentry on duty. We ventured out into the streets again to observe this "normality" for ourselves. In the almost empty streets, we soon experienced the distasteful necessity of bowing to our conquerors. At almost every junction and bridge were posted sentries, their stocky figures almost dwarfed by their bayonets.

Suddenly, nausea overtook us as we were confronted with the gruesome spectacle of heads, still dripping with blood and stuck on posts, the heads of Chinese severed from their

bodies by the two-handed samurai sword, as a warning to would-be looters and pilferers. We turned for "home!" Before long, we heard the sound of shots and learned that people were being rounded up at random to be killed or, at the whim of the officers in charge, reprieved on the very brink of the freshly dug grave. But a Chinese, who bore the tattoo of five dots on the back of his hand could expect no reprieve: he was a committed communist, the arch-enemy of our new "masters".

Before the first week of Occupation was over, I was asked to go with some Rover Scouts and a party of M.A.S. to the Alexandra Military Hospital in Pasir Panjang to help "clean the wards". What we found defied description. The Japanese had perpetrated a monstrous crime — the mindless bayonetting of patients, nurses and doctors. It was our task to help collect and place the bodies in military trucks for burial. We were sent on the same mission to many other places. Malacca Street and Raffles Place were scenes of exceptional carnage.

After these experiences, evacuating the General Hospital was slightly less harrowing. We had twenty-four hours to evacuate a thousand patients, some seriously ill. Our instructions were to leave behind the drugs and medical equipment for the wounded Japanese, but nurses and doctors managed to smuggle out a small quantity. To their foresight and courage many owed their lives in the ensuing months. Convoys of ambulances took civilian patients to the Miyako Hospital while the mental patients were despatched to an island nearby. Among the patients we helped to move was a young Jewish woman, Thelma Guston, who had only recently undergone major surgery. She survived the ordeal.

Nearly two thousand service casualties had to contend with even greater suffering. They were put in temporary centres at the Cricket Club, Victoria Memorial Hall, Singapore Club and Fullerton Building. From the latter, the sick and wounded were later sent to Changi jail, commandeered for a prisoner-of-war internment camp. By the end of February, doctors and nurses were already interned there and among them, the newly-married couple, Dr Philip Bloom and his wife, Freddie.

The Japanese ordered all Chinese and Eurasian members of the Singapore Volunteer Corps to assemble outside the YMCA. The poor response angered the Japanese. They reissued the command ordering those who had assembled to reappear on the following day, bringing with them their

defaulting comrades. On that day, the first batch were dismissed. But the *second* batch, among whom was a Chinese mechanic on my staff, were never seen alive again.

We gradually became inured to the first stages of the loss of freedom. The Japanese stopped the printing of all English language newspapers save one which they renamed the *Shonan Shimbun* (Singapore Times). We failed to read this at our peril. Here were printed our daily orders and directives, always ending with the terse reminder that penalties for disobeying or failure to carry out duties, were severe.

We were told to hand over all radio receivers to a special centre. All my stock was confiscated, but my personal radio was returned to me with the short wave circuit disconnected and sealed. Now we had the privilege of listening only to Nipponese news and propaganda.

Cars were taken away and public transport ceased to exist. Trishaws still plied their trade and for a short time, I still had my van which I used to remove the rest of my goods when my premises were requisitioned. I stored them in a house in Sophia Road which was rented and occupied originally by a Japanese lady now interned in India by the British. I need not have bothered for I never saw any of those goods again.

Two events lifted our spirits from the depression that was beginning to weigh heavily upon us. For their own purpose, the *Nippon* High Command (the Japanese objected to being referred to by any other name!) had speedily restored the Malaya-Singapore railway service. On the first train from Penang, came three members of the Jewish community on a three-day permit. One of them was Isaac Manasseh who returned to Singapore after the war and helped build up a Jewish youth movement. What they told us of life in Penang was encouraging. So far, they had suffered no harassment and they were hopeful that they would be allowed to live their lives in comparative freedom. They transmitted their hope to us.

The other event was the discovery that my good friend, David Tweg, was safe. When the invasion began, he was teaching in Upper Serangoon and had found himself behind enemy lines. We placed a message for him in the *Shonan Shimbun* (Singapore Times). He saw it and immediately began the twelve-mile journey by bicycle. He passed scenes of horror and misery, skirted patrol cars, dismounted at road blocks and bowed meticulously to every sentry. About five miles from the city, a sentry confiscated his bicycle and he

completed the rest of the journey on foot. Our reunion was emotional.

While the Chinese were being singled out for vengeance, the Indians and Malays were being wooed by the Nippons as the co-partners in the prosperity that would come with the victorious peace. For the Europeans, there were other plans.

Tuesday, 17 February 1942, an order was issued to the citizens of all nations at war with Japan to assemble on the Padang in preparation for internment. They were to bring clothes for ten days and were assured that the *Victorious Nipponese* would observe International Law and protect internees. The vast majority of the 1,279 men, women and children who assembled that day were expatriates, among them some Jews. A few members of our community also presented themselves, Bill and Shooker Abbott, M Lelah and Max Woeltz. For no apparent reason, Max was dismissed but by a tragic irony, he was arrested shortly afterwards and was never seen again. Ralph Bridges was there and determined to share his fate, Gracie accompanied him.

They were marched off to camps in the Joo Chiat area. On the way, crowds gathered to jeer at them but here and there people darted out to offer a little food and drink to the elderly and the weak, at the risk of their own lives. Not all Japanese showed hostility. A British official who was still at liberty, was being driven around the island by a Japanese officer, Lieutenant Nakani, when they passed a column of internees in East Coast Road. The Lieutenant backed his car away and, turning to his passenger, said: "I'm very sorry!"

The first weeks of internment were spent in appalling conditions and then, when the internees had begun to bring a little order into the chaos, they were ordered to pack their baggage for the seven-mile trek to Changi jail. The women showed tremendous grit and marched into camp singing "There'll always be an England."

Those of us who remained outside wondered whether we would not be safer behind bars. However, the choice was not ours to make and so we faced each new day with foreboding and dealt with each situation as it arose. On 2 March, the comparative calm of the last days of February ended for me. I had moved from our flat in Amber Mansion, to join Sassoon Sadka in "Pollux", the twin to "Castor", the family home of Lee Kuan Yew, in Oxley Road. My brother, Ivor, remained in the flat with a few friends.

In the evening of 1 March, Zeke Elias, Max Woeltz and

Ivor set out from the flat to visit us at "Pollux". On the way, a car drove past and one of the passengers waved to Zeke. He recognised him as a former business associate, Mr Nagai of *Mitsubi-Bussan Kaisha*. The three friends were surprised to see that the car turned round, came back in their direction and drew up beside them. With Mr Nagai, now in the uniform of a captain, acting as an interpreter, the officer, Colonel Hayashi, demanded to see their passes. They tried to explain that no passes had been issued but the Colonel, in a fury, lunged out with his riding whip striking them on their shoulders. Poor Zeke got the worst of it. They were told to get their passes immediately from the *Kempetai* (the secret police) headquarters in the former YMCA building.

The three men went directly there only to be told curtly, that it was too late and that they should return the next morning. They were at the desk by 8.30 am. This time, they were sent on a wild goose chase from one building to another, until they were finally redirected to the YMCA to be despatched once more without passes. They got back to Amber Mansions at 3.30 pm almost too weary to breathe.

Soon after, I went to see them and was still there when a Japanese officer arrived to summon them back to the YMCA. We thought that the whole unpleasant charade would now be over and I waved them off cheerfully. I had no presentiment that this was to be our last meeting. I called at the flat the next day and found that they had not returned. Zeke's brother, Solly, told me he had been worried that they would not be given anything to eat and had sent food to the YMCA. But Colonel Hayashi had not allowed the food to be delivered, shouting at the *tambi*, "We look after the people in our custody! The three men are well."

During the days that followed, we went from police station to police station, from prison to prison and to every interrogation centre known to us. I was in Anson Road, after a fruitless visit to the Sailors' Home, now an interrogation centre, when I witnessed one of these bizarre incidents thrown up by war and occupation. As I looked on helplessly while Japanese guards belaboured British prisoners-of-war in the dockyard with their rifle butts, I saw German soldiers who had just disembarked angrily intervene on behalf of the British!

The prisoners-of-war had been given a momentary reprieve. But for me, there was none. We heard now that Mamuro Shinozaki had been appointed Welfare Officer. I wrote to him to investigate on our behalf. I might have saved

myself the trouble. The reply came, "We do not interfere with the work of the Military Police and the Kempetai."

A few days later, by a quirk of fate, I was summoned to repair the fans in the YMCA. My spirits rose as I felt sure that I would now have the chance to discover where the three friends were detained. But although I managed to visit every room in the building on the pretext of examining the electrical installations, I found no trace of them or of any other detainees. I finished my survey and repairs and reported to the Police Chief. He greeted me courteously and asked me my charges. Payment was my least concern, but I mumbled $25.00. He handed me $10.00 and I turned to leave. But he had not finished with me. I was recalled and told to sit down and join him over a glass of brandy.

Had my heart not been so full, the situation would have been comic as I very rarely drink and even the smallest amount of brandy can make me drunk. I knew I dared not refuse. My guardian angel must have been with me for the Chief rose and turned to get some biscuits before I had even raised the glass to my lips. I quickly poured the brandy into a flower pot which, luckily for me, was at my elbow. As he returned to his desk, I saw him looking at my empty glass with some astonishment. He offered me another drink. This time I felt it would not be discourteous to refuse and again, I rose to take my leave. Again, he called me back and asked if I had a car. I told him it had been requisitioned. He told me to wait and putting on his cap, he beckoned me to follow him.

He led the way to his car and told me to get in. To my surprise, we drove to the car dump at the Esplanade. He asked if I could identify my car among the hundreds there. I spotted my Morris right in the centre, but as I wanted no favours for myself from the Kempetai, I pointed out to my escort that it would be quite impossible to drive it out. "Buggaro!" (Bloody fool!) was his only comment. I suppose I was a "bloody fool", but for a different reason — I still did not give up hope of finding my brother alive.

Events in the next few weeks shook my faith, but did not extinguish it. First, we learned from their families of the disappearance of two young lads, Elias Albert and Elias Ezekiel. They had been stopped in Short Street by a Japanese driving a military lorry and were told to get in to show him the way. They did not return and enquiries threw no light on their whereabouts. Also, at this time, J.B. David was put under house arrest for no apparent reason. When he was released

later, it appeared his arrest had been connected with his investments in Malayan tin mines.

Random arrests continued. Abram Pinhas, Aaron Isaac and Charlie Ezekiel were the next victims. Aaron and Charlie were eventually released and, it was from them, we gained first-hand information about the treatment of detainees. The three were picked up in New Bridge Road and held in the interrogation centre in Anson Road. There, they were subjected to psychological torture. Questions were hurled at them, while a sword was brandished over their heads. During the silences, the interrogator pulled out a revolver and laid it on the desk in front of them. They heard the sound of shots fired and prisoners moaning. Eventually, Aaron saw Abram being given a cigarette by a Japanese officer and led away. A few minutes later, there was the sound of a shot. Aaron was later released. Abram was not seen again. His commercial empire collapsed during the war years, but he left a name well-respected in all circles — business, communal and social. Happily, his brother, Isaac, had escaped to Bombay. After the war, he returned to Singapore and eventually rebuilt Abram's business.

In Pollux, Sassoon and I had been joined by Moses Cohen, my cousins, E.J. Nathan and his son Arnold, David Tweg and Ernest David. Ernest was a most unusual character. He pursued whatever interested him with great singleness of mind and purpose. This served him well as an insurance salesman but it was his eccentricities that made him memorable and endearing. We had particular reason to be grateful for them in the months and years that followed for they often brought us relief from our moods of deep depression.

Ernest began the study of numerology in Calcutta where he had lived until a few years before the Occupation. He left Calcutta because his studies revealed that he would not meet with good fortune there; nor was his name propitious. After making complicated calculations, the name *Randal Adair* emerged with correct numerical values to ensure a bright future. So, Randal Adair he became. He began the study of astral projection and pursued it despite the disbelief and ridicule of his associates and friends. I think he felt only pity for his detractors, whom he considered too ignorant and lacking in faith to share the ultimate reward, the mastery over the mere material aspect of nature! His other obsession, at that time, was body-building which protected him well enough from physical attack, but it was no defence against the prac-

tical joker.

One evening, in Pollux, he retired early asking us not to disturb him as he was going to contact his mother in Calcutta. We knew the procedure: first, he studied his astrological predictions and then wrote a message. Placing it under his pillow, he concentrated on his astral projection and waited for a reply to materialise.

David Tweg decided to make sure a "materialisation" took place. He borrowed a pair of ladies' knickers and cautiously crept into Randal's room. He moved stealthily towards the bed where Randal lay quite still with his eyes closed and was just about to substitute the knickers for the message when Randal opened one eye! For a split second, David felt himself literally transfixed by its stare. Then, pandemonium broke out! We had great difficulty calming Randal down but, in the end, his inherent good nature prevailed. David survived and so did their friendship.

When I moved to Pollux, I still had my van. One morning I switched on the ignition and though the engine was working, the van refused to budge. I got out and found the chasis resting on bricks. Now, apart from a few personal tokens, our most important possession was the radio.

During February, we received two messages from friends, both delivered by unlikely go-betweens. The first was brought by a member of the Indian Independence Army at some risk to himself and was from David Marshall who was now a prisoner-of-war on the island. He asked me to do what I could for his mother who was living in the *Talmud Torah* where a few members of the community, including the Hazan and his family, had taken refuge.

The other message, conveyed by a Japanese airman, was from Surabaya. He brought us news of the safety of the Mussry family, who had sent greetings to friends and family in Singapore. We had had no word from Java since my return from there in December 1941. Since then, the Japanese had constantly reminded us of the glorious victories in Southeast Asia, giving them control of territories from the Philippines to Burma. This message allayed our worst fears.

There was no news of the refugees in India, but the chance came to relay a radio message to them through Kanapathy, my Indian *tamby* (office boy), who was granted certain concessions by the Japanese. He was willing to send a message for me for a dollar. Although we had no means of knowing whether the message had been received or even sent, for a

short space of time we felt less isolated.

On 16 March, the *Shonan Shimbun* issued an order to all Jews to muster outside the Orchard Road Police Station for registration the next day. That morning, we gathered quietly in the compound. I think we felt the inevitable had happened and soon we would know what was in store for us as *Jews*. Meanwhile we waited. We were free to move around and held whispered discussions. It was decided that we should have a spokesman. Spontaneously and unanimously, Moses Cohen was chosen and he agreed to take on this thankless and possibly dangerous responsibility. Still we waited. At last orders came to enter the station one at a time. We were each given a form to fill in with the usual details of name, date of birth, religion, domicile, race, age and address but we also had to give the whereabouts of the family. Then we were handed a white armband with a one inch red stripe on which our names, race and numbers were printed in Japanese in black ink. We were ordered to wear this armband at all times. Government employees were told to report for re-employment, we were all told to keep on working and then we were dismissed.

Wearing the armband produced some unexpected reactions. Chinese shopkeepers became very wary of us. To them armbands were symbols of enemy authority and they thought we were collaborators and spies. It was very hard to convince them that our armband merely proclaimed our status as *Jews*. Incidentally, no Jew collaborated with the Japanese.

I met with a very different reaction from a Japanese official. He stopped me in the street and examined my armband closely. "You what-ka?" he asked. I answered in as firm a voice as I could muster, "I am a Jew." To my astonishment, he grasped my hand and shook it energetically, smiling broadly. "Ah Jew!" he exclaimed. "Werry good! In the world three great Js — one Japan, two Julius Caesar, three Jew!" He let go of my hand as abruptly as he had seized it, turned on his heel and walked away, leaving me more confounded than ever by the unpredictibility of our Japanese masters.

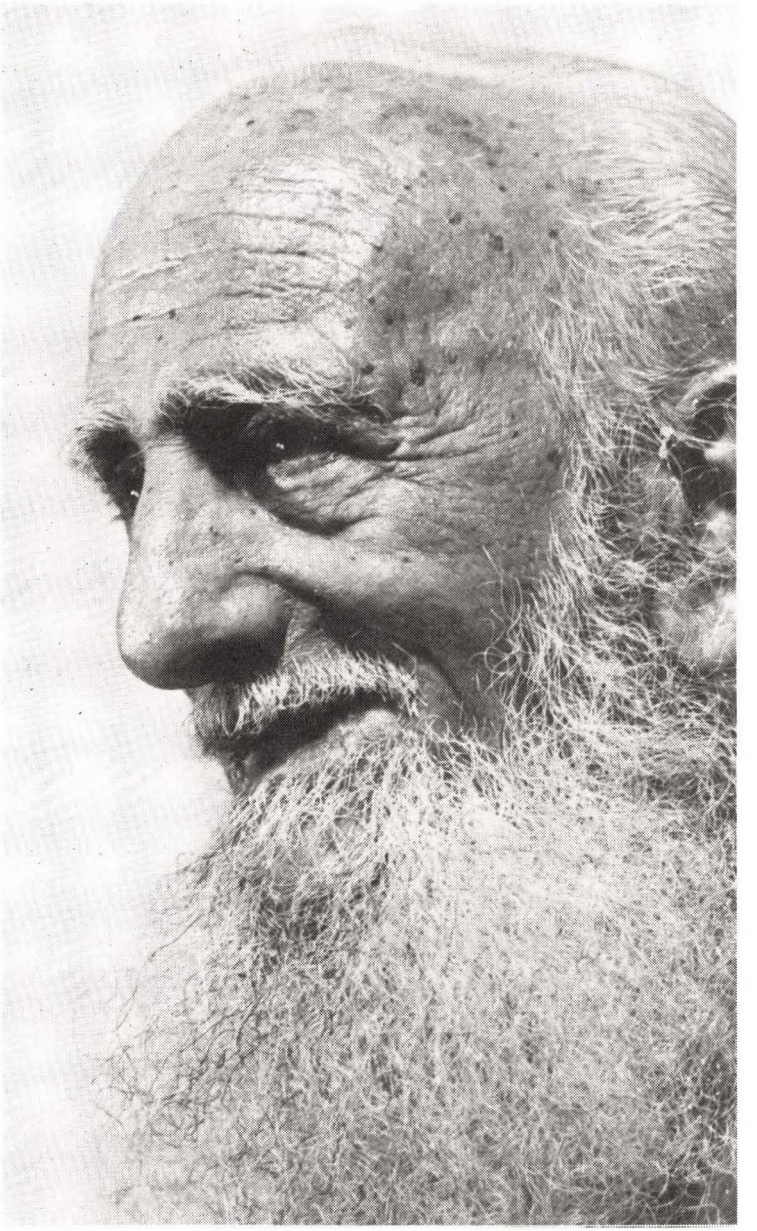
Many Jews were already reduced to living from hand-to-mouth and some had turned to hawking any goods available. A friend of ours managed to obtain some watches. One day, knowing a few words of Japanese, he sold a watch to a high ranking Japanese officer who believed he was getting a Rolex. That evening, the officer realised he had been tricked and had actually bought a *Japanese* replica instead of the genuine

article. He managed to trace the hawker and brought him in for interrogation. The hawker threw himself on the mercy of the officer, pleading with him on behalf of his starving wife and children. The officer not only released him, but drove him home in his car stopping on the way, to buy rice, sugar and tinned milk. He stayed long enough to see the family fed. The *chuzpa* of our friend amused us, but we could not help wondering how an ill-judged action might affect the whole community.

During these fateful days, the synagogue retained its significant role in our lives. News was exchanged there and collections were made whenever possible to help those who had no means of support. We prayed with increased fervour for the safety of our loved ones. Most of us had had no news of our families since their evacuation. We did not know if they had survived, but we prayed. We prayed, too, that we would remain free to worship and for the moment we had good reason to believe that we would. As soon as the Japanese Military Administration had been established, Yamashita had called a meeting of all community leaders at the Adelphi Hotel. The Minister for Religious Affairs had asked Moses Cohen to prepare a paper on Judaism. It was well-received and the minister asked to be invited to a service in the synagogue. As *Shvo'oth* (Pentecost) was only a few days away, he was asked to attend on the first day of the festival. To our great relief, the service conducted by Moses and Sion Daniel met with his commendation and he assured us of his complete co-operation in all religious matters.

We did not need his help often, but on the occasion when we required it, he kept his promise. When we needed an ethrog for the observance of *Succoth* (Tabernacles), Moses asked permission to go to Belle Vue already requisitioned by the Japanese, and look for the tree Sir Manasseh Meyer had planted in his garden. Permission was granted. Sadly, Moses found the tree had withered and the house itself was scarcely recognisable. It had been turned into a Buddhist Temple. The room where Manasseh had pursued his studies of the *Gemorrah* (Commentaries) had become a repository for the ashes of the Japanese war dead. But his Indian bearer had been allowed to remain as care-taker, and keep a few cows from which he supplied us with milk, a great luxury in those days, when food stocks were running low.

It was not long before we had to arrange the burial of Abdullah Shooker, the first Jew to die during the Occupation.



David Deborah.
Minyan Man of the Maghain Aboth Synagogue.



Sholomo Raphael.
Beadle of the Maghain Aboth Synagogue.



Said Solomon.
A Devout Yemenite Jew.

He had been turned out of his home at No 1, Oxley Road and died at the age of 93 in the *Talmud Torah*. We were astonished, and somewhat moved also, when the Mayor, Shanusaki, came to pay his last respects to Abdullah, his neighbour in pre-war days.

It was at this time that, quite by chance, as I was tuning the radio on long wave, I heard the announcement, "This is the voice of Air India calling." I realised that I had tuned into the British network in India and would be able to hear truthful reports of the progress of the war which, however depressing, would be better than the daily Japanese bulletins announcing victory after victory and the sinking of more ships and aircraft than the Allies could possibly have possessed! We listened with headphones only, well aware of the penalties that we might incur. The enemy was close at hand. A branch of the secret police, known for some reason as *gendarmes*, was housed in a United Engineers flat in River Valley Road and there was also an interrogation centre at No 3, Oxley Road. We passed it at least twice a day, with eyes averted, as punishment was inflicted on victims in the open compound. But one day, I recognised the woman supervisor on duty as an acquaintance who had been a resident in Singapore for several years. Now she was standing by, giving orders for the torture of a Chinese. Strapped to a ladder, he was suspended upside down on a scaffold and then his head was repeatedly immersed in water. At night, our sleep was disturbed not only by our own nightmares but even more, by the yells and screams of the prisoners.

The sounds that came from the house at the corner of Eber Road were quite different. Here were housed the Japanese "comfort women", who lined up every morning, faced East and intoned prayers for the *Tenno Haika* (the Emperor). They were brought out for the troops, to prevent a repetition of the loathsome events that were enacted in the rape of Canton during the Sino-Japanese war. The Chinese, in revenge, had provided women riddled with venereal disease.

One evening after dinner, we were sitting on the verandah playing cards when two Japanese arrived at our doorsteps. They spoke very good English and showed interest in the game we were playing. They asked if we would teach them chess and bridge and lend them our books. They said they were admirers of English Literature, their special favourites being Shakespeare and Scott. Their behaviour was almost too correct and aroused our suspicion.

Their visits became more frequent and our concern increased when they began to question us about our fellow Jews. They wanted to know if there were rich Jews living in Singapore, how the Jews were managing to earn a living and what type of work interested them. We left it to Moses to reply, trusting that his mild manner and honest expression would have the right effect. Moses told them that the community could boast of no rich members, most having little money, barely enough to buy necessities. "How then do you account for so many Jews spending so much time and money in the Great World?" Thinking carefully, Moses said: "I doubt whether you will find many of our people there." Then, came the retort, "Come with us tomorrow night and see for yourself." Next day, we went round warning as many of our associates as possible to stay away from the World. That night our visitors came to take Moses there. Despite our warnings, he saw a number of Jews. "Now, see for yourself. Where do they get their money?" smirked one of his escorts. Moses suggested that they were squandering their money instead of using it wisely and assured the Japanese that he would reprimand them. Though there were no repercussions from this incident, it increased our misgivings.

I did not give up the search for Ivor, Zeke and Max. Eventually, I was sent to one of the Kempetai's centres in the government offices building, formerly the Treasury Department in Empress Place. There, seated at the desk, was one of the Japanese who had paid us so many unwelcome calls. Our suspicions had been correct. My anxiety increased but I had come on a matter of grave importance and I was not to be deterred. I stated my purpose and showed him photographs. He took a file and flicked through it. Then, looking up at me and with a voice scarcely above a whisper, he warned me to go home and make no more enquiries if I valued my freedom. I could do no more. Nothing ever came to light about their disappearance.

Another caller was a Japanese naval officer who had found out that I was an electrical and radio engineer. He ordered me to go with him to remove a transmitter from a damaged ship anchored in the roads. I was then to take it to his factory and repair it. I soon found that certain components were needed which I knew were almost unobtainable even before the Occupation and would be impossible to get now. If I did not make the transmitter operational, I would be blamed. So, each day I turned up for work, wondering how long before he

called my bluff. One evening, he called at Pollux at the same time as the Kempetai officials. He was obviously ill at ease and quickly took his leave. The next day when I turned up at the factory, he paid me my wages and told me not to come again. My suspicions were confirmed. I had thought he was engaged in illegal transactions, salvaging whatever he could to resell to the Japanese High Command at a handsome profit and seeing the Kempetai at our home, he no doubt thought they had come to me for information.

Freddie Isaacs was managing the family firm of opticians, M Ezekiel & Sons. Business was naturally very slack and so he had plenty of time to attend to each client. He became aware that a certain Eurasian lady was paying him an unusual number of visits and was asking a great many questions. Growing more and more uneasy, he tried to treat her with all courtesy while answering as briefly as he could. Then, the Kempetai pounced on him. He was marched off to the interrogation centre at No 3 Oxley Road. No specific charge was made against him, but his interrogators seemed convinced that he was withholding information.

They kept him prisoner for three weeks. His wife went to the centre every day to plead for his release. It was, probably, due to her courage and persistence that they eventally let him go. Freddie's temperament helped him to recover quickly from the ordeal. While imprisoned, he was given the impression that he had been quite wrong about the Eurasian lady being a spy for the Japanese: rather, they suspected that *she* was spying for the Allies!

During the early days of the Occupation, prison discipline inevitably broke down and many prisoners managed to escape. The gruesome measures taken by the Japanese against crime and lawlessness, did not stamp out crime and it was a gang of violent criminals who caused the death of a member of our community.

Cecil and Rupert Reuben had moved to their office in De Souza Street in the city centre. This move was partly to safeguard their business and, partly because a pet dog, which they had promised to look after for a friend, had annoyed the neighbours with its persistent barking! One afternoon, Cecil refused to go out with his brother because he did not want to leave the dog alone. As he sat at his desk, a gang of armed Chinese broke into the office and demanded his keys. The dog began barking and one of the men turned round and shot him. Cecil died of stab and gunshot wounds moments later.

Within two weeks, four members of the gang had been caught. They confessed and were executed in Pickering Road Jail in Chinatown.

Another incident, involving the police, had a very different outcome. A Malay member of the civilian police force called on me. I recognised him as the former patrol leader of a Malay scout troop who was an old classmate of mine. I welcomed him as an old friend, but I was soon aware that his visit was not purely out of friendship. I decided to tax him with my suspicions. Shamefacedly, he admitted that he had been ordered to enquire about a certain Dutch lady we were supposed to be harbouring. Controlling myself as best I could, I asked him to follow me into the bedroom. "There is your Dutch lady," I said, pointing to the long pillow known in the tropics as "*a dutch wife*". "That is the only Dutch lady we have in the house!" For a moment, he lost his composure but soon recovered and started a new line of questioning. Why had Reverend Adams and Bishop Wilson called on us? "To give us spiritual help," I replied. He left soon afterwards.

The first year of Occupation passed. We had been left to carry on our lives with comparatively little interference, but we were always on the alert, on our guard, avoiding serious discussions even when there was the remotest chance of being overheard. We moved away when groups gathered in the streets and automatically bowed to our "conquerors". We pleaded ignorance of world news, professing to know only what we were told officially about the progress of the war. We grew used to tightening our belts, living from day to day, and snatching any harmless relief from tension and boredom that presented itself. All this stood us in good stead for the trials that were to come.

On 5 April 1943, over one hundred Jews were interned.

Chapter Thirteen:

The internment

"Let him give his cheek to him that smiteth him!"

— Lamentations, Chapter III, Verse 30.

During the past months of uncertainty, we thought internment might bring us a measure of stability but when the time came, we found ourselves unprepared. We were woken early in the morning of 5 April 1943 by a terrible clamour. Within seconds, we found ourselves held at bayonet point. The doors had been broken down. Soldiers yelled at us and thrust leaflets into our hands informing us we were now classed as enemy subjects and were to be interned.

We could take with us a few personal belongings and so, we stuffed whatever we could into pockets and a small bag. Still scarcely aware of what was happening, we were soon trundling through the quiet streets in an open truck. We lurched to a stop outside the homes of other Jews and helped them clamber onto the truck with their hastily packed parcels and packages which often burst open, scattering their few treasures into the street or onto the floor.

We noticed that women and children were pushed aside and the guards, shouting in Malay, said that they were to remain behind and might be collected later. We heard a guard saying that it might be only a short time before we would be released. Our minds were in a turmoil as we were taken on our way. We realised that we were fortunate to have transport. Soon five truckloads, carrying about one hundred Jews, were headed for Changi jail. The rest, about four hundred and fifty men, women and children, were for the moment left free — free to agonise over the fate of their families and friends, to find enough food to survive, to extricate themselves from the quicksands of Occupation and free to be thankful each morning that they had survived another day.

It was still early when the trucks dropped us in the yard of the jail and the gates were closed behind us. We hauled our belongings from the trucks and stood in mute groups, waiting. Eventually, our spirits rose when we saw coming

towards us not Japanese guards, but civilian internees. They introduced themselves as the Camp Representatives and told us they would show us to our quarters. On our way through the jail, we exchanged news. We were warned that our quarters would be very restricted as the jail already had 2,500 internees instead of the 400 criminals for which, in 1930, it had been built.

We had been allotted a large shed which had previously served as a rice store. Each of us would have a patch, about seven foot by three foot. We were warned that our shed was adjacent to the women's quarters which the Japanese had declared "out of bounds". Some of us found ourselves smiling at the situation this conjured up. It reminded me of the old comics where the boys' and girls' schools were kept strictly separated by ludicrous caricatures of teachers. But my fantasy was quickly dispelled as we were gravely reminded of the severe penalties which might be imposed not only on the individual but on the whole camp for infringement of orders.

The representatives left us to take stock of our surroundings and to clean our quarters soon to become known as *Aldgate*. The store was a typical godown: a solid five foot brick wall formed the main structure with expanded metal, most of it covered with hessian cloth, linking the wall with the flat roof. The hessian was extremely thick and was designed, no doubt, to prevent our catching the slightest glimpse of the women exercising in their quarters. Daylight filtered through the uncovered area.

We had just finished arranging our mattresses and belongings when the representatives returned to give us further advice and answer our questions. Now, the story of their first year of internment began to emerge. I should like to pay tribute to the efforts and ingenuity of these first internees. They had begun their ordeal in almost intolerable conditions, described in detail, in a report written in 1945 by S.N. King, A.N. Alexander and W.L. Blythe, for a Commission of Enquiry in Singapore (See page 154).

Fortunately, among them were specialists in almost every field, from cooks and plumbers to doctors and administrators. During that year, they had used their skills to reduce the squalor and make life bearable and even, incredible as it might seem, enjoyable from time to time. They were a mixed bag of humanity as we ourselves were. In the following two-and-a-half years, there were inevitably some clashes of temperament and some unpleasant incidents. The blame fell

mainly on a few arrogant and narrow-minded men, who spread ill-founded and often slanderous rumours and on some, who were weak-minded, and only too eager to find scapegoats for their own predicaments. But the majority were decent, many heroic and a few saintly.

It was a relief to hear that the Japanese rarely entered our living quarters. There were no official roll-calls and no inspections. The Nippon High Command expected us to be responsible for our own discipline and welfare, but they also demanded a *healthy* camp. Here, their demands proved unrealistic. For a short while at the outset, internees had been allowed to organise the purchase of food, medical supplies and materials from sources outside the jail. The purchases were financed by a loan paid into the camp fund by the internees and while the money lasted, the fund also gave each internee a monthly allowance of $5.00. But now, as we were soon to experience, stocks were running out.

The Red Cross authorities were not allowed access and there was no right of appeal to them, despite the Japanese assertion that they would observe the International Code of Law for internees and prisoners of war. The overall control of the camp, when we arrived, was in the hands of comparatively humane and able officers, appointed by the department of Military Administration. Asahi was the Controller of Enemy Aliens and Naito, the Camp Supervisor. However, a sinister figure, Lieutenant Touchitana, an officer of the Military Police, had recently been posted to the camp. To further humiliate the internees, he had brought with him a guard unit composed of Sikh soliders, whom we had hitherto considered loyal to Britain, and a few Japanese NCOs. Discipline noticeably became harsher and the reactions of the Command even more unpredictable.

The internees had set up their own tribunal, presiding over civil and criminal courts, both to protect their own people and to mete out justice. They had also worked out a fair and democratic way of running the camp which took the strain off the few who might, otherwise, have to bear the full burden of administration. Committees were elected to office for three months at a time. Representatives for each block were also elected, as well as a medical officer, officers for health, hygiene and fatigues, a quarter-master and officials dealing with diet and the supply of food. We were asked to elect our officers as soon as possible.

We were further briefed about the general routine and

handed aluminium strips bearing our names in Japanese and our numbers. Our initiation was now over. It was left to us to "fall into line", mindful at all times, that to "fall out" might not only lessen our own chances of survival but would also harm others. Our elections did not take long. Moses Cohen was elected the Representative and I found myself in charge of hygiene, waging perpetual war on flies, bed bugs and mosquitoes.

Within days of our arrival, there was another change in the overall Command. Asahi and Naito were replaced by Lieutenants Susuki and Tominaga, whose name soon became synonymous with mindless brutality. But if you were among the fortunate who escaped his notice, changes in our routine were at first minimal. We even contrived to strike a small blow for freedom.

The behaviour of the Sikh sentry, on guard outside our quarters, had considerably irritated us. He demanded from us the maximum subservience. Not content with our token bows every time we passed him, he abused us on the slightest pretext and accused us of lack of respect for the "Great Japanese Emperor". We noticed how stiffly he bowed to show his own deference and decided we could give him a small dose of his medicine. Twenty of us lined up at a time to walk past him at regular intervals, bowing obsequiously as we did so. It did not take long to wear him down. To our amazement, he actually begged us not to make things too hard for him! The following day, the Japanese High Command informed us that we were no longer required to bow to the Sikh guard. A few days later, he was removed and was not replaced.

Another member of the new Command was a swaggering braggart who strutted around in jack-boots and thus, earned himself the nickname, "Puss-in-Boots." He was one of the interpreters recruited from the Japanese pre-war residents in Malaya who spoke Malay, the language of communication used by the High Command. When he was drunk, which was almost nightly, his favourite sport was beating up internees, men or women, who failed to bow when he entered their quarters without warning. On one single excursion, he left seventy internees battered.

Those first few days, we learnt our way around the jail. Our shed led out to a yard, known as the Main Yard and from this, we entered the kitchen which led to the library and laundry which also served as a bathing shed. Here we were able to shower, taking water from one of the two large con-

crete tanks with a dipper. Water was also available from a tap. Only one tap was fixed on each floor. The waste water from the laundry was used to flush the latrines which were built over the main drain. Thirty seats and squats had been erected over the deep concrete drain that carried the abundant overflow from the laundry. We were not amused to find that this area had been nicknamed *The Wailing Wall*, but we learnt to live with it. There were urinals also and again, the ingenuity of the first internees proved itself. Nothing was wasted. The vegetable patch was fertilised from the urinals and the *pissoires* erected in or near the garden.

The hospital was surprisingly well-equipped and many of us were soon to experience, at first hand, the skill and dedication of the staff. There were quarters nearby, known as *Cripplegate*, where the very old internees were cared for with great compassion. On the other side, bordered by a twenty-five foot high boundary wall, was a football field which considerably boosted our morale.

It was, of course, the food supply on which the welfare and morale of the internees depended. Although the High Command issued a scale of rations, the actual provisions fell far short of it. What rations there were, were collected by representatives of each block in "tongs", utensils shaped like a witch's cauldron. Each internee received his portion in his own quarters. Our basic meals consisted of a small portion of "congee" (watery porridge) and plain tea without milk or sugar for breakfast; for the main meal we had a few ounces of boiled rice, thin vegetable soup and an occasional, almost invisible sliver of dried salt fish. In the evening, it was again "congee" and tea.

Any extra provisions that we had brought into the camp, we were allowed to cook over the steam pipes which ran alongside our quarters. This was a great boon during the short time our stocks lasted. But there was a rather unpleasant side to the possession of individual food stores. Large stocks of any commodity were supposed to be handed over to the camp committee for general use, but this was an unwritten rule which was hardly honoured. To quote one instance, a member of the clergy brought in some provisions which, as it happened, had been given him by Ellis Ezekiel, a member of our community. The crates were never handed over but one day, Ellis was offered a tin as a friendly gesture and he realised that it came from one of his crates. Unfortunately for him, it turned out to be a tin of ham so he promptly handed it back.

Despite our great need for protein, we all observed the main dietary laws.

We still had a tuck shop run by the camp which was stocked with goods bought from an Indian merchant through the offices of a neutral agent, Mr Schweitzer, a member of the firm of Diethelm. The sight of the lorry, nicknamed *The Blue Angel*, being driven into the yard raised our spirits enormously. It usually had a load of salt, pepper, cigarettes (most internees had a terrible urge for a smoke and would make up some evil-smelling concoctions in an attempt to quell the pangs), soap, possibly some biscuits, the rich, sweet, sticky *gula malacca* and a few tinned provisions. Some of the tins that provided us with a very important source of nourishment would have been banned from the shelves of any self-respecting shopkeepers, as they were so blown and rusty. Yet as far as I know, there was not a single case of ptomaine poisoning during the period of our internment.

If we were lucky, we had a few fresh vegetables grown by the camp gardeners. Even a few leaves of spinach, a sweet potato or a slice of papaya could add a festive note to a meal. We found we could even enjoy each other's good fortune. There was an occasion when the Palm Leaf Fatigue group was collecting branches to make *pinyapu leedee* (witch's broom), when Sol Elias, Ellis Ezekiel and Harry Sassoon spotted a chicken that had strayed from a nearby kampong. They gave chase, caught it, wrung its neck and managed to bring it back hidden under the palm leaves. We all joined in congratulating them and, like "the Bisto Kids," hung around sniffing while they ate.

We tried to relieve the monotony of our meals and our lives by finding ways of celebrating each other's birthdays. People who had given up having birthdays suddenly recalled the dates and, if we had let them, would have acquired an extra one! We always managed to find something for such occasions. We were fortunate that Jacob Gazal was one of the internees. He had been a butcher's supplier during the pre-war days and was famous for his *patcha* (a Sephardi version of haggis!) Even without the host of ingredients he was accustomed to using, the dish he concocted from tinned vegetables, tomato puree and potatoes was pure delight for us and it lingered in our memory for weeks. We all suffered from food hallucination and fantasy. After reading an account of "*Beau Geste's*" entertainment by an Arab Sheikh, where a dish very much like *patcha* was described in loving detail, I

could not close my eyes at night without dreaming that I was about to taste it.

One of my encounters in those first weeks was with Shooker Abott who gave me the wonderful news received from his sister, Sophie, in London, that my womenfolk had arrived safely there. The cousins who had left Singapore with them had settled in Glasgow. Of course we wanted to write to them immediately but such a privilege was withheld.

I also met Eze Manasseh who was in hospital and I scarcely recognised him. He had been suffering from dysentery and his body was shrunk and emaciated. Jack Elias, a nursing orderly, was looking after him and described him as a most gentle and uncomplaining patient. He died in the next camp, in Sime Road, not long after our transfer. At first, the Japanese sent seriously ill patients to be treated in Miyako Hospital. Joe David developed heart trouble and spent the whole of his internment there. E.J. Nathan, recovered there from acute dysentery and returned to camp.

Probably the saddest event of those days was the death of Abraham Ezekiel Abdullah, a good man who had been the cheerful owner of a small crockery shop in Beach Road. He had been arrested in the early days of the Occupation and subsequently released, very much shocked by his experience. Internment without his wife and family had now badly affected his health. He was admitted to the camp hospital, but it was not long before a doctor told us he was dying and begging to see his wife. Moses went immediately to appeal to the High Command who despatched a guard to bring Abraham's wife to his bedside. She arrived in time and stayed with him till the end. Again, there was an appeal to the High Command that Abraham be buried according to Jewish rites. This was granted and two internees were allowed to accompany the body to the cemetery. There, under the nose of a Japanese guard, news was exchanged with the other mourners.

The camp representatives had been petitioning the Command to lend the camp money through the Red Cross. It was known that the camp fund was almost exhausted, partly because the Japanese had used it to finance their administration. The only contribution received had come from an outside source, rumoured to be the charitable Storch brothers, Adolf and David, who had probably escaped internment because they held Chilean passports. Each internee had been given $5.00 from this donation, but the Fund remained in

urgent need of an infusion.

A representative appealed once more to the Command. This time the answer was, "Go to the Jews!" And to us they came. We responded willingly and were able to make a contribution of $100,000 as an interest-free loan to be repaid by the British Government after the war. The representative was appreciative and, wanting to share the good news as quickly as possible with all internees, he called a full assembly of the camp, but he did not receive the favourable response he had expected. Many received the news with blank faces and worse, within hours of the announcement, an internee was heard referring to "the bloody Jewish money-lenders!"

It was my first experience of blatant anti-semitism in adult life and I found it hard to take. We were now considered as rich as Croesus and were besieged by requests for personal loans. We were offered cheques for cash to be repaid at a huge interest — the borrower's own terms — on the security of a scrawled IOU. Much of the money that now began to circulate was used to buy up provisions that had been *hoarded* for resale on the *black market*.

Black market dealings were almost inevitable in camp conditions and had been in existence *before* the Jews were interned. But now, they became linked with us. I do not deny that a few of us were associated with offbeat transactions, but the big deals were outside our scope and intention. The black marketeers tried to bring us into their web thinking we had the big money they needed, but we showed them how unwelcome their soliciting was.

One day, they came to R.G. Hayim who had for some obscure reason, earned himself the nickname, "Windy". Before the war, he had a breakdown and spent some time in a mental hospital. Eventually, he was sent home with a certificate certifying his *sanity*. This gave him great confidence and if anyone called him "crazy" in the course of a conversation, he would brandish his certificate. In fact, he felt he had the upper hand as, after all, he was the only one who had *proof* of his sanity! The black marketeers offered Windy a tin of corned beef at an exorbitant price of $26 and he turned down the offer. A member of the camp police, hearing a twisted version of the incident, accused him of being mad to get involved in the black market.

Windy put him in his place. "*I'm* not mad," he retorted, "but I would have been if I'd bought the tin! *They're* the mad ones to try to make such a deal." Windy was exonerated. He

proved himself a most cheerful, loyal and philosophical friend. Neither he nor any other Jew was brought up before the Camp Disciplinary Court.

Within the first month of internment, Aldgate welcomed some new arrivals — a train driver, Bill Crooks, a deck hand from the *Empress of Asia*, Mr Walker, and Mr Jenkins, a journalist and devoted Moslem. A little later, we were joined by five Catholic priests from Malaya. Our friendliness was warmly reciprocated. The priests volunteered for orderly duty in the hospital and many an internee has reason to remember their dedication. At about the same time, we learnt of the arrival of five women from Sumatra. They had all escaped from Singapore, but had been recaptured and brought to Changi. Among them was Annie Silverman, an Ashkenasi.

We adapted very quickly to camp routine. Various duties took up most of our energy, from the daily collection of firewood for the boiler room and incinerator to the performance of our own fatigue duties. It took a little time to sort out which fatigues we were best equipped to do. I was very quickly removed from the heavy digging party — a popular one as it brought with it the promise of extra rations — as I did not have the right physique (I weighed at that time, only about a hundred pounds). Randal Adair, on the other hand, was ideal for the work. I joined the carpentry fatigue. Basic furniture was needed for the old people's quarters and we, ourselves, had very little, so we made stools and mattress supports, helped considerably by Mr Cherrington, the pre-war manager of Robinson's furniture department. He was very proud of his craftsmanship and if I referred to him as a good carpenter, he would quickly put me right. "I'm not a carpenter, I'm a cabinet-maker!" And he did his best to be true to his honoured craft, despite the lack of materials. It was good to meet an old friend of mine in this fatigue, Captain Hughes, whose ship, *The Islander*, had plied between Christmas Island and Singapore. We also carried out general repairs, canvas work and sewing — most of us became acquainted with the needle, making shorts from shirts and improvising head coverings and sandals. Barbers were in short supply and David Tweg and I offered our services. To our surprise, we were soon much in demand and found that we could wield the scissors quite painlessly.

Sunday was the official day of rest, when only the kitchen staff remained on duty and members of the different deno-

minations held their services. We were able to hold ours on Shabbat, led by Sion Daniel and Moses Cohen. After the war, Sion was appointed Hazan of the Chased El.

Only three weeks after internment, we were preparing to celebrate *Pesach*. We despatched our long-suffering Moses to the "Pharoah" to plead for his people. Like our forebear he, too, was dismissed without the assurance that his request would be granted. The days passed and the eve of the festival arrived. Moses was suddenly recalled. He was told that the supply lorry was about to leave and that he could go with it to the synagogue to fetch the *matzoth*. The guard went with him into the compound where the dough was being prepared. Moses asked the devoted band of *matzoth* bakers if they could make enough for the other internees too, although they would have only three hours before the lorry returned.

When he came back, the batches of *matzoth* were ready and a small crowd of people had gathered all begging for news of their families in Changi. His heart was torn at the sight of them. Many were ragged, all looked underfed and their faces were worn with anxiety. He tried to put their minds at rest in the brief moments allowed by the guard, and then it was time for the return journey.

That night, we managed to clear our quarters to leave a space in the centre where we could sit to celebrate the *Seder*. There were one hundred and twelve of us. A small number of Jews from other blocks were allowed to join us including Lazarus Rayman, the pre-war chairman of the Singapore Municipality, and Mr H. Weisberg, the Colonial Treasurer to the Straits Settlements.

Sitting on the floor, we chanted the familiar story of the Exodus from Egypt and we prayed with more fervour than ever before or perhaps, since. What an atmosphere and what a feast it seemed to us! Somehow, we had gathered all that we needed for our services — eggs, celery, *charoseth* and *matzoth*. To our rations were added small portions of *ikan merah* — one of the tastiest of Singapore fish — bought by our quartermaster, Daniel Kelly, through the camp shop. We savoured every mouthful. And it was just as well, for that was to be the only festive meal we were to enjoy during our internment. For *Shvo'oth*, we gathered in groups for prayers, but we had no means of ushering in the festival with any extra fare. During the intervening seven weeks, camp life had grown harsher and our rations had decreased.

But life was not all routine and gloom. We were not con-

fined to our quarters and were able, occasionally, to make and receive visits. Lazarus Rayman came whenever he could and I well remember listening to his comments as he studied the *Gemmorah* (commentary on the Bible) with Moses. Ralph Bridges would come to us for solace. Meetings between husband and wife were not allowed and Aldgate was the nearest he could get to his wife, Grace.

Among the most companionable of our visitors was a young Presbyterian minister, Reverend Robert Greer. He was a Hebrew scholar and it was illuminating and entertaining to discuss the Bible with him. Wallace Duncan, secretary to the Municipality, was a fine conversationalist whose gentle manner belied a sharp intellect. There was a great deal of camaraderie between the younger Aldgate inmates and the crew of the *Empress of Asia*, some of whom had been the unexpected guests at the wedding of Dr Philip Bloom and Freddie.

We were lucky to have at least two talented raconteurs and mimics in Aldgate. Simon Hayasad, a pre-war post office clerk, was a most original impersonator and Leon Simon had the gift of seeing the humorous side of almost any situation. As secretary to the camp committee, he rendered us all valuable service. I think most of us will remember Silas Thomas' unintentional contribution to the lighter side of our life. He was a rather serious, retiring young man who had the habit of quoting Shakespeare or spouting proverbs in and out of season. I think, it was his somewhat pompous delivery that earned him the nickname of *Shentan Thomas*, after the luckless war-time governor of Singapore whose broadcast reports on the Japanese campaign proved so far removed from the truth.

Sports enthusiasts were not easily put off. They invented camp versions of cricket, football and badminton. Although we were near to the sea, we were allowed only one swim and after that, we were warned that swimming would increase the danger of a cholera epidemic and it was forbidden. As long as the Japanese policy of non-interference lasted, internees worked hard to create a variety of entertainment.

On Sundays, a group of five musicians, who had all belonged to Raffles Hotel orchestra and of whom three were Ashkenasi, gave an hour's concert in the hospital quarters. Their signature tune was "*When My Dreamboat Comes Home*". evoking bitter-sweet memories of, what seemed to us now, care-free days. At least two plays were produced and

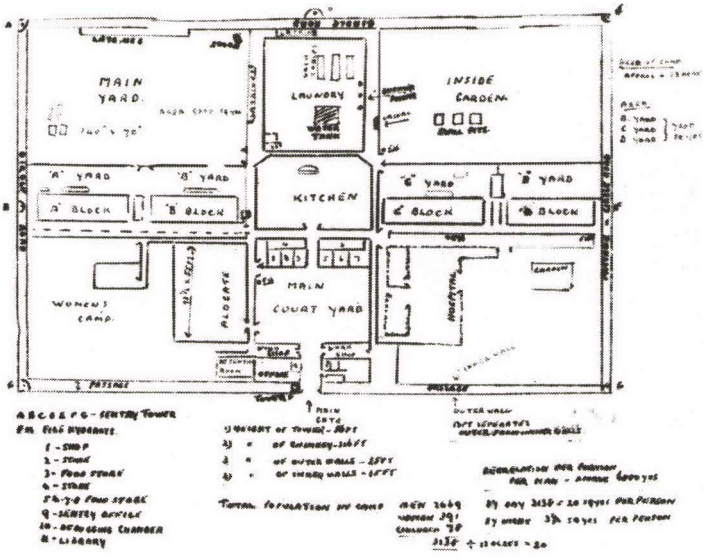
one Revue.

A bridge league was organised with each floor or block entering one or two teams. To our surprise, Aldgate were the outright winners. Poker was also popular. One evening, Ernie Simon and a group of friends were enjoying a session when two Japanese officers stopped to watch. They seemed to be in good humour, chuckling loudly as they went on their way. Half an hour later, a guard appeared yelling out orders to the players and to the representative of Aldgate, who happened at that time to be Rupert Reuben. They were marched off to the guard room. We waited. Hours passed before they eventually returned. They looked worn out, but were otherwise unharmed. They had been made to stand to attention for the entire interrogation period and then, with a warning that henceforth gambling was forbidden, they were despatched to their quarters.

There was a profusion of lectures and classes on every conceivable subject. The only drawback, apart from the decline in our mental capacity which we put down to the decline in our physical stamina, was that most of them were held in the same area, as space was limited, so that one's knowledge of the finer side of choosing worms for fishing was apt to become mixed up with choosing the right blend of spices for cooking curry! For private study, there was an excellent selection of books, many of which had been salvaged from Raffles Library. Anyone who wanted to pursue a serious course of study was likely to find a qualified and willing tutor. Yahya Cohen, for example, learnt German from Dr Klemperer, who had formerly practised medicine on the island of Langkawi, north of Penang. He and Dr Engels gave us ample proof of their deep humanity and brought comfort to many.

Not very long after internment, I had met the prewar Commissioner of Scouts, Frank Sands, and we decided that even though our resources were very limited, we could form a scout troop. Reverend Adams gave us his backing. We managed to teach many branches of scoutcraft including first aid, map reading and map making. I still have the scale map of Changi Camp, made by members of the troop, showing the allocation of space for each internee. Whenever possible, we organised team games and generally succeeded in harnessing the goodwill of the scouts for the benefit of the camp.

We were sadly brought face to face with the harsher discipline imposed when Joe Isaac, in all innocence, forwarded a note to the Commandant asking permission to collect rolls of



PLAN OF CHANGI CAMP COMPILED BY SCOUT TROOP IN CHANGI CAMP

canvas that he had remembered leaving in his premises. He was immediately summoned to appear for interrogation from which he was brought back staggering, in a state of collapse. His crime had been to refer to the canvas as *his* property — all property was "the property of the victorious Japanese government"! He had been beaten with a long staff and left unattended in a state of shock and in dreadful pain for several hours. Thanks to devoted nursing, he recovered.

The weeks passed and soon it was *Rosh Hashannah*. Sion Daniel had brought his most treasured possession into camp, his *shofar*, and it was his blowing of the age-old "clarion calls" that inspired our prayers. In the following days, I found myself practising a tango with one of the Catholic priests! But it was all for a good cause. We were rehearsing to the sound of an ancient winder gramophone, as far away from onlookers as possible, for a revue to be staged on the night of *Yom Kipur*, 9 October 1943. That *Yom Kipur* we all fasted well, perhaps it was not surprising as the rigours of camp diet were an excellent training for a mere twenty-five hours of self-denial! Before breaking the fast, I joined the cast of the revue and someone was kind enough to hand me a cup of

coffee. The Revue was a success and apparently, I looked quite convincing as a Spanish senorita in a dress smuggled out of the women's quarters. This was to be our last entertainment. The events of the following day marked the end of our first phase in camp and for many, heralded a period of the utmost horror.

Very early on 10 October 1943, the *Double Tenth* as it became known, we received the order to assemble in the main yard. We went with no sense of foreboding. Indeed, talk of repatriation was in the air. Someone had spotted a neutral ship, later identified as the Swedish vessel, the *Gripsholm*, lying at anchor at the entrance to the Naval Base and many expected repatriation orders had at last arrived. We stood for roll-call and waited. No explantation was given. We waited. Suddenly, all entrances to the main yard were closed and armed guards posted. Forty names were called out. I heard R. Nathan and stepped forward. Moses pulled me back. "You're not R. Nathan," he whispered. The name was not called again. It is possible that Moses saved my life. The forty were taken for interrogation. We were left in the yard in the enervating sun without food or water until mid-afternoon. Then block by block, we were ordered back to our quarters. The guards came with us. They searched every article we possessed, scattering, our belongings without remorse. Any photographs or diaries discovered were confiscated. They took our prayer books too, but these were later returned to their owners.

We learnt the reason for the search later. The Japanese High Command suspected that there were, among us, contacts for the resistance movement. They feared a planned uprising and considered that internees were potentially more dangerous than the average prisoner-of-war, as most of us had at least a fair knowledge of the country and the language. They had received information that we were transmitting and receiving messages and were furiously seeking out the radios and agents. But, there were none. In the whole of the camp, there were only two radios and perhaps, one or two assembled by our radio engineers from the bits and pieces brought in by John Long, our ambulance driver who took the seriously ill patients to the Miyako Hospital. Sadly, John was one of those arrested on the Double Tenth. He was kept for six months in a Kempetai cell, released in a completely debilitated state, allowed to struggle back to a semblance of living and then shot. In fact, he was the only internee to be

executed. The Japanese preferred to let you die of exhaustion or other "*natural*" causes brought on by their treatment.

Freddie Bloom was another of the victims. She survived months of indescribable horror, written about without bitterness in a kind of diary she kept in the form of letters to her husband Philip, and published many years after the war, under the title, "*Dear Philip.*" In 1946, their daughter was born and suffered deafness at birth as a result of the terrible deprivations Freddie suffered during her imprisonment. She became a pioneer in her work for the deaf and disabled and was awarded the OBE. They settled in London where Philip became a consultant in sex and marital disorders. Dr Cicely Williams underwent the same brutal treatment and, she too, was nursed back to health. They were the only women to be arrested on the Double Tenth. They were completely innocent of the charges as were all the others.

After this event, we had only our routine fatigues to keep us going. All privileges were suspended — no concerts, classes, no school for the children, and no sports. Religious services were limited to thirty minutes and our rations were cut. The Camp Fund was plundered again by the Command and no extras could be bought. Now armed patrols clumped around the camp at all hours of the day and night. Soon, thirteen more internees were routed out and taken to the Kempetai. No more patients were sent to Miyako Hospital. No mail was released until Christmas and we of course could send none.

In January 1944, we saw Chinese labourers erecting four long huts of attap and wood posts on the football pitch. We thought more internees were arriving, but discovered that the huts were for us. In the monsoon season, we were moved into them, exposed now to constant damp and heavy storms. Rumours of repatriation still persisted. In April 1944, General Saito, who was given command of the camp, tantalised us in his first harangue with these words, "*Lagi satu bulan, suma jadi banyak baik!*" ("In another month, everything will be fine!")

The Europeans took this to mean that repatriation was only a month away and the Camp Committee, taking the rumours very seriously, began training local internees in administration and essential maintenance. I was one of the engineers given the task of studying all electrical installations and the working of the main water pump outside the jail. While we were on this fatigue, we noticed what we thought

were scraps of paper caught in the machinery. To our great surprise, when we pulled out the papers, we saw we had recovered a copy of a lecture given by Lt-Gen Sir Lewis Heath at the Kitchener Barracks. Changi, 16 and 17 June 1942 on the campaign in Malaya. We read it unobserved later, and it filled in many gaps in our imperfect understanding of that wretched war.

The unpredictable attitude of the Japanese towards internees was revealed again during those months of tension and increased deprivation. Moses Cohen, who was our representative once again, was approached by a member of the High Command, offered coffee and cigarettes and asked to submit his true opinion of the running of the camp. Moses mustered all his diplomacy to put the case of the internees — perfectly aware that he was being made "to walk the tightrope" and that an ill-judged statement could put his own safety and that of his fellow-internees in jeopardy. At first, his interrogator seemed satisfied with Moses' replies and comments, nodding sympathetically several times. Then came the blow. Moses was asked to act as an informant. He had no room to manoeuvre. He had to refuse and take the consequences. His refusal was received in complete silence, then he was dismissed. When he returned to Aldgate, his face looked drained. We went about our work wondering when repercussions would come and whether another internee would be found more willing than Moses to act as an informant.

But the High Command seemed, at that time, to have other matters to deal with. A series of visitors invaded Changi and the internees were drilled in the right way to behave before them, to respond smartly to the commands — *Kyoysuke* (Attention)! *Keiri* (Bow)! and *Yasume* (At ease)! During one of the visits by a group of generals, a sample menu of our diet was requested. Watching the expression of the general as he read it, we thought he showed displeasure and were even hopeful that the cut in our rations might be restored. But no change came.

A month after General Saito's address, the news came that we were to be transferred from Changi to a camp at the old RAF base in Sime Road. Many naively anticipated that this was to be the clearing station before repatriation. The rest of us nerved ourselves for another long drawn-out period of waiting.

Chapter Fourteen

Exodus

"Simplicity and truth are all our needs."

— Sir Laurens van der Post commenting on his experience in a Japanese Prisoner-of-War Camp — 1983.

The date of our transfer was 1 May 1944. Many internees were now convinced that repatriation was only weeks, if not days away. With as much cheerful energy as we could muster, we set about clearing our quarters and many were the jokes exchanged at the junk which most of us were determined not to part with. Eventually the lorries arrived, filled up and left. But we, the Jewish internees remained. No rations were issued, no shade was available and doubts about our destination mounted. It was strange how alone we felt, like children who had missed the coach that took their friends out on a treat. But of *this* treat, we were not to be deprived. Eventually we, too, were picked up by lorries and as we were driven away, British prisoners-of-war arrived to take our place. We cheered them on and tried also to cheer each other as we drove past places we had not seen for over a year.

It was a relief to be heading for Sime Road — to the trees and open spaces, wide paths and vividly green grass where before, we had felt almost physically crushed by the surrounding grim grey walls. But once again on arrival, we found ourselves waiting. It was not until late in the evening, when one of the camp representatives came to take us to our new "quarters" — a dilapidated hut, the floor covered with excreta and the roof caving in. We were voluble in our protests and were prepared to take the unprecedented action of reporting this treatment to the Nippon High Command. That night, we slept in the open on the concrete path.

Early the next morning, we were offered alternative accommodation. This was in Hut 106 which, though it had a leaking roof and rough plank walls, was a great improvement. It also provided me with strange sensations, for it was in Hut 106 that I had installed telecommunication equipment not long before the Japanese campaign. I had also helped to dis-

mantle the equipment, for salvaging or for burial, when the base was being evacuated. Now, in Walter Mitty fashion, I found myself mentally digging up various components that might prove vital for our survival, but I was soon jolted back to reality with the task of once more settling in.

It was an unexpected bonus to find that we had been allocated a small adjoining hut for a cook house. The administration realised that in this sprawling conglomeration of huts, it was more practical to distribute *un*cooked rations. Engineers were soon busy installing open clay and brick fireplaces and we despatched our cooks to collect our rations. After we had eaten our first meal for twenty-four hours, we were in a more receptive mood to take stock of the area. Our camp was adjoining the familiar grounds of the golf club which brought a sense of continuity to our lives that had been completely absent in Changi.

About four hundred yards away, at the bottom of a gentle slope, there were flower beds neglected and overgrown, but still worthy of the name *Rose Garden*. It was here that the women were quartered, in pre-war administration huts. The roofs leaked badly, but there were flush toilets and showers. All our quarters were supplied with running water and electricity. For men, there was a communal flush system in an open field, but only a skeleton structure remained — no roof and no walls, so the engineers installed basic alternatives by boring holes and drains. A roofless shed with an apology of a shower served as our laundry. Hospital quarters were soon ready to receive the sick and infirm.

We soon found that the harsher discipline, enforced after the *Double Tenth*, had been relaxed. Our days began to follow the pattern we had earlier enjoyed in Changi. There was a relaxation period in the afternoon after our chores. Our clothing was becoming even more basic, but we tried to keep intact one pair of shorts and a shirt for official occasions. Early evening, a steady stream of skinny, sun-blacked bodies, tattered apologies for clothing over arms, would make their way to the bathing shed. The sound of backgammon chips slapped onto the board punctuated the air and for a while, we lost all sense of time and place. In the late evenings, small study groups started up again, but no classes or lectures were sanctioned. Lights were put out at 10 pm.

On Sunday afternoon, families were re-united for half an hour. Husbands and wives dressed up for the meeting in the Rose Garden and none went empty-handed — somehow little

somehow little gifts were found and carefully wrapped. Religious services were resumed but in Aldgate, there was no attempt to organise a full service. Small groups came together spontaneously for prayers but some preferred to worship alone — in their own time and in their own way.

The birth of a baby boy in the women's ward brought us together to witness the *mila* performed by Dr Landor in Hut 106. To honour the dead, we were allowed to send a full *minyan* to the cemetery until the last weeks when permission was withdrawn and burials took place in Sime Road. The bodies were re-interred after the war. Eze Manasseh was the first to die, after suffering from acute dysentery which reduced his poor body to a mere sixty pounds.

During the first weeks, the Japanese introduced a new watch-word, "*Sendiri tanam, sendiri makan!*" (What you grow, you eat!) Large areas of the site were dug up, a slice of the golf course included, and tapioca was planted. Eventually, each internee was able to add eight to ten ounces of green leaf to his rations, but our meals were not enriched because the Japanese decreased *their* contribution accordingly. We hoped that papaya would supply us with vitamins and protein, but the papaya is a capricious plant. I have seen wonderful pendulous fruit growing from what seemed a dead hunk of wood in a neglected courtyard, while in a well-tended compound only a few shrivelled midgets appeared on a healthy looking tree. We planted papayas in every available plot of ground, but we never saw a ripe fruit. It was not safe to leave them to ripen on the tree for they might fall prey to the first night prowler. So we plucked them, small and green and used them as vegetables. Once a tin of tomatoes came our way and I planted the seeds. I nursed the tiny plants, watching over them tenderly and at last, I saw a fruit forming. I think I willed it to grow. Then one morning when I rose early as usual to tend it, only a battered, crumpled stalk remained.

We had a new hazard to contend with. In the neglected parts of the site, the tall tough grass known as *lallang* grew without check. It harboured many pests and among them, the typhus-bearing parasite carried by rats which was transferred from rats to *lallang* and from *lallang* to humans. A special gang of volunteers was organised to wage war on it. Each member wore protective clothing and bathed in disinfectant on his return to camp. Sadly, there were many cases of tropical typhus, a number of which proved fatal, but there was no epidemic.

There was also an outbreak of malaria which was not unnatural, since anti-malarial measures had ceased with the Japanese Occupation. Four members of Hut 106 went down with it, but all recovered. Eliah Sharbanee was one of the victims. He was sleeping under the mosquito net issued to every malaria victim when, in the early hours of the morning, we were awoken by a dull thud. We soon found out what had caused it — a cobra was neatly coiled on the top of the net. Someone picked up a heavy stick, tilted the net and struck, killing the snake instantly. But where there was one, there could be more. We made a thorough search in the roofing but found nothing. We had to keep a constant lookout for scorpions and centipedes and our watchfulness paid off. I think only one of us, Manasseh Joseph, was bitten by a centipede. The agony he suffered for many days increased our vigilance.

There were other diseases we now had to contend with, due principally to malnutrition. Every internee had his share of dysentery, ulcers, sores and cuts that would not heal, oedema, pellagra and beri-beri. But common-place illnesses scarcely made an appearance. Judah Bechore's younger brother had his appendix removed and recovered fairly quickly. There were no cases of common cold but one case of chicken pox. One internee suffered asthmatic attacks, and three had toothache. There was a single case of a singular illness, an aversion to water! David Panjang needed hospital treatment and was told he must bathe first. He protested and said that he would die if he took a bath but the orderlies insisted. The outcome was very strange and sad for he died within four days.

Medicines were now in very short supply. Internees, in favourable circumstances, were able to bring in or smuggle in a few extra supplies. I was able to smuggle in a small quantity of M & B 693 tablets, a few bandages and some aspros with an order for spare parts I gave to the Japanese, when I was ordered to repair one of their radio sets. But for the most part, medicines had to be concocted from whatever was at hand. Rubber trees grew in the area so bandages soaked in rubber latex provided a good substitute for elastoplast, rubber seeds were swallowed for debility, palm oil formed the base for unguents, a few rusty nails shaken up in water provided an iron tonic, spectacle frames were manufactured, with Reggie Meyer's guidance, from old tooth-brush handles and wood ash was used for tooth powder. Crushed onion was applied to

sore feet and garlic was used for dysentery. One of the internees was an amateur herbalist and day in, day out, he collected plants and drew from them many cures, which undoubtedly helped to save many lives.

The carpentry fatigue worked very hard to make bunks and tables from any junk available. Wood and nails were in short supply, but an eighty-three year old, ex-Oxford Blue trudged the camp with a bag slung over his shoulders collecting every piece of twisted metal, everything that resembled a nail, and to this day, I feel the compulsion to pick up any nail, however rusty. The women's huts needed a new roofing so I was asked to round up a few volunteers and get on with the job. Finding volunteers was easy for obvious reasons, but the job was difficult. We were supplied with sections of attap leaves woven together but unbound. We were supposed to separate the leaves and weave them into the existing covering. Sydney Hanin, Moses Cohen and David Tweg struggled with me to achieve a rain-proof shelter under the watchful eyes of "Puss-in-boots," who was on guard to see that we had no communications with the women.

When we arrived the next morning, we were not at all surprised to find that the new leaves had all been blown away! We complained to "Puss-in-boots" that we had not been given the right tools for the work and he managed to get some No 30 enamelled copper wire from the stores. He went one step further and actually worked with us, instructing us as he went along. He was so pleased with our progress that he gave me a special armband to allow our team access to the women's quarters without a guard. This meant that we could carry messages without fear of detection and it was a boost to everyone's morale.

Another stroke of luck came, when we were called to mend the roof of one of the Japanese stores. We looked down through the gap in the thatch and saw jars of thick soya sauce (rich in Vitamin B), sacks of salt, small onions and fresh vegetables. The temptation was too great and we succumbed. Like Aladdin stepping down into the robber's cave, David climbed into the store and passed up to us handfuls of commodities which were now as precious as gold. How we managed to carry our loot back to Hut 106 without leaving a trace I do not know, but I remember clearly savouring the added flavour they gave to our poor fare.

Towards the end of 1944, we were given the heavy job of constructing huts for a new batch of internees. Within three

weeks, we had put up six huts — three in the women's quarters and three in the men's. Many of the new internees were from camps in Malaya, the rest were all the remaining Jews, about four hundred and fifty altogether. Most were relieved to be interned and some of them even looked upon it as a sort of picnic. There were also some habitual malcontents well-known to many of us pre-war. One woman, in particular, thought the world owed her a living. When she approached anyone for help, she made no bones about *demanding* money even preying on their superstitious fear that she possessed the power of "the evil eye." It had become almost a ritual to hand her some money and then to add a little more *for the eye!*

Such a character could not fail to fall foul of the Japanese and it was not long before it happened. The women were lined up to be addressed by the commandant. Suddenly, she stepped forward and in her particularly whining voice complained, "*Tepong tada, nasi tada, gula tada, kopi tada!*" (We've got no flour, no rice, no sugar and no coffee!) The slap she received sent her reeling, and for once, she had all our sympathy when she bequeathed a legacy of curses on the officer and his family for generations!

It was with regret that we realised some of our new internees were adding to our burdens, not wilfully but because they were unwilling to benefit from our experience and were headstrong. We became uneasy. We knew, for example, that a few broke camp and encouraged others, who had been more cautious, to do so too. As so often happens, it was not the ring leaders who were caught, but a poor chap who had previously suffered from mental disorders. He tried to make an escape, but was caught after five days and given a terrible beating. All the Jews, as a result, had their rations reduced yet once again, and for two weeks, we were on half rations only. Two weeks before the surrender, this same man escaped again but this time, the High Command had other problems and he was not caught.

Indiscipline was once again dealt with by our own tribunal and I was involved, involuntarily as it happens, in one of the cases. I had, somehow, offended one of the internees who was a champion wrestler. One morning, I was returning to Hut 106 after fatigue duty when I realised I was being followed. Before I had time to turn around, I felt myself lifted completely off the ground and hurtling through the air. I must have turned a somersault before landing, bruised and very

much shaken but to my amazement, with no bones broken. I was still lying on the ground when members of my fatigue rushed the wrestler. They cautioned him not to try this again. But it was only days before he made ugly threats to Moses, who decided he should be reported to the Tribunal. He was sentenced to two weeks solitary. As luck would have it, the roof of the solitary hut was in need of repair and it naturally fell to the roof fatigue to carry out the work. We made sure he was taken out before we climbed onto the roof as we had no intention of risking another one-sided wrestling bout. He emerged chastened after his two weeks, but we thought it wise to give him a wide berth!

One night, Isaac Ephraim, otherwise known as Blue Pants because he was almost the only internee to wear long, coloured pants, went out after lights out. A few minutes later, he returned to Hut 106 doubled up in pain. Gradually the story emerged. He had heard David Tweg telling us how, unable to sleep one night, he had risked breaking the rules, had left the hut to go for a stroll and had come face to face with "Puss-in-boots." David, prepared for the worst, apologised for his action and explained that he was feeling terribly depressed, missing his wife and children. "Puss-in-boots" lifted his hand and David closed his eyes ready for the slap. It didn't come — he opened his eyes to see "Puss-in-boots" taking an egg out of his leather pouch and handing it to him. He received a pat on the back and was told to go back to his hut. When Blue Pants heard this, he decided to try his luck. He, too, went out and met the sentry but instead of taking pity on him, the sentry saw through his little game, beat him up and yelled at him to get back to his quarters. Poor Blue Pants was teased rather unmercifully about his escapade.

"Puss-in-boots" was in trouble himself shortly after this. He swaggered into the women's quarters one day to reprimand one of the ladies for some minor misdemeanour. Carried away by his sense of power, he slapped her brutally across the face. To his amazement, she retaliated and slapped him back. She was brought before the Commandant who locked her up for a few hours, but "Puss-in-boots" disappeared for some days. When he resumed his duties, we saw that his face was badly marked and swollen and it seemed that this time the High Command had shown its disapproval of the bullying of women.

On 6 June 1944, I was ordered to go under escort to the

administrative office in the Green House, at the Sime Road entrance to the camp to repair a Mullard radio receiver. My escort was Kobyashi. The occasion had an unexpected outcome. I was installed in front of the set and left to carry on with the repair. I soon found out there was only a slight fault, but I made great play of tuning and testing in the hope that I might pick up an Allied station. I succeeded. "All India Radio" was coming over quite clearly. Without arousing the guard's suspicions, I heard that the Allies had landed in Europe and were advancing towards Paris. I could scarcely control my excitement. This was too good an opportunity to miss so I told the guard that spares were needed to complete the repair. In this way, I hoped I would be called back when the spares arrived.

In three days the summons came. Kobyashi escorted me to the office and I was given the box containing the spares into which my supplier, my friend Shotam, had managed to put some urgently needed medical supplies. I prayed that I would again hear the familar voice of the announcer of "All India Radio" and my prayers were answered. This time I heard the announcer identify the names of the towns through which the Allies were advancing. Later when I was back in Hut 106, Dr Engels produced an Atlas and with his help, I managed to piece together the scraps of information that gave us reason to hope. As we were not allowed to discuss current affairs, we could only share the news with a few trusted friends, the *Pollux gang*, the Representative, Mr Collinge, and the acting Colonial Secretary, Mr Blythe. They did not let me down.

This was not the only outcome of my visit to the Green House and possibly, it was the less important. It happened that when Kobyashi was escorting me to Hut 106, he stopped suddenly and pointed to my Rolex watch. All the way back he pestered me to sell it to him. I refused at first, but then it occurred to me that I might be able to obtain food in return for my watch and if this was so, Kobyashi might prove a valuable go-between for those who still had valuables to sell. I tentatively made this proposal to him and he agreed straight away. I could go no further until I had discussed the plan with C.E. Collinge. To my relief, he gave his approval but at the same time warned me that the whole affair would have to be unofficial.

Thus, the *Grey Market* came into being. The *Black Market* had not ceased, but the prices asked were beyond the means

of most of us. We hoped that through the new process, the women, the sick and infirm, and more internees would be able to have at least a small share of the supplies that were brought in. As Kobyashi refused to deal with anyone but me, it was inevitable that I would be accused of consorting with the enemy and profiteering but I was not deterred. The plan was a simple one — Kobyashi inspected the wares, fixed a price and brought in, on the official lorry, extra goods to the correct value. At a pre-arranged spot, a special fatigue of completely trustworthy internees (some of whom were from the Police Force) waited for the lorry to unload and, within minutes, they removed and distributed the unscheduled goods.

The plan worked smoothly for some months until the day that Kobyashi brought in one thousand eggs. He had turned a blind eye to our giving the women internees a share, but this time, he sensed danger and warned us not to be foolish as he was sure the women were becoming careless. But how could we withhold such treasure? That evening, Collinge sent for me. Very gravely he told me to dress formally — shirt and shorts — to await interrogation.

He explained what had happened. By an ironic coincidence, before the eggs had been brought in, he had himself appealed directly to Lieutenant Susuki to supply the camp with eggs as malnutrition was now the cause of disruption of work schedules and would probably result in many deaths. His request had been turned down with the curt rejoinder that there were no eggs to be had!

By another coincidence, he had been asked to accompany Susuki and a visiting engineer to the women's quarters to see the cooking facilities and as they entered, the first thing they saw were stacks of eggs! Susuki stared, then without a word walked out. In a mood of numb resignation, I went back to my hut, dressed and waited. That night no summons came, nor the next day, nor the next. On the third day, Kobyashi walked in. He was in a bad state, his face bearing the marks of a recent beating. Bitterly he reproached me, "Why did you trust the women? Didn't I warn you?" At that moment, I could not help feeling very sorry for him and very dejected. The *Grey Market* could obviously function no longer and I was still waiting for a summons. But the days went by and it did not come.

Gradually, my confidence was restored and I was able to resume normal duties. Weeks went by and our health was

deteriorating more rapidly. I received a deputation to try once more to coax Kobyashi to trade. I found out that he was badly in need of money and would, perhaps, be willing to take the risk in order to pay his debts. He would only agree to sell, but he refused to bring in food. In the hope that he would eventually change his mind, I agreed to his terms. It was not long before he was persuaded to bring in a few supplies. Everything went smoothly and there was an unexpected bonus — Kobyashi wrapped up some of the parcels in the *Syonan Shimbun*, sometimes it turned out to be the Malay version, sometimes the English and sometimes the Chinese. From the Malay and English versions, we had a steady trickle of news but none of us was proficient in Chinese.

Then one day, Mr A. Jordan, a pre-war administrator in the Department of the affairs of the Chinese Protectorate, came to see me. His first words scarcely encouraged trust or mutual sympathy. "I had no wish," he said, "to come and visit your hut, but . . . ." — they sounded so like the well-known opening gambit, "I don't like Jews in general but some of my best friends are Jews." I held my tongue and waited for his explanation. He asked to be allowed to translate the Chinese-language news and assured me that he was well aware of the risk involved. I decided to take a chance and, during our subsequent meetings, had no cause to regret my decision.

November was a momentous month. Early in the month, we heard the unfamiliar sound of the drone of bombers. They came by day and we wondered, at first, why the Japanese had resumed raids after more than two years. Then someone shouted, "They're ours!" We realised to our immense relief that they could embark on *daylight* raids as they expected little opposition from fighter planes or anti-aircraft guns. Their targets were obviously the Naval Base, the docks and the oil depots so that we were not in the firing line. We went about our duties unconcerned about the possible danger, but considerably heartened by what the raids presaged. Even when fragments of a shell fell on Hut 106, making a great hole in the roof, our spirits remained high. But the Nippon High Command were shaken and orders were issued to dig trenches around the camp "for our protection". We doubted this but we prayed and prepared to get on with the job. A fatigue of six members from Hut 106 were assigned to trench digging in the Rose Garden. When the sentry saw what little progress they were making, he stripped to the waist and taking a shovel, started to dig exhorting the fatigue to follow

his example. They had no intention of complying but instead, stood by — one of them actually holding the sentry's rifle — and heaped praises on his magnificent effort. This was the scene observed by Lieutenant Susuki when he arrived on his rounds. It was the poor sentry he turned on, while the others stood at attention waiting for the blows to fall. But none came. They were let off with a warning which was later extended to the whole camp. This was another shot in the arm for us and, as each day brought our planes in view, we felt justified in letting our hopes soar.

The raids continued until March 1945, when they were replaced by almost daily reconnaisance excursions. Weakened as we were, we managed to walk with a jaunty step and held our heads higher as the anxiety on our gaoler's faces grew. We experienced one severe setback when, at midnight, Kobyashi, in a drunken stupour bawled out the news that Roosevelt had died on 12 April. With his death, hopes of peace seemed to recede. Collinge asked me to try and verify Kobyashi's report and it was not long before we received the vernacular newspapers, their bold headlines leaving us no longer in doubt. For some weeks there was little to cheer us and then in early August, we saw American planes flying over the Naval Base and rumours were rife that it had been bombed.

The Japanese officers could no longer hide their agitation. Lieutenant Susuki sent a certain sergeant, nicknamed "Gila" (crack-pot) for his fatuous attempts at humour, to take me to his home in Adam Park to test his radio. I found nothing wrong except that the short wave seal had become loose, which meant I could tune to the forbidden wave length. After manipulating the knobs for some time, I heard a BBC overseas bulletin, announcing Russia's declaration of war on Japan and that the war with Japan was drawing to a close! I had heard enough. I resealed the short wave and reported that the set was functioning well. To my astonishment, Susuki came in and asked me to break the seal. I was sure that he did not suspect me which meant that he must be anxious, on his own account, to hear an Allied broadcast although this was forbidden. I decided it would be more dangerous to do what he asked than to refuse. I told him I feared the reprisals of the Kempetai. His face became expressionless and he ordered me back to my quarters.

On my way back, I was overtaken by Sergeant "Gila". He shouted at me that I was in his charge and that I should not be returning without an escort. He slapped me twice on the face,

and then, as if satisfied that justice had been done, his mood changed. In a comparatively quiet voice, he asked me if I had been given a meal before being dismissed, and when I said "No", he ordered me to return with him. This time, to my surprise he led me into the kitchen. Muttering about the way I had been treated, he began frying eggs and served them to me with a full plate of rice saying, "*Makan*!" (Eat!) I set to with a will, wondering if our captors were hoping to ingratiate themselves with us before the day of surrender!

Feeling quite light-headed, I returned to Hut 106 to give them the good news. Events in the following days strengthened our belief that the end of the war was near. After 13 August, no fatigue parties were sent out. On the sixteenth, a prisoner-of-war working party called out to us as they passed by Sime Road, that peace had been signed. Within two days, we heard that Red Cross parcels were on the way. The Japanese were looking worn out and many were in tears, but still we were given *no official confirmation* that the war was over. Our meals were improving daily and on Sunday, the 19 August, we were served such quantities of rice and fish curry that many of us were forced to leave food on our plates! On that day, too, the last of the Double Tenth prisoners were released, in a most pitiable state, scarcely able to stand.

For the next ten days, we were strangely unsettled and disturbed. On 20 August, Collinge circulated a report of an interview he had had with General Saito concerning the recommendations for the return of internees to a normal way of life. We were reminded that the Japanese were still in control — that did not go down well with us — and that we were to do our utmost to avoid incidents. General Saito declared that he had tried to be fair during the period of our internment and that he regretted the food shortage and the deaths. We were to have no celebrations and, of course, order was to be maintained. We were reminded that there would be severe punishments for infringement of discipline.

It was almost miraculous under these conditions that there were no serious incidents. We found our tempers frayed, our nerves on edge, and our usual good humour giving way to petulance. We slept badly and the more news we had, the less we were satisfied. When we heard that an atomic bomb had been exploded, we craved for details and explanation but none were forthcoming. We received no news of our families and it was some days, before we were allowed to send postcards abroad. But there were at least additions to our diet —

old army stocks of Australian cheese and frozen Cold Storage butter arrived for us and also, fresh eggs and fish for the hospital patients. From the sky came leaflets in Japanese telling the guards to treat us well and in English, urging us to "keep our cool" and obey orders!

On 1 September, a few of us, unable to control ourselves any longer, broke camp. We managed to board a bus to town as far as the corner of Albert Street and Bencoolen Street. As we were preparing to alight, a crowd surged forward. We saw that they were Chinese and for a few seconds, we were naive enough to think they were coming to welcome us. Then we saw they were armed with hammers and sticks. They converged on the bus and began dragging out Malay passengers, beating them mercilessly in a frenzy of revenge. We managed to escape and made our way to the safety of the Central Fire Station in Hill Street with Jimmy Phipps, the pre-war superintendent.

Near the Capitol Cinema, we had a heart-warming reunion with Sassoon Sadka's amah, who was venturing out from her area for the first time for many months. We asked her to try and move in to Sassoon's house, Pollux, to re-occupy it on his behalf. From the Fire Station, where Jimmy was given a terrific welcome by his staff, we managed to get a lift back to camp. The horror of the scenes we had witnessed remained with us and we were not tempted to break camp again.

But now a steady stream of visitors came and one of the first was Poon Kong Ah, who had been manager for M & E Nathan before the war. I asked him to try and get us a radio and to our delight, he returned with one the next morning. It was 2 September, the day on which the signing of the Japanese surrender took place. The ceremony was broadcast and we were able to listen to it. That evening, we tuned to the Overseas Services of the BBC and as the simple little signature tune, "Lili Bolero", came over the air, we were joined by internees from all over the camp, many weeping unashamedly. The next days brought memorable events in quick succession. The day after the official surrender, Lady Thomas hoisted the Union Jack over the camp and our ragged assembly stood to attention, then broke into snatches of patriotic song. We managed a verse of "*Land of Hope and Glory*" and ended with "*There'll always be an England*". The re-occupation of the island began on 5 September and, on the same day, the Straits Times re-appeared in print, one hundred years after its first issue. On that day too, we tasted our first

fresh bread for four years, baked for us by the cooks of HMS *Sussex*.

The ban on leaving camp was lifted and the gates stood open. The island reverted to Singapore time and, as a further symbol of the restoration of British rule, the Band of the Royal Marines marched proudly into camp and performed the traditional ceremony of Beating the Retreat. But our moods continued to fluctuate. At times we made a conscious effort to blot out the intervening years and to envisage a return to the life interrupted by war, but at the back of our minds, we knew that nothing could be the same again and questions were forming that needed answers. Meanwhile, we strutted about camp parading our freedom.

On 9 September, we found that we had a new status. We had been taken over by the organisation for the Repatriation of Allied Prisoners-of-war and Internees, RAPWI for short. Junior members of the Colonial Service among the internees were appointed as officials. We welcomed the change, confident that at last, we could be given definite news of the date of our repatriation, but we were disappointed. The days went by bringing small comforts. Our basic rations were still meagre, but now we had such luxuries as tinned salmon, pears, jam, cheese and sugar. Lady Mountbatten paid us a visit, quite informally, as she was anxious to see for herself the conditions in which we had lived. But neither her visit nor the arrival of a small company of ENSA to entertain us, did much for our morale. We were still starved of news of our families and longed to come to grips with the problems that we were bound to meet, when eventually we resumed our normal lives.

With our minds so pre-occupied, it took the arrival of my cousin and partner, Meyer Nathan, to cheer us up. He had come from India with the invading forces and was able to give us good news, at last, of members of our family and friends who had found refuge in the United Kingdom, Australia and India. He himself had been fortunate. After a hair-raising escape from Singapore, he had landed in India where he had been seconded to the RAF and had come through the war unscathed. During the next few days, it was good to see the hospital patients taken away for treatment or repatriation. But the rest of us still had to be content with rumours. We had to wait our turn along with 32,000 other internees and prisoners-of-war, but it was hard to be patient.



Front row of Civilians. Bishop Wilson of Singapore, Rayman, Dr. Munshi, S. S. Scales, Bennett, C C Brown, Watson, Forbes.

The 12 September was proclaimed Surrender and Victory Day and many of us decided we would be present at the ceremony though no arrangements had been made for us. No transport was available so we left on foot, a strange procession of scarecrows dressed in an assortment of tattered, shirts, singlets and shorts with feet either bare or in threadbare tennis shoes. But we felt like princes as we passed Japanese soldiers in a state of complete dejection, cleaning the streets they had so recently patrolled. We joined the crowds in front of the Municipal buildings and in a mood of solemnity, watched the march past of the Japanese High Command flanked by representatives of the forces of the Commonwealth and South-east Asia Command. Then it was time to face the shock of revisiting our pre-war homes and places of work. I was relieved to find my premises intact but like my flat, completely bare.

In Pollux, we were heartened by the sight of the amahs who had been allowed to move in, but it, too, was bare, apart from a few chairs and a settee that had been slashed open in a fruitless search for hidden valuables. The amahs had managed to save a few of our possessions, a little crockery, a few silver articles and money that had been entrusted to them. We felt humbled by their loyalty and very grateful. In Waterloo Street, we found that the caretaker of the synagogue and his family had weathered the occupation. So had the

The next day, Lord Louis Mountbatten arrived in Sime Road and his own exuberance and confidence were infectious. For a short time we forgot our frustration. We gave him a rousing welcome, cheering him till we were hoarse. I still prize the Japanese ten dollar note — known cynically as "banana money" because it was as worthless as the bunch of bananas printed on it — that he autographed for me.

The days that followed brought an end to internment for most of the Europeans and suddenly, the camp was almost empty. But we, the Jewish internees, were still there. Now it was made plain to us that as most of us were locally domiciled, we were expected to make our own arrangements to restart our peace-time lives. But many had no homes to go to for they had been bombed or requisitioned by the Japanese and had by now, been occupied by the first-comers. "Tea money" would be needed to persuade the occupiers to leave and money was not available. New currency was only now being put into circulation and no other currency was valid. Incidentally, it was not exactly new — the dollar note bore an engraving of George VI, the date was 1 July 1941, and the signature was that of H Weisberg, who, at that time, had been the Colonial Treasurer, Straits Settlement. The notes had been waiting in India during the war years.

Without money, many of us were helpless. Apart from needing a roof over our heads, there was also the need for household goods and furniture. We were told to apply to the Custodian of Enemy Property, who might release articles we recognised as ours, or we might be allowed to take furniture on loan. We lost patience and grew loud in our complaints. It was probably therapeutic to give vent to our feelings, as we were like patients recovering from a long and serious illness and apathy impedes recovery! In our new aggressive mood, we loudly condemned the BMA as an administrative jungle, referred to the newly-promoted colonels, who had landed with the invading forces and seemed to proliferate daily as "banana colonels" and S.E.A.C. (South East Asia Command) stood for Supreme Example of Absolute Confusion. We had justification for our outburst against the BBC, when we heard that atrocity stories about Japanese Camps had been broadcast on Home wavelengths before our families had been notified that we were safe and in reasonable health! It was only in mid-September that we had been able to send any mail and we still had not received more than a card containing a few bleak words.

Gradually, even Hut 106 began to empty. Among those who remained were Moses Cohen, Rupert Reuben, Leon Simon and myself. Our closest relatives were in India or the United Kingdom. We made repeated applications for repatriation passages, meeting each time with refusals. We considered our request was fair and were determined to press our case. We knew moments of great bitterness. The change we had noticed in the behaviour of some of the European internees did not help. Certain of the heads of large mercantile firms were particularly at fault. As internees they had been, of course, on an equal footing with us or, in fatigues, they had had to take orders from us and they had also accepted favours from us. On the eve of their departure, they became aloof, scarcely acknowledging our existence. A few unpleasant incidents were inevitable. One occurred at the old Dutch Club in Cairnhill Road, where we had gone on one of our rare sorties from Sime Road. A few ex-internees were having a drink there and as soon as we entered, one of them called out to us, "Hey, what price *gula malacca* (molasses)?" His tone of voice made it obvious that he wanted to provoke us by implying that we had sold *gula malacca* on the black market. Leon and I stepped forward and were about to punch him, when the futility of retaliation restrained us. There is an old Rabbinic saying, "When one dog barks, he soon finds other dogs to bark with him!" Such behaviour is after all best ignored.

I suffered another distasteful experience when I went to the Cathay building, in the hope of recovering some of my stock removed by the Japanese in the early days of Occupation. The Japanese had set up a broadcasting studio in the Cathay using the equipment they had looted. Now that the British were once more in control, there was a chance that I would be lucky. It did not take me long to unearth radios, spares and even letter-heads and name-plates belonging to M & E Nathan. I told the officer in charge, a certain Captain Dumerique, that I would arrange to have the goods collected. To my utter surprise, he retorted that I could do no such thing until I could produce proof of ownership. I protested that after three-and-a-half years of internment and the chaos of occupation, this was hardly possible and I asked him to reconsider. But he was adamant and I left angry and distressed. I found that others had suffered the same type of rebuff and I wonder what eventually happened to our goods. I could not forget this meeting with Dumerique and about a year later, I

recognised him when he came into our shop, recently re-established. He noticed some special microphones I had brought back with me from England. Commenting that they were just what the BBC needed, he announced officiously that he would be sending us a requisition order for them. I admit that I took great pleasure in telling him to save himself the trouble as they were not for sale.

There is little doubt that those who have lived under enemy occupation, feel more keenly the ill-conceived actions of their *own* people than those of the enemy. Vehement reactions were not, therefore, unnatural. I remember feeling deep disgust, when I heard a group of expatriate internees gloating over quite a small act of vengeance they had wreaked on the Japanese. They had commandeered a lorry to go to Jurong, where they hoped to find their cars in a pound rumoured to be there. They did not find their cars, but they came upon Japanese prisoners assembling. They lined up sentries and stripped them of their valuables. We knew even greater revulsion, when we saw Dr Evans beating Kobyashi after he had bound him to a lorry. He was pummelling him mercilessly with his fists and we called out to him to stop behaving like the Japanese! *I* had not the heart for revenge although, while suffering occupation, I had vowed to avenge the disappearance of my brother and our friends.

I found that however critical I was of the behaviour of expatriate internees, I was even more critical of my fellow Jews and myself. Living at such close quarters for so long, we became only too well aware of each other's shortcomings. My feelings filled me with a deep discontent which, much later, was to translate itself into action to help re-shape communal life. But now I was too tired. At last on 1 October 1945, through the good offices of a former colonial officer and a nurse I had befriended in camp, Moses, Leon, Rupert and I were given passages on the s.s. *Antenor*. We sailed away to be reunited with our families, leaving behind the island that had, until this devastating war, cocooned us and our community in a state of great complacency. The history of Singapore and of the Jews in its midst were both set on a new course.

Postscript

After the war, significant influences were at work which greatly affected our community. Changes in the political sphere, advances in communication and air travel and the foundations of the State of Israel all helped to extend our horizon.

In 1978, we celebrated the centenary of the dedication of the Maghain Aboth Synagogue. Concluding our short history of the community that appeared in the commemorative brochure, are these words:

"All these factors led to an awakening of a sense of our responsibilities: our responsibility as citizens to the land in which we live; our responsibility to each other as Jews and our responsibility to ourselves to make the most of our gifts and opportunities. Nothing is achieved without a price and the cost of our becoming a more outward-looking community has been the decrease in our number for many of our members have emigrated in search of their goal. But although our numbers have decreased from nearly one thousand to a mere 450, we remain a strong and vital community."

It is hoped the story of these changes will be told in a sequel to this book.

Proclamation of Third September 1939 to German subjects in Singapore

George VI by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, Ireland and the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India.

PROCLAMATION

L.S. T. S. W. Thomas
Governor and Commander-in-Chief

WHEREAS I, Thomas Shenton Whitelegge Thomas, Knight Grand Cross of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Straits Settlements and their Dependencies, am satisfied by information received from a Secretary of State that war has broken out between His Majesty King George VI and Germany and between their respective subjects:

NOW THEREFORE I, Thomas Shenton Whitelegge Thomas, Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Straits Settlements and their Dependencies, hereby require all persons being German subjects to report on Monday, the 4th September, 1939 between the hours of 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. to the Control Officer and the Control designated hereunder:-

The Office of the Registrar of Aliens, Central Police Station, Singapore, bringing with them their documents of identity, together with the following articles:-

Personal clothing, jewellery and cash, toilet articles and a blanket. Persons subject to the directions contained in this Proclamation who fail to report within the period of time above specified **may be arrested by any person** and delivered to any Police Officer to be dealt with according to law.

GIVEN at Singapore this 3rd day of September in the year of Our Lord one thousand nine hundred and thirty nine.

By his Excellency's Command
A. S. Small,
Colonial Secretary.
God Save the King

Report of a Commission of Enquiry into THE INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS IN SINGAPORE BY THE NIPPONESE AUTHORITIES, FEBRUARY 1942–1945.

The Nipponese Army High Command Order, calling for the internment of civilians in Singapore as translated and circulated on 16th February 1942, read as follows:-

"Citizens of all nations at war with Japan, including members of the Chunking Government, are to proceed to the Padang at 10.30 a.m. on Tuesday, 17th February 1942, with enough clothing for ten days, but they must carry the packages themselves. Sick and wounded civilians are to remain in their homes or in hospital. Their addresses are to be recorded. Internees will be accommodated in two camps, one for men and one for women. No servants are permitted except of the same race. Those engaged in public services are to carry on and wear arm-bands signifying "Service". It is unnecessary to bring food."

In response to this order 1,197 men, 145 women and 37 children assembled on the Padang where they were kept on parade until nearly 2 p.m. and then marched five miles to the first internment camps — Joo Chiat Police Station and Karical Flats for men and two large houses near the Roxy Cinema for women and children. They had to carry with them most of their baggage, but some transport was provided for the heavier packages and a few internees who brought cars with them were allowed to use them for conveying the old, sick and young children to the camps.

No preparations had been made at any of the buildings for the reception of the internees. They were herded into rooms and outhouses. The floors were thick with dust and dirt, torn papers, broken fragments of furniture and other debris left by the looters. In Joo Chiat Police Station, the bucket latrines had not been cleared for five days. No food or hot drinks were provided. The internees had nothing to eat and nothing but water to drink from breakfast on the 17th until 3 p.m. on

18th February, when small quantities of canned food were delivered to the camps by a British member of the Capitulation Liaison Committee.

In the days which followed, many hundreds more men and women were interned and on the 24th February, a new camp for men were opened at the French Convent in Joo Chiat. But no supplies of any kind were forthcoming from the Nipponese authorities until 26th February, when they supplied the camps with rice, cooking oil, salt and tea. In the intervening period, the camps had had to depend on supplies collected by internees (five from each camp) who were provided with passes and cars. They collected food, cooking utensils, etc from private houses, offices and warehouses which had not already been occupied by the Nipponese.

Living conditions at these camps were deplorable. In Joo Chiat Police Station, for example, every available building, outhouse and shed was occupied on an area of about 20 to 24 square feet per man. Internees had no mattresses, beds or mosquito nets. They had no stools, chairs or tables. Many of them had no proper feeding utensils and had to make do with empty food containers. They slept on concrete or wooden floors using spare clothing as bedding.

The internal latrines could not be used, as every inch of space up to their doors was used as living accommodation. Open pits were dug in the central parade ground for use as latrines and for the disposal of rubbish. This work was hampered by the lack of proper tools which the Nipponese refused to supply. Latrine buckets and garbage tins had to be used for cooking and distributing food. There was no provision for the segregation of the sick who were treated where they lay on concrete floors. Doctors were without proper drugs, medicines or instruments which had to be collected as opportunity offered from the surgeries of interned medical men.

Fair quantities of canned food were collected during the first week but by then, sources of supply were rapidly disappearing and the Nipponese would give no indications as to when regular and adequate rations would be supplied. The camp was rationed on a bare subsistence basis.

Breakfast was a cup of tea or coffee and lunch, canned meat and/or fruit and a little boiled rice. Tea or coffee with or without a small scone or biscuit during tea breaks.

On the 6th March, male internees were moved to the Changi Prison and were followed by the women and children days later. With the exception of the old and infirm and

mothers with infants in arms, the seven-mile journey to the gaol was made on foot, light baggage being carried. The portion of the gaol allocated to the male internees (whose numbers had now grown to 2,300) had been designed to accommodate 400 prisoners. (The population progressively increased and had grown to 2,834 men, when internees were moved to their last camp at Sime Road in May 1944).

Three internees were allocated to each cell and in addition, 20 to 30 were accommodated in the central alleyways on each of the first floors of the cells. On the ground floors, work-rooms, mess-rooms and punishment cells were used as living accommodation and there was a considerable overflow population living on open verandahs, in passages and in make-shift shade and huts.

A survey, made at the end of 1942, showed that each male internee had an average of 30 square feet of floor space. But this included passages through work-shops, door-ways and other spaces in communal use and the actual area, which each internee could call his own, was not more than 24 square feet, i.e. 8′ × 3′.

In work-rooms and mess-rooms, there was no room on the floors even for the small quantity of baggage which had to be accommodated and suitcases, kit bags, hats, towels, and clothing had to be suspended from the roof. There were no separate rooms for messing, recreation or religious purposes. Concerts, lectures, educational classes and religious services had to be held in the open air.

The camp was infested with bed bugs, which originated on the upper floor of the cells, but spread rapidly to all parts of the building. The high degree of congestion in the living quarters complicated the task of dealing with the pest and the utmost efforts of the Health Officers could do no more than to keep the plague from getting completely out of hand. Throughout the stay at Changi, the bed bug added its quota to the squalor of living conditions and (ably assisted by the mosquito) constituted one of the major sources of discomfort at night.

In view of the intimation in the original internment notice that no transport would be provided, those who assembled on the Padang on the 17th February had limited their baggage to hand packages such as suitcases and kit bags containing in the main clothing, toilet necessaries and valuables.

Those subsequently interned received very diverse treatment. Some were allowed to bring with them bed and bed-

ding and a reasonable quantity of personal belongings. Others were sent in with even less baggage than those originally interned and often with no more than the clothes they wore. Of the great majority, it may be said that they entered upon internment grossly deficient in the bare necessities of civilised life. They had no beds, bedding, stool, chairs, tables and many of them had no feeding utensils, no (or little) spare clothing or toilet necessaries.

The Nipponese did nothing to supply these deficiencies. Their provisioning of the camp was limited to food (rice, cooking oil, dried fish, sugar and salt), small quantities of washing soap, old newspapers (for use as toilet paper) and petrol for the camp lorries.

From the third year of internment they, also, supplied small quantities of drugs and hospital supplies and a fraction of the materials required for bedmaking and the repair of living quarters. The quantity of food supplied by the Nipponese ranged from 40% to 95% of the total rations issued to the camp at various periods. Everything else had to be supplied by the internees.

They had to buy extra food necessary to supplement official rations, to fell, cut up and transport all firewood required and to procure as best they might, drugs, medicines, hospital supplies, beds, bedding, clothing, footwear, toilet necessaries, tools and materials required for the maintenance of essential services, for the cultivation of vegetable gardens and the repair of buildings.

Funds were raised, by loans from internees and uninterned persons, but neither money was available nor facilities provided by the Nipponese for its expenditure were ever sufficient to meet the full requirements of the camp.

Phase One. Control by the Nipponese Army High Command in Malay, February to September 1942

During this period, the internees were under the direct control of the Nipponese Military Authorities. The first camp commandant was Major Kato, whose attitude may be judged from the following extracts from his pronouncements to representatives of the camp during the first weeks of internment:

"If you want food, you must work for it. The first job is to repair destruction in the town."

"In the camp, you are to do everything for yourselves. Women and men are to be strictly separated."

"You are to feed yourselves and work in co-operation and lead a good life in the camp."

"The Governor has asked us to supply you with beds and mosquito nets, but these are luxuries in war-time."

"You must submit a list of medical instruments and medicines required. The High Command will then decide whether these will be supplied to you or whether you have to get them for yourselves."

(**N.B**. The only medical supplies received from the Nipponese during the first 25 months of internment was one bale of cotton wool.)

Major Kato lost no time in informing the internees that it was the intention of the Nipponese to punish them in revenge for the alleged ill-treatment of Nipponese internees by the British authorities. On 25 March, when he handed over control of the internees to Lieutenant Okazaki he said, "When we consider the way in which Japanese internees have been treated by the British, we feel we cannot give you freedom or an easy life."

One of the punishments which he decreed and which was maintained during the first 15 months of internment was the complete separation of husbands and wives, parents and children and male and female relatives generally in the Men's and Women's camps.

Except for a meeting on Christmas Day 1942 and on 11 February 1943, husbands and wives quartered in the same building were not allowed to meet until June 1943, from which date meetings were allowed as follows:

June to September 1943	— half hour every fortnight
13/9/43 to 10/10/43	— half hour every week
10/10/43 to 25/12/43	— no meetings
25/12/43	— meeting for one hour
1/1/44	— meeting for one hour
7/4/44	— meeting for one hour
4/6/44 to August 1945	— weekly meetings

In succession to Major Kato, Lieutanant Okasaki, assisted by 2nd Lieut. Tokuda, controlled the Changi Camp from 25 March to September 1942. It was on the whole a negative administration. Internees were left to work out their own organisation. The controlling officers seldom entered the living quarters of the camp. There were no roll-calls or routine inspections.

After mid-April, limited and irregular opportunities were given for buying food and other supplies through a firm of Indian merchants. But these facilities were insufficient to enable the camp to get in enough supplies of food to balance the diet. And the camp was on the verge of an outbreak of beri-beri in June when, after repeated requests, permission was given to buy rice polishings.

Nothing was done to relieve congestion or improve living conditions. Indeed, these became worse as internees — many of them ill-equipped — continued to be sent to the camp. Under this regime, the administration of discipline was left in the main to the Camp Committee.

Individual punishments inflicted by the Nipponese staff included three cases of face-slapping of women internees for alleged irregularities in bowing and a few similar instances in the Men's Camp, but there were no instances of imprisonment or corporal punishment inflicted by the officers in charge of the Camp. At the time, the internees took this as a matter of course, but in the light of their later experiences, they were to realise that the restraint shown by Lieut. Okazaki and Tokuda were a matter of surprise and gratitude.

Phase Two. Control by the Military Administration Department, Synon (Singapore), September 1942–October 1943.

In September 1942, control of the camp was taken over by the Military Administration Department. Mr Y Asahi was appointed Controller of Enemy Aliens and Mr Naito became camp supervisor. These two men were, by far, the most humane and able of the Nipponese officers who controlled the camp during the 3½ years of internment. They planned to relieve congestion by releasing locally-domiciled internees, the old and infirm and such Europeans as could be employed on work of public service.

They tried to improve the rationing of the camp and to provide further opportunities for recreation by incorporating in the camp an area outside the prison walls. But from the outset, they were thwarted by those in higher authority. No appreciable release of internees was affected. The population of the camp was increased by a large number of people being sent in by the Military Police.

There was no improvement in the basic rations of the camp and, although a vegetable garden was established outside the prison walls, internees were only allowed to make restricted use of this for recreational purposes — women for

one hour on three evenings and men for two evenings.

Mr Asahi announced, however, that he had made an arrangement whereby the Neutral Agent, Singapore, would be allowed to supply the camp with food and necessaries on behalf of the International Red Cross Society. He also said that the ban of meetings between husbands and wives would be lifted in the near future.

But the more liberal attitude towards the general organisation of the camp under this regime was accompanied by harsher methods of administering discipline. It soon became apparent that this was outside the scope of Mr Ashai's control. An officer of the Military Police, Lieut Tchuchitana, was posted to the camp and he brought with him a guard unit of Sikhs with a few Nipponese soldiers and N.C.O's.

Orders were issued that internees must bow to all Sikhs on sentry duty, must bow to the Sikh guardroom whenever they passed it, and that the cleaning of the guardroom, including the cleaning of latrines must be undertaken by the internees. Sikh guards, with loaded rifles, were placed in charge of fatigue parties and internees were told that their orders must be immediately obeyed. This led to a great deal of dissatisfaction and several instances of face-slapping occured and in one case, an internee was kicked, punched and man-handled by Sikh guards without instructions from the Nipponese officer.

Under this regime, the camp had its first experience of the methods of punishment and investigation employed by the Military Police. Four internees, who had broken bounds at night, were caught returning to camp and were severely beaten with heavy plies and, subsequently, tied up in the guard room, one for 72 hours, one for 54 hours and two for 36 hours without food or water, during which time they receive further beatings and manhandling by members of the Sikh guard.

A man, accused of passing notes to a Prisoner-of-War working party, was beaten with knotted ropes, sticks and subjected to torture by covering his face with a cloth which was kept soaked in water. He was finally removed with another internee to a penal establishment where they were kept on starvation diet without bedding, spare clothing or facilities for washing for seventeen days.

A woman internee was removed to Joo Chiat Police Station where she was kept for eight days without bed or bedding. She had no privacy, no provision for washing and was kept on a diet of rice and water.

In April 1943, Asahi and Naito relinquished their command of the camp to Lieut Susuki (supervisor) and Mr Tominaga (officer in charge of discipline). The latter took immediate steps to exercise stricter control over the internal organisation of the camp. A series of raids on the living quarters were carried out under the leadership of Mr Tominaga in the course of which large numbers of books, atlases, diaries and other documents were seized and internees were ordered to hand in all A.R.P helmets, whistles, electric torches, rice sacks used as bedding, electrical appliances and privately owned tools.

The administration of corporal punishment became more frequent and, usually, included a form of torture known as the "Stick Treatment". The victim was made to kneel on the ground, a pole two inches in diameter and six feet long was placed behind his knees. He was required to assume a sitting posture with the body held upright. If he made any movement to ease his cramped position, he was struck with a stick or other implement by the Sikh guard or Nipponese officer administering the punishment.

A great deal more authority was now delegated to junior Nipponese officers, some of whom used their powers with reckless irresponsibility. One officer, (Kawasoyi) in an evening's tour of the camp assaulted twenty two men and four women. Most were struck about the head or face, the weapons used being variously a faggot of firewood, a plank of timber, a stick and in one instance, a wooden chair.

One internee was kicked in the eye after having been knocked down. A crippled woman was struck while trying to rise from her chair. One woman, who was ill, was struck while asleep. The alleged offence in each case was that the internee had failed to bow, but the officer had entered cells and living rooms without warning, and blows were struck in most cases before internees were aware of his presence.

On another occassion, the same officer entered an exercise yard after **Lights Out** and struck down an internee, who had been sleeping on the verandah and was rising from his bed when the officer's presence was announced. He was knocked unconscious and left lying on the ground with his head bleeding profusely.

Another officer (Kobyashi), when he discovered a breach of regulations regarding the use of electrical equipment in the Women's Camp, ordered the Woman's Representative to go to the Sikh's guardroom and remain standing there until

further notice. He then left the camp for the week-end. After great difficulty, permission was obtained from another Nipponese officer for the prisoner to sleep in an open room opposite the Guard Room and the following morning, she was released by Lieut Susuki.

The same officer punished five members of the camp orchestra by confining them on the roof of the prison tower for 36 hours. During this time, they were exposed to the full heat of the sun and had no covering at night.

Two of the Men's Representatives, who were in the office during this period, were locked up for ten days on a diet of rice and water; one for contesting a statement that British doctors were leaving Japanese internees to die of disease in India without any attempt to cure them and the other, because an internee on fatigue had used a ladder without first obtaining permission from the Nipponese.

Two members of the Men's Executive Committee were submitted to the "stick treatment", beaten with sticks and plaited rotan and were locked up in a store room for three weeks on a penal diet and conditions of great privations. These men had offended Kobayashi who denounced them to Tominaga without the least justification as being engaged in subversive activities in the camp.

These and other disciplinary incidents equally brutal and irresponsible created an atmosphere of terrorism in the camp. Internees felt they were dominated by inimical forces which might at any time break through all restraint with incalculable results.

In September 1943, the first full roll-call of the camp under Nipponese supervision took place, followed at intervals by similar parades culminating on 10th October 1943 ("The Double Tenth") with a roll-call parade which inaugurated a period of dark terrorism that will live in the memory of every member of the Camp at the time.

Double Tenth Investigation

A Commission, appointed by the authorities of Sime Road Internment Camp to take and record evidence from internees who were arrested by the Japanese Military Police in consequence of a raid on Changi Camp on the 10th October 1943, first sat on Thursday, 30th August 1945. It completed the record of evidence on Sunday evening, 2nd September 1945 after having taken statements from 36 of the survivors. It was considered urgent to record this evidence prior to the disper-

sal of the camp, which it is believed might take place as early as 3rd September, 1945.

On the 10th October 1943, all internees in Changi Prison were paraded soon after dawn in the Main Yard as if for a routine roll-call. Soon after this, the Military Police arrived and armed soldiers picketed all doors. A number of internees were called by name, labelled and segregated. Internees were then ordered back to their Block Yards where further labelling and segregation took place.

Meanwhile, a search was made of the personal belongings of all internees. During this search, there was looting and wanton destruction by the Japanese. The investigation finished after dusk and internees were allowed to return inside the prison. Many of them had had no food since 6.00 p.m. on the previous day (Tokyo Time), and some suffered distress and even collapsed owing to the day-long exposure to the sun without food.

In consequence of this investigation, 57 internees were removed from Changi Prison by the Military Police on or after 10th October 1943. With one exception, these were all interrogated at Japanese Military Police centres in Singapore. The course of the interrogation showed that the Japanese were trying to establish that there was a spy organisation in Changi Prison which received and transmitted by radio-telephony, which had established contacts in the town for the purpose of sabotage and stirring up anti-Japanese feeling, and which collected money from outside for this purpose.

In fact, there was no spy organisation, no radio transmission and no attempt to promote anti-Japanese activities outside the camp. There were, however, radio receiving sets in the camp which were used solely for the reception of news and money was collected from persons outside the camp for the sole purpose of supplementing the totally inadequate rations supplied by the Japanese.

The conditions under which internees were detained by the Military Police were rigorous in the extreme. They were crowded, irrespective of race, sex or state of health in small cells or cages. They were so cramped that they could not lie down in comfort. No bedding nor coverings of any kind were provided and bright lights were kept burning overhead all night.

From 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., inmates had to sit up straight on the bare floor with their knees up and were not allowed to relax or put their hands on the floor, or talk, or move except

to go to the lavatory. Any infraction of the rigid discipline involved a beating by the sentries. There was one pedestal closet in each cell or cage and the water flushing into the pan provided the only water supply for all purposes including drinking. It should be recorded here that nearly all of the inmates suffered from enteritis or dysentery. No soap, towel, toilet articles nor handkerchiefs were permitted and inmates had no clothes other than those they were wearing.

The food supplied, normally rice, occasionally vegetables and a weak tea with no milk or sugar, was less than half that supplied by our own Prisons Department as punishment diet for Asiatics. It was insufficient to support life over a long period and led to serious deficiency diseases in all cases of long detention.

Medical facilities afforded, whether visits of medical personnel or the supply of medicines or drugs, were for all practical purposes non-existent. In many cases, our own doctors sharing the cell with the sick made urgent requests for prompt medical attention on their behalf, particularly in cases where the victim was on the point of death, but those requests were invariably ignored. In one case, a Japanese doctor, who was called to see an internee suffering from a fractured pelvis and possibly ruptured kidney, remarked that the man was not sick enough.

The three women taken from Changi Prison were detained in exactly the same conditions as the men and shared cells with male prisoners of all races. They were afforded no privacy, even for their most intimate requirements and any attempt on the part of Europoean men to screen them was broken down by the guards. They were subjected to insults and obscene gestures by Japanese prisoners in the same cell and the Japanese prisoners, with the assent of the guards, tried to compel them to perform sordid tasks in the cell.

The buildings occupied by the Japanese Military Police resounded all day and night with blows, the bellowing of inquisitors and the shrieks of the tortured. From time to time, victims from the torture chambers would stagger back or, if unconscious, would be dragged back to their cells with marks of their ill-treatment on their bodies.

In one such case, an unconscious victim died during the night. He did not receive any medical attention and his body was not removed until the afternoon. In these conditions, and this atmosphere of terror, these men and women waited, sometimes for months, to be summonded for interrogation,

which might come at any hour of the day or night.

Usually, interrogation started quietly and would continue, so long as the inquisitors got the expected answers. If, for any reason, such answers were not forthcoming physical violence was immediately employed. The methods used were:

1. Beating with iron bars, brass rods, sticks, bamboos, wet knotted ropes, belts with buckles, or revolver butts all over the body.

While these beatings were being inflicted, the victims were sometimes suspended by the wrists from a rope passed over a beam. Sometimes their hands were tied behind their backs and forced to kneel on a sharp piece of wood or iron. At the same time, sharp edged pieces of wood or metal were placed behind their knees so as to cut into the flesh as they knelt.

While they were so kneeling, the Japanese would jump on their thighs or on the projecting ends of the bar or wood behind their knees. Sometimes, to increase the pressure on the bar or wood behind the knees, a Japanese would perch himself on the shoulders of the victim or the victim, with hands untied, would be compelled to hold heavy weights above his head.

They were often forced to remain in this position without intermission for 9 to 10 hours, during which period, interrogation would go on remorselessly, punctuated by blows. At times, the victim would be tied to a table and remained tied until he lost consciousness. This treatment was, in some cases, carried on daily for 4 to 5 days consecutively.

In one case, a European, who died later, was interrogated with the usual beatings for 55 hours at a stretch and another European, since dead, underwent 144 hours of beatings in all, according to the estimates of his cellmates.

2. Water torture: There were two forms of water torture. In the first, the victim was tied or held down on his back and a cloth placed over his nose and mouth. Water was then poured on the cloth. Interrogation proceeded and the victim was beaten if he did not reply. As he opened his mouth to breathe or answer questions, water went down his throat until he could hold no more. Sometimes, he was then beaten over his distended stomach and sometimes, a Japanese would jump on his stomach or pressed on it with his foot.

In the second method, the victim was tied lengthways on a ladder, face upwards; with a rung of the ladder across his throat and his head below the ladder. In this position, he was

slid head first into a tub of water and kept there till almost drowned. After being revived, interrogation continued and he would be re-immersed.

3. During interrogation the inquisitor, in many cases, burnt the victim with cigarette and cheroot ends, even on the most sensitive parts of the body, e.g. the armpits, between the toes, on the scrotum and penis. Several Asiatics had petrol poured on their bellies and ignited and, one had his hands tied together and immersed in a bowl of methylated spirit which was then ignited.

4. Electric torture: There were two types of electric tortures. In the first, an induction coil was used with one electrode being attached to the hand or foot and the other, a bare wire, was applied to various parts of the body. One victim reported that he was thrown across the room by the violence of the shock. The effect has been described as one of physical and mental disintegration. The second form, apparently more severe, was called the electric table or electric cap. There is evidence that this was used, but not on any of our internees.

5. In addition to these forms of torture, the inquisitor often employed other methods such as ju-jitsu, twisting the limbs, bending back of fingers, punching, repeated blows on the same spot and, so on. These methods, in many cases, resulted in dislocations and permanent damage to limbs and joints.

In one case, the inquisitor punctuated his questions by flicking off, with the frayed end of a bamboo, flesh bruised in a previous beating. This left a permanent scar, six inches by three inches, on the victim's thigh.

6. In several cases, the victims were lead to believe that their execution, either by beheading or shooting, was imminent. They were advised to write a letter of farewell. Preparations for execution were carried out, up to the penultimate stage, with such realism that in two cases the victims fainted.

7. Threats to families: Threats were also made to take action against the family of the victim (the wives of some internees were believed to be in Japanese custody in other parts of Asia). Torture was carried out to the limit of human endurance. One internee attempted to commit suicide by jumping over the verandah. In his fall he fractured his pelvis but, despite his condition, his interrogation under torture was continued until just before he died. In another case, the internee asked his inquisitors for the means to commit

suicide. A pistol was produced and was snatched away only when the man was about to carry out his declared intention.

Of the 57 internees detained, as a result of the investigations on 10th October 1943, 12 died of sickness directly attributable to the appalling conditions under which they were detained. One, as described in the preceding paragraph, as a result of his fall and one was executed. The survivors who returned, after lengthy custody by the Military Police, required prolonged treatment in the camp hospital for extreme emaciation (except where Bedema was present), chronic dysentry, neuritis, sores, ulcers, scabies, beri-beri, weak hearts or injuries to joints or limbs.

The Commission also recorded evidence of three surviving members (out of six), of the Body Disposal Squad. They were arrested by the Japanese Military Police in the Municipal Building, Singapore in March 1942, and were sentenced after a so-called trial, to two years solitary confinement, each for "anti-Japanese talk." While in prison, three of six died, without receiving any medical attention, whatsoever. Requests for medicine on their behalf evoked the reply, "You are enemy prisoners and are not allowed any medicines."

Signed: S.N. King, M.C.S. Chairman.
N.S. Alexander, M.S. PhD.
W.L. Blythe, M.C.S.

Appendices

Copy of a Reply made on March 1944 by Moses Cohen (Representative of the Jewish Internees for periods from 1943 to 1945) to a Japanese Directive for comments on conditions in Camp and requests to the Military Authorities.

Copy of Japanese Directive:-

1. What do you think of internment?
2. What do you think of the food rations you are getting now?
3. What do you think of the treatment received from the Military Authorities?
4. Do you want things to go on in the Camp as they are at present?
5. Do you have any demands or requests you wish to put before the Military Authorities?

Note.

Answers are to be written without reserve and to be honest. To be written as one paragraph. The main question is No. 1. The others are by way of illustration.

To be written as one would write to one's father. There will be no punishment.

(Replies to be handed in to the Men's Representative by Friday, March 31st 1944.)

Reply.

Whilst the treatment of civilian prisoners of war no doubt necessitated some form of concentration camp within restricted area — but containing plenty of living space and space for exercise and recreation — it was never imagined that 3,500 internees, including 500 women and children, would be subjected to the existing close confinement of a convict jail (built to house 600 criminals) without adequate facilities for reasonable comfort and recreation. When 103 members of the Jewish Community were told they were to be interned a year ago, they were ordered to be ready in about 20 minutes. This was hardly sufficient time to take with them such of their belongings that could make life in internment more comfortable. They were given no opportunity to make any arrangements for their families in

Singapore and were, in some instances, told their relatives would shortly follow them. Conversely, they were told that they would return in a few days to rejoin their families, but neither of these promises ever materialised. It is felt that if a man is considered an enemy subject and is consequently interned, then surely his wife and children who are dependent on him should follow his fate. Most of the internees so affected have been suffering severe mental anxiety as to the welfare of their families and this worry has been the worst part of their internment. Surely, it could not have been the intention of the Military Authorities to inflict such mental torture. Several attempts have been made by internees to ameliorate this condition but with no results. No communications or meetings have been allowed with relatives for almost one year. Quite naturally, one cannot understand why a small portion of the Jewish Community were interned whereas, the balance has been allowed to remain either on parole or as neutrals. Many internees are in the same category as those who are out and should have been given similar treatment. The rations provided are inadequate and leave us hungry particularly in the evening, when many complain that they find it difficult to go to sleep because of hunger. The Camp has been provided with a scale of rations by the Authorities but this scale has not been adhered to fully since our ration is short by 7 ounces a day per internee. In the case of the Jews, the food is quite unpalatable but having to provide for almost 3,500 people from a single kitchen, one can hardly expect anything different. The dietary laws of the Jew are admittedly severe and in this camp, these laws have had to be disregarded owing to the lack of facilities required. When pork is provided as a meat ration in the Camp, the Jews as well as those who do not eat pork on religious or medical grounds, have to remain with no animal protein for the day. Few, if any, of the internees have been accustomed to this diet in normal life and, it is considered that better and more nourishing food including eggs, fruit and coconuts should be provided by the Authorities. Meanwhile, as a result of the inadequacy of existing rations and due to lack of nourishing food, internees are steadily losing weight and are becoming unfit for heavy fatigue work. One must admit, however, that the present rations are an improvement on what was being provided one or two months earlier. Our conditions of internment still fall far short of the standard accepted for the treatment of civilian internees.

A large number of internees have only a mattress separating their bodies from the bare earth and there are some who have no mattresses at all and are sleeping on jute bags placed on the ground. There is complete lack of privacy and the small space allotted to each internee in Aldgate hut is a width of 3 feet and a length of 7½ feet per man. It is felt that steps should be taken to improve this situation by at least providing beds for those who require them and better housing conditions. One can hardly wish to see such a situation continuing and it is hoped, that some immediate action will be taken to ameliorate the lot of internees. Apart from general fatigue work, there is nothing in the Camp to occupy the time of the average internee, particularly those unable to perform heavy duties. A few months ago, we were allowed to attend lectures, educational classes and dramatic and musical performances, but now that none of these privileges is granted, time seems to drag and a resumption of entertainment will help a great deal. With regard to any demands or, requests or, consideration by the Military Authorities, the following is appended.

a) Facilities be immediately granted for frequent and regular communication between internees and their relatives in Singapore, Malaya and the outside world.
b) Generally all round improvement in the food ration to enable internees to recover and maintain their normal standard of health.
c) Better housing conditions.
d) Greater freedom of movement and exercise.
e) Facilities for study, entertainment and sport.
f) Supply of adequate bedding, clothing and footwear.
g) Supply of essential drugs.
h) Access to world news.

(Signed) Moses Cohen.

Penang and Java

As Penang and Java have been linked by trading, family and social ties with the Jews of Singapore, a brief account of the Jewish connection has a valid place in this book.

PENANG

Penang is an island with an area of about 108 square miles located off the west coast of the Malay peninsular near the northern end of the Strait of Malacca. In 1790, after protracted negotiations, the Sultan of Kedah granted the island to the British for use as a harbour for the refitting of ships engaged in the Chinese trade and for stationing a squadron in case of war with Holland or France. In return the British agreed to pay a sum annually and to help in any war that threatened Kedah. In 1800, after a favourable visit by the Duke of Wellington, Colonel Arthur Wellesley, a piece of land on the mainland was also ceded and named Province Wellesley.

At the time of these transactions there were very few people living in these territories, but with the policy of free trade the population increased rapidly and development was assured for some time, until maladministration brought it to a halt, redeemed for a while by the rubber boom. Meanwhile, Singapore forged ahead, leaving Penang an attraction, if not for trade, most certainly for tourists for the unspoilt beauty of its seascape and the leisurely pace of its life style.

As far as I can establish, the first Jew to join the increasingly cosmopolitan population of the island was Ezekiel Aaron Manasseh, a cousin of the Manassehs who were soon to play a leading role in establishing the community in Singapore. He settled in Penang in the early 1880's and died there eighty six years later. Israel Cohen in his *Mission to the Far East* in 1918 penned a brief, but revealing sketch of him:

> "We anchored at Penang where I called on the oldest Jewish resident, Mr Ezekiel Manasseh, a little grey-haired man who had left Baghdad thirty years before. He was studying a Rabbinical commentary on the Book of Daniel and called my attention to a passage in the last chapter on the basis of which the author calculated that the restoration of Palestine was to take place between

1920 and 1922. This discovery stimulated his generosity and after lunch his son drove me back to my ship."

The firm of **Storch Brothers**, of which I wrote in Chapter VIII, established a branch office in the main street of Penang, dealing in diamonds, silverware and jewelry. Meyer Grand was their manager and he became the leader of the little community as well as a J.P. Meyer took over the business when Storch Brothers was wound up, added a radio department and renamed it **Meyer Grand & Company**. He, too, had connections with Singapore, his wife being the sister of Sassoon Sadka's wife, and when Penang fell to the Japanese, it was to the Sadkas that Meyer came, while his family were able to escape to Australia. Meyer's description of the fall of Penang is in Chapter X.

Other families who spent some years in Penang were the Mordecais — a descendant of whom still lives there, running the Casuarina Hotel in Batu Ferringhi — the Solomons and the gentle, learned, orthodox Mr Isaac and his young family who had previously been living in Java. He emigrated to Australia in 1940 and his children took full advantage of the fine educational opportunities available there as did the children of Sassoon Sadka, all successful in their chosen careers.

The small community, composed it would seem, more of sojourners than residents, was remarkably well-organised until the arrival of the Japanese. They held services in the synagogue, a converted shophouse in Nagore Street and they had a cemetery in a street named after the Jews who made their last journey through it — *Jalan Jawdi*. It is said, but I cannot confirm it, that it was an American tourist who paid for the cemetery in gratitude for the nursing and care he received from members of the community when he docked there after falling ill on a voyage in a P. & O liner. Regular services were held led by a *hazan*, Mr Hiawi, chickens were slaughtered by a *shohet* and there was even a certain amount of tuition in Biblical studies.

It is possible that there are still a few Jews living in Penang. They would be entirely dependent, now, on Singapore, for any religious rites. In 1974, there was an appeal for four men to go there to make a *minyan* for a burial. The three sepharim in use during the comparatively flourishing years have been sent to Australia.

The following is a copy of a government census. I believe that both Sephardi and Ashkenasi are included and also those who spent only a short time in Penang.

Census for 1881, 1891, 1899, 1901 and 1941

Year	Males	Females	Boys	Girls	Total
1881	14	9	5	4	32
1891	47	64	14	30	155
1899	83	41	33	15	172
1901	16	17	8	4	45
1941	11	8	6	5	30

JAVA

Java is the most important island of the Malay Archipelago, now forming part of the Republic of Indonesia. It lies between the Java Sea and the Indian Ocean, separated from Sumatra on the west by the Sunda and, from Bali on the east, by the Bali Straits. It has an area of approximately 50,000 square miles. Fertile volcanic ash almost covering the tertiary volcanic soil has made Java a luxurious garden. Jakarta, formerly Batavia, in northwest Java, is the capital and Surabaya, an important naval base, ranks second.

Three main cultures have moulded Java. First the Hindu, which has left its mark on the language and inspired the development of intricate spinning, weaving and metal work; next under the influence of Islam, Java became a Muslim state, and then in the seventeenth century, began the period of Dutch domination. Desire for a re-assertion of their independence was, however, ever present and although early in this century, the Dutch East Indies acquired the status of a separate unit within the Netherlands Kingdom, this was not enough. When Holland was occupied by Germany in World War II and the Japanese began their campaign of so-called *liberation*, the Indonesians welcomed them as partners in their struggle, making a Dutch defeat in their East Indian colonies inevitable. After the war, they continued their fight alone and finally in 1950, the independent state of Indonesia was admitted to the United Nations.

It is known that Jews began to trade in the East Indies from Holland where they had found a haven from persecution in the early years of the seventeenth century. As the Dutch extended their interests, small scattered pockets of Jewish settlers came into being, hardly meriting the name of communities, for the Jewish traders, like their European counterparts, regarded Europe as *home*. It was not until there was an influx of Jews from Baghdad and India in the late nineteenth century that we find a semblance of communal life in a few

cities of the East Indies. In 1918, Israel Cohen visited the Dutch East Indies on his *Mission to the Far East* and leaves us his impressions:

> "I was met in Batavia by four young Dutch Jews, three of whom were in government service, who lost no time in taking me to see some people in the suburb of Welterfreden. There, an Austrian Jew expressed his scepticism about the advisability of bringing Jews back to Palestine and argued that they should be absorbed among the nation . . . a view I found prevalent among the bulk of the Jews of Java.
>
> "I heard, then, about the conditions of Jewish life in what was then a peaceful Dutch colony. There were several hundred Jews — perhaps as many as two thousand scattered from Batavia to Soerabaya, but most concealed their origin or denied it. Dutch Jews had been living there for a very long period and there were many holding government positions, but there was no communal Jewish life. Mixed marriages were frequent and the only form of association consisted of a few struggling Zionist societies. There was not a single synagogue, although on the High Festivals religious worship was held in a private house or public hall in the three or four largest centres.
>
> "From Batavia, I went to Bandoeng where there was only a single Jewish household consisting of a Sephardi, and his wife who had come from Baghdad. They were a pious couple, genuinely pleased to welcome one who brought greetings from the Holy Land and pointed with pride to a picture on the wall which was an old-fashioned oleograph of the *Tomb of Rachel* and the *Tower of David*. I then journeyed to Soerabaya where I was introduced to about a dozen selected guests. One of them was married to a native of Maderoe . . . and he readily contributed. There were a few other Jews in the city who had native wives and were made to feel social outcasts."

There seems no doubt that the majority of Batavian Jews were either Ashkenasi or Sephardi of European extraction. As Israel Cohen discovered, they did not live as a community. I believe, however, that they made the effort to observe the High Holydays and held well-attended services in the hall

of the Hotel Welterfreden. Some of the Sephardi families living there joined friends or relatives in Soerabaya or Singapore for the High Holydays and when they needed help or advice in religious matters, they referred to Singapore.

Members of the Sayers family, Isaac and Abraham Sherida, Silas Cohen and the Ezekiel family were among those best known in Singapore. The Ezekiels became the foremost opticians and manufacturers of optical equipment, not only in Java but in the whole of the East Indies and when in 1920, Ellis and Abe Ezekiel established a firm in Singapore, they were equally successful.

Although Israel Cohen found *only a single Jewish household* in Bandoeng, I know that the Khatans, Ezras, Joshuas and Aslans carried on thriving businesses there. Cheribon attracted a few families, among them E.J. Nathan, Eliyahu Nathan, my father, and Isaac Jacobs. Tragedy struck the Jacobs family when their daughter Meda was drowned on a voyage to Singapore. The Sayers eventually took over my father's business.

In the Celebes, in the late '80's, two brothers of the Simon family established a profitable import-export business and Moshe Elias amassed a fortune there which, unfortunately, he later lost. In 1918, Joseph Simon, the younger brother, went to Singapore to get married and then set up business in Sumatra. He was very popular with the Dutch authorities and served in the Militia. Both brothers were very observant Jews, the older one being well-versed in the Torah, but as there were no synagogues where they could join in communal worship, they returned to Singapore for the High Holydays. In 1940, Joseph fell ill on a visit to Singapore and died there. He was buried in the Thomson Road Cemetery.

Most of the Sephardi traders settled in Soerabaya. Many had close ties with the Singapore community, among them the Solomons, Bahars, Benjamins, Mizrahis and Mussrys. The Mussry family are probably the best known. Jacob Silas Mussry left Baghdad in 1895 for India where he stayed until 1914. From there, he sailed for Java where he married Toba Solomon who was born in Kota Raja. They set up home in Soerabaya and raised a family of thirteen children. Toba was their guide and mentor while Jacob, a most observant Jew, taught by example. Toba has survived her husband and is living an active life in Los Angeles, still very much the matriarch, surrounded by most of her children and their families. Though slight in stature, Toba immediately impresses one as

a woman of exceptional character, warm, shrewd, far-sighted and quick-witted — with a fund of Arabic sayings, used to advantage. In Soerabaya, she kept open house and many a Jewish traveller found a warm welcome there. Her eldest son, Charlie, who remained in Java, acted for some years as honorary consul for Israel until his untimely death.

The Jews of Soerabaya are, to my knowledge, the only ones to organise themselves into a community. For the dead, they purchased land for their cemetery and provided the services of a *Hevra Kadeesha*, while for the living, they held religious services, mainly in the home of Jacob and Toba Mussry and had at one time an Ashkenasi President, Mr Aranson. They made their loyalty to their Jewish identity their rallying point.

Now there is scarcely a Jewish family left in Indonesia. Emigration began with the threat of the Japanese invasion and continued after the war when those who had remained were released from internment. The climate of political instability that followed World War II hastened the departure of those who had lingered.

SANDAKAN

A tribute to two Jewish refugees, Dr Sternfeld and Dr Laband, of whom Agnes Newton Keith spoke highly in her book *"Three Came Home"*.

Dr Sternfeld

He was an elderly Austrian refugee reputed to have been a famous Viennese obstetrician.

> "He had . . . gentle and elegant foreign ways which prepared us to believe anything. . . . He had gone to work for the North Borneo Trading Company as company doctor. . . . He was *accepted* in Sandakan but not taken to people's hearts. We, who meet him in the future, we, who, for three and a half years knew his work in captivity, will, I hope, give him the warmth we did not give before."

Dr Laband

He was a German refugee, a dentist, employed by the government. Later, during the Japanese Occupation, he worked in the Sandakan Civil Hospital. Agnes Newton Keith describes his treatment of her and her little son:

"Dr Laband was an angel to George and me, bringing extra food, extra clothes, getting me a thermos, doing anything he could think to do. I was nervous for his sake as he had something still to lose . . . but he would not be warned. He said, 'If they imprison me I do not mind. Until then, I will help you all.' And he did so fearlessly for months until finally, with the other doctors, he was accused of conspiracy and sentenced to jail."

Appendix

The Orchard Road Cemetery

The Orchard Road Cemetery or Old Cemetery, as it came to be known, was acquired in 1841.

It lay in a marshy area on the outskirts of the town of that time. The land was granted to the Trustees of the Jewish Synagogue on a 99 years lease and was registered as No 76, Lot 102 T.S. & Mukim 20 (Area 1r. 14p). **Quit Rent** was fixed at a yearly amount of $2.00.

A twelve-foot wall was built around the site completed by a massive cast-iron gate which was always kept locked. The ground was well looked after first, by the Trustees and, after World War II, by the Jewish Welfare Board.

While on a visit to Singapore in 1976, I made a study of the graves and listed the inscriptions on all those that could be deciphered. I found a total of 160 graves, thirteen of them children's. It seems that the last burial took place 8 December 1903 when two children, Sam and Christy Dimmenberg, were buried.

Nineteen of the inscriptions were unfortunately illegible and fifteen were damaged, probably because the grave stones were sinking.

I think there were 91 males and 37 females. The majority being of Sephardi origin, judging by the names. 64 males had Sephardi names and 22 females. Most of the inscriptions were in Hebrew characters, but a few were in Hebrew and English.

For most of the Sephardi, the year of death was recorded according to the Biblical reckoning while the Ashkenasi graves bore the year of the Common Era. For example:

Leah, daughter of Hayeem 20 Adar 5651.

Edward Lawrence, 2. 5. 1890

As far as I have been able to trace, there are few descendants of those settlers buried in the Old Cemetery still alive today. I have traced members of the following families: J.A. Elias (Sephardi) Y.I. Ellison (Ashkenasi), Katoon Meyer (Sephardi), J.E.J. Nathan (Sephardi) and Samuel Silberman (Ashkenasi)

Linking the graves of two women in the Old Cemetery is a bizarre and macabre story. On 31 March 1887, merchant neighbours of a disused coffee house at No 70 North Bridge

Road, complained to the police of an unpleasant smell coming from No 70.

The house was locked but when the police broke in, they found the mutilated body of a Russian Jewish lady, Sally Rosenberg, who had been brutually murdered. Her body had been thrown into the central well of the house.

After extensive enquiries, a Pole named Sigmund Gabrowski was arrested. He confessed to the murder and was tried and sentenced to death. The sentence was later commuted to servitude for life.

Eight years later, another Jewish lady, who was running a coffee house at No 70 was found strangled. Her murderer was never discovered. The house was now considered to be under an evil spell, but nothing untoward happened there for a number of years.

Then in 1918, a third Jewish lady, again a Russian, Sally Liebmann, who had become the proprietress of the Globe Hotel at No 70, was murdered by a Chinese servant. She was strangled and battered on the head with an iron bar.

An old resident, a Mr Landau, was also murdered. This time there was a clear motive for the crime, robbery. The murderer was arrested, sentenced and hanged.

The unfortunate Sally Liebmann and Mr Landau were buried in the Thomson Road Cemetery, 28 September 1918.

No other gruesome facts about the graves in the Old Cemetery have come to light and until 1940, its history was peaceful as befits a place of rest.

In 1940, the 99-year lease ran out but war had broken out in Europe and the Singapore government, in this time of uncertainty, did not initiate a move to renew the lease on a long-term basis. It seems that they accepted the payment of the $2.00 quit rent, however. In fact, in January 1942, I saw the entry made in the accounts that the $2.00 had been paid in that month.

It happened that Ezekiel Elias, secretary for the Trustees, deciding that it would be safer to remove books and records from the synagogue, took them home and asked me to go through the books with him. It was a tragic irony that the synagogue should remain unharmed throughout the Japanese Occupation, but that Zik, himself, a few months later, was taken by the Japanese never to be seen again.

In 1946, on my return from England, after internment, I found that the Trustees were exceedingly anxious about the fate of the Old Cemetery. It had survived the war undamaged

by bomb or blast but in 1945, Mr J.A. Harvey, Assistant Commissioner of Lands, wrote to the Trustees informing them that the lease for the land on which the cemetery stood had expired and that the quit rent had not been paid **for the last eighty years**.

The Trustees were, therefore, asked to surrender the land and make the necessary arrangements to exhume the graves. They were even warned that if no reply was received, the Attorney General would be approached to ask that new trustees be appointed. David Marshall interviewed Dr Hunter of the Health Department who had been involved in earlier negotiations and he was shown a card index in the Land Office in which there was an entry, **New Lease Issued**, the date 1941–2.

Mr J.A. Elias, a Municipal Commissioner, whose father, I believe is buried in the Old Cemetery, directed his efforts to try and persuade the Commissioner of Lands to reverse his decision but he remained adamant.

As I realised that I was probably the only member of the community who had seen the entry in our own records that the $2.00 had been paid in January 1942, I decided to visit the Land Office myself. I was told that nearly all records were missing but that a card index remained. There I saw entered in red italics, "Quit Rent Received January 1942." I pointed it out to the official feeling more optimistic about the future of the Cemetery.

The days went by. As far as I know, the request for the surrender of the land was not retracted but neither was it reissued. In fact the matter dragged on for years.

The strangeness of the situation was noted by a visiting Rabbi in 1952. Rabbi Rabinowitz of South Africa wrote in his *Far East Mission:*

> "One of their problems was almost insoluble. They had actually taken a cemetery on a 99-year lease which had now expired. The land was now of enormous value, situated as it was in what was now the commercial centre of the town, and the Municipality was insisting on its return, as they wished to sell it for business purposes. I am glad to have met **the most believing** people **in the world**! I said caustically, 'Your forbears must have had implicit faith in the near advent of the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead. Who ever heard of a cemetery being taken on a 99-year lease?' "

The government soon revealed that their request was part of an overall plan to acquire all burial grounds in the town area and a Board, made up of a body of elders of the various religious communities concerned and a government representative, was convened for discussion.

For many months nothing was decided. Finally, the Chinese, who did not put forward strong objections, accepted compensation for the exhumation of their graves to be paid to the Chinese Burial Society.

The Moslems, however, reminded the Board of one of the clauses signed by Sir Stamford Raffles that the Government would not interfere with the religious rites of their people, and they gave their opinion that it was against their religion to exhume the bodies.

Thus, the declaration of the Jewish Trustees was reinforced and the matter rested there.

At the time of writing, a news item was published in the Jewish Chronicle, dated 18 March 1983. T.L. Shanson wrote from Singapore — SINGAPORE TO CLOSE TWO CEMETRIES.

> "After exhausting all avenues of appeal to the Singapore Government, the country's Jewish Welfare Board has notified the community that the remains in the two Jewish cemeteries must be transferred to another site nearer the boundary.
>
> "The older of the two cemeteries is situated in a highly developed shopping area. It is in Orchard Road, Singapore's equivalent of London's Oxford Street, and this is widely regarded as inappropriate. The other cemetery, in Thomson Road, is outside the city centre. Both sides come within the Government's plans to build an underground railway.
>
> "The Government has agreed to pay the expenses of the transfer, as well as the travelling and other costs of the members of a **Chevra Kadisha** who will come from Israel to supervise the arrangements.
>
> "The exhumation of the remains in the Orchard Road cemetery will begin in April, but the exhumation at Thomson Road will not be organised until next year and will take about twelve months.
>
> "It is believed that *there are no surviving relatives of the people buried in Orchard Road cemetery.* (The italics are mine.)

"The trustees of the Manasseh Meyer family have announced their intention to re-inter in Israel the Meyer remains which are buried in the Thomson Road cemetery."

The Thomson Road Cemetery

By the end of the nineteenth century, the town area was spreading further inland. The Old Cemetery in Orchard Road now stood in the centre of new commercial development. As almost all the ground had been used, the Trustees, Manassah Meyer, Ralph Sassoon, Saul Nathan and Ezra Nathan, looked around for a suitable site for a new cemetery. They found one in the district of Moulmein and on 21 December 1900, they purchased a large plot, with an area of 135,178 sq ft for the sum of $5,047.12. It was sub-divided into lots, listed in the title deeds as Lots 3, 4 and 5.

On 15 December 1903, Manasseh Meyer bought the adjoining land, listed as Lots 1 and 2 with an area of 84,814 sq ft for $8,681.40.

Twenty six years later, on 19 September 1929, Manasseh Meyer made a donation of this land to the Trustees of the synagogue. In 1903, the property was re-surveyed and listed as Lots 2^4 and 2^5 having an area of 39,930 sq ft and 45,692 sq ft

It was agreed that Lot 2^4 be retained as a private family burial plot and was always referred to as The Meyer Plot. The first burial here, on 12 January 1915, was that of Manasseh Meyer's second wife, Rebecca Meyer. By 1951, seven members of the Meyer family were also buried there.

On 1 April 1933, David Frankel purchased on behalf of the Trustees, further adjoining land, resurveyed and listed as Lot 1^{45}, having an area of 99,290 sq ft. The purchase price was $3,971.44.

On 26 May 1937, a further plot of land, adjoining the south border of the cemetery, was surveyed and listed as Lots 3^6 and 3^7, with an area of 86,862 and 137,724 sq ft. It was bought for $18,000.00.

Mrs Rosa Frankel, the wife of Abraham Frankel, and Mrs Rebecca Meyer, the wife of Jack M. Meyer, contributed $3,000 and $2,000, respectively in an endowment fund. The rest of the money was collected from various members of the community. The land was overgrown with *lallang* and *beluka* (tall grasses) and was mosquito infested. A road was laid, leading into the cemetery grounds.

J.A. Elias donated a water-stand fitted with washing basins and running water. A committee consisting of J.M. Meyer, I.A. Elias, Joe David, Edward Nathan and Ezekiel M. Elias,

who was appointed secretary, were responsible for the building of the *Tarah* (Purification) house, gardeners' quarters, store house and the planning of the burial plots. When the area was cleared, levelled and drained, the cemetery ground was transformed from a wilderness into a well laid out, terraced grassland.

The first burial that took place was of Mr Nassim Ezekiel Nissim on 29 September 1904 and, by the end of 1905, a total of 15 burials had already taken place.

However, during the years before World War II, there was no complete register kept of the graves and the somewhat haphazard allotment of plots led to a little disorder.

After the war, in August 1946, some consternation was caused by the arrival of a letter from the Municipality to David Marshall, stating that the Meyer Plot had been used illegally for burial, as there was no record to show that a burial permit had been issued.

In 1930, Sir Manasseh Meyer, himself, had been laid to rest with his family and the Trustees were anxious to find a speedy solution to this most unwelcome complication. The Municipal Commissioners suggested that as the Meyer plot was private property, the present owners might "relinquish the ground to, and vest the same in, the Municipal Commissioners either directly, or if there were legal difficulties, by an application to the court, then the Commissioners would be in a position to provide an extension of the licence by representing the relinquished land to the community as a cemetery."

By 27 November 1946, the affair had been settled on the lines suggested by the Commissioners.

In 1946 also, a new committee was formed of S.E. Sherida, J.N. Shohet, Saul Ezekiel and myself, to be responsible for the registration, numbering and order of the plots and for the organising of burials. No sooner had the new committee begun this work, when it became apparent that they had another problem to tackle, that of the squatters who had moved in during the Japanese occupation, in the empty land surrounding the cemetery. They were now invading Lots 3^{6} and 3^{7}, and Lots 2^{5} and 4^{5}, building their attap huts overnight. Despite the fact that the authorities were themselves unable to resolve the problem, the Trustees were served with summonses for allowing these illegal squatters to erect their huts!

The Jewish Welfare Board decided to prevent further encroachment by erecting an elaborate wire fencing around

the area of Lots 2^{1}, 2^{4}, 2^{5} and 1^{45}. The next step was to institute rental charges and eventually, this proved a reasonable compromise as the Board derived a fair income from its tenants. The money was used for the upkeep of the cemetery grounds, to support the **Chevra Kadeesha** and to help pay for resurfacing the road leading to the cemetery. The balance being provided for by voluntary contributions from the community.

Until the time of writing, the grounds have been well-maintained. At one period, the leaders of the *Habonim* arranged for fatigue parties to wash and clean the graves on Sunday mornings. But when this was no longer possible, the graves were cared for by the *kebuns* (gardeners) and the registration and identification of graves have been kept up to date.

Now a directive has been issued that no more burials are to take place in the Thomson Road Cemetery. A new site has been allocated to the community about seventeen miles out of the town, in the district of Chua Chu Kang in the North of the island and very near the Air Base. May it prove a true place of rest!

List of Members who were buried in the Thomson Road Cemetery, 1904–11.

Year	Date	Name
1904	14.09.	Nassim Ezekiel Nissim
	14.10.	Penhas Sayed Aaron
	20.11.	Farha Joseph Yahooda
	29.11.	Farha Nassim Deborah
1905	2.01.	Solomon Abraham Abraham
	21.01.	Eliayahu Penhas Halevy
	3.03.	Mary Grunstein
	25.04.	Ezra Paryis Abdoo
	21.05.	Nassim Mansoor
	29.07.	Mazeltov wife of David Menahem
	12.09.	Mertooka wife of Hayeem Sareth
	18.09.	Moshe Hayeem Bersah
	15.11.	Manasseh Rahamin Saleh Gubbay
	12.12.	Dinah bas Masooda
	31.12.	Hannah bas Nassim Rahamin

1906	6.02.	Habiba wife of Isaac Hayeem
	20.05.	Yahya Awat Cohen
	28.08.	Saleh wife of Abed
	11.12.	Abraham Zaan Cohen
1907	12.02.	Guilio Attias
	14.03.	William Listerman
	20.04.	Rachel bas Isaac Dabvoz
	28.04.	Marcus Moscovitz
	29.07.	Joseph Baker
1908	14.04.	Hannah Burnstein
	15.04.	Hannah wife of Edward Sanderman
	24.04.	Yentha Adelie Balter
	10.05.	William Cornfield
	11.05.	Rachel Raymond
	2.07.	Dora Simon
	2.08.	Goldie Eva Silberman
	30.10.	Joseph Ginsberg
	25.11.	Aziz bas Abed Halevie
1909	21.02.	Edward Sanderman
	15.05.	Joseph Isaac Hayeem Joseph
	25.07.	Ezekiel Ezra Abraham Ezekiel
	20.09.	Saul Mordecai Marcus
	25.09.	Habiba bas Joseph Israel
	2.10.	Tifaha bas Rabwan
	13.10.	Raphael Sassoon (Trustee)
	16.10.	Shabatti Jacob Halevie
1910	17.09.	Moritz Evenberg
	5.10.	Farha Rahamin Joseph
	11.10.	Moshe Jacob Averbugh
	23.10.	Simha Nissim Aaron
1911	13.04	Shabatti Silman Ezekiel
	22.05.	Dinah Ezekiel Ezra

Number of graves in the cemeteries

	Males	**Females**	**Under 15**	**Total**
Orchard Road 1841–1904	91	37	12	160
Thomson Road 1905–1973	312	256	137	705

Census of Jewish Population

Census of Jewish population from 1830–1930

Year	Males	Females	Boys	Girls	Total
1830	9	—	—	—	9
1832	5	—	—	—	5
1833	11	4	—	—	15
1841	18	4	—	—	22
1849	30	27	—	—	57
1871*	83	41	33	15	172
1881	97	50	38	19	204
1891*	118	117	49	61	345
1901	165	130	82	85	462
1905	181	147	90	89	507
1914	206	190	106	93	595
1921	335	288			623
1930	415	462			877

* Further details of Census of 1871

Age	Males	Females	Age	Males	Females
1	2	1	20	9	9
2	2	1	25	11	10
3	4	2	30	17	4
4	2	0	35	12	4
5	3	1	40	12	4
6	2	3	45	6	3
10	11	3	50	7	3
12	2	2	55	5	3
15	5	2	60	1	0
Total	83	41		33	15

* Further details of Census of 1891

Age	Males	Females
1–5	17	19
5–10	19	23
10–15	13	19
15–20	9	19
Adults	109	98
Total	167	178

Ashkenasi Jews may have been registered in government censuses as European nationals and would not, therefore, be included in the above lists.

Estimated number of Jewish population 1941–45

Evacuees	250
Interned 17 February 1942	19
Interned 5 April 1943	103
Interned 25 March 1945	472
(222 men, 200 women, 50 children)	
Estimated total population 1941	844
Missing	8
Died in air raids	8
Died during occupation	50
Estimated total population before the return of evacuees	528

It has been impossible, to date, to compile a complete list of those interned by the Japanese. There may be ten names missing from the following list.

16 men were interned on 17 February, 1942. They were:

I Abett
S Abett
H Bolter
R Bridges
S Davies (or Davis)
Jack Elias
Dr Landor
M Lelah
Max Lewis
E Manasseh
Ken Meyer
Lazarus Rayman
M Weinberg
H Weisberg

Two members of Raffles Band

Two women were interned on the same date — Mrs Bolter and Gracie Bridges. Annie Silberman entered camp probably a month later.

5 April 1943, about one hundred men were interned. In Changi, they were assigned to the rice shed nicknamed **Aldgate** and in Sime Road to **Hut 106**.

Jack Aaron
Kelly Aaron
Abraham Abdulla
Randal Adair
Haskel Baruch
I F Bechore
J F Bechore
M M Cohen
Saleh Cohen
Yahya Cohen
M Daniel
S Daniel
D B David
Jack David
J B David
Abe Elias
Jonah Elias
Joseph Elias
Simon Elias
Yona Elias
Meyer Elisha
M Joseph Elisha
A Gareh
Yacoub Gazal
S Grimberg
S Hanin
Nissim Hawa
R E Hayeem
Aaron Isaac
Fred Isaac
Isaac Isaac
Jack Isaac
Joe Isaac
Niom Isaac
Ephraim Jacob
Isaac Jacob
Meyer Jacob
Reuben Jacob
Elias Jonah
Solomon Jonah
Albert Joseph
Ezekiel Joseph
A J Joshua
Kasir
Ishak Marudi
Max Menaheim
Joe Messiah
R Meyer
K J Mordecai
Hai Moses
Simon Moses
N Murad
Moshe Nassim
Arnold Nathan
E E Nathan
E J Nathan
Ezekiel Reuben
R N Reuben
S Sadka
Reuben Saltoon
H M Sassoon
Noorie Sassoon
Menahem Shalome
E Sharbanee
E Simon
L Simon

Dr Engle
E Ephraim
Jacob Ephraim
B Etlin
A Ezekiel
Ellison Ezekiel
Saul Ezekiel
Moshe Ezra
Simon Ezra
D J Kelly
Joseph Kelly
S Khatena
Dr Klemperer
Charlie Lelah
Harry Lelah
Maurice Lelah
Jacob Manasseh
Saleh Manasseh
Abraham Solomon
D S Solomon
Jacob E Solomon
Nissim Solomon
Silas Thomas
D K Tweg
Yakoob Zaab

There were five non-Jewish internees who shared Aldgate and Hut 106. They were Bill Crooks, J Jenkins, Lovebridge, E Loveday and A Walker.

World War II Casualties

Killed in air raids
Albert DEBORRAH
Joseph ELIAS
Maurice EZEKIEL
Elias JOSEPH
Sarah JOSEPH and their two children
Hannah MOSES

Died at sea
Mr & Mrs A COHEN
Norman BOLTER
Moses David SOLOMON

Died in internment
Abraham Ezekiel ABDULLAH
Solomon JONAH
David JOSEPH
Ezekiel S MANASSEH
Moses Nissim ROBIN
Solomon David SOLOMON

Missing during Japanese Occupation
Elias ALBERT
Silman COHEN
Ezekiel Moses ELIAS
Elias EZEKIEL
Isaac Elias NATHAN
Abraham PINHAS

David SHARBANEE
Max WOELTZ

Died in action
Terry SASSOON

Deaths that occurred during the Japanese Occupation
(March 1942 - September 1945)

MALES

DATE	NAME	AGE	TOTAL
9. 1.42	Child (Daniel)	0 years 7 months	
14. 3.42	Abdullah Shooker	93 years	
24. 3.42	Abraham Cohen	40 years	
29. 3.42	Somundal Grumberg	80 years	
6. 4.42	Kelly Jonah Joseph	62 years	
9. 4.42	Reuben Lelah	50 years	
17. 4.42	David Solomon	58 years	
9. 6.42	Reuben Gloomy	85 years	
17. 6.42	Charlie Eze Aaron	30 years	
2. 7.42	Abdullah Sion Ezekiel	50 years	
8.11.42	Saul Joseph Salem	85 years	
22.11.42	Salleh Nissim Joseph	85 years	
28.11.42	Jacob Aaron Isaac	85 years	
19.12.42	A W Brisk	82 years	14
15. 1.43	Cecil Reuben	43 years	
19. 3.43	Moses Elias Nehayma	60 years	
4. 5.43	Ezra Messiah Israel	70 years	
5.10.43	Silas J. Manasseh	74 years	
20.10.43	Reuben Ezra Sherazie	95 years	
21.11.43	Manasseh Sadka	48 years	
20.11.43	Joseph Ezra Messiah	22 years	
10.12.43	Joseph A Gazal	50 years	8
8. 5.44	Showa Jacob Ballas	60 years	
14. 6.44	Joseph Rahim Ezra	48 years	
22. 7.44	Ibrahim Salim	0 years 8 days	
21.10.44	Judah Joseph	70 years	
10.12.44	Haham Silman	75 years	5
7. 1.45	Sassoon Sayers	38 years	
17. 1.45	Elias Thomas Kendel	73 years	
15. 2.45	Leon Silberman	73 years	
2. 8.45	David Hai Seleman	60 years	
10. 8.45	Reuben Saul Menahem	41 years	5

FEMALES

18. 2.42	"Aunt Chalha" Manasseh	88 years	
15. 3.42	Khatoon Solomon	69 years	
16. 5.42	Awath Tob	80 years	
2.10.42	Chalha Rubin Gloomy	80 years	4
29. 1.43	Freda Grumberg	83 years	
8. 9.43	Daisy Ezekiel Abram	1 year 6 months	
28. 9.43	Rachel Moses Shabatti	95 years	3
15. 2.44	Simha Daniel Sion	19 years	
22. 2.44	Katie Jacobs (Youm)	70 years	
1. 3.44	Misoda Chalha	50 years	
27. 3.44	Lulu Ezekiel	26 years	
5. 6.44	Victoria Gurgee	50 years	
17. 6.44	Salha Rahamin	80 years	
23. 8.44	Katie Solomon	0 years 6 months	
23. 9.44	Hannah Badra Cohen	80 years	
30.11.44	Esther Saul Joseph	45 years	9
27. 2.45	Masooda Ezekiel	55 years	
22. 3.45	Rahma Khatoon	70 years	2
TOTAL			50

Trustees of the Synagogue

Trustees of the Synagogue and cemetery, 1841–1978

1841	Joseph Dwek Cohen Nassim Joseph Ezra Ezra Ezra Ezekiel
1870	Joseph Dwek Cohen Abraham Solomon Joseph M Joshua Manasseh M Meyer
1878	Abraham Solomon Joseph R Joshua Manasseh M Meyer
1881	Manasseh Meyer Rubin Meyer Sassoon Aaron Gubbay David Aaron Gubbay
1891	Manasseh Meyer Raphael Elias Sassoon Ezra Gubbay Ezra Ezekiel Nathan
1900	From 21.12.1900 Raphael Elias Sassoon Manasseh Meyer Saul Jacob Nathan Ezra Ezekiel Nathan
1928	From 19.9.28 Sir Manasseh Meyer Jacob Meyer Isaac Aaron Elias Joseph B David
1929	Ezekiel Saleh Manasseh Joseph A Elias J M Sassoon J B David

After the Japanese Occupation

1946 From 8.8.46
J A Elias
D J Elias
E S Manasseh
J M Sassoon

From 19.8.46
J A Elias
D J Elias
Moses M. Cohen

1950 From 29.8.50
I A Elias
M Lewis
S E Sherida
J N Shohet
D S Solomon
D S Marshall

1965 From 26.3.65
I A Elias
D S Marshall
M Lewis
J N Shohet
F J Isaac
Ezekiel Joseph

1971 From 24.2.71
D S Marshall
Joseph Grimberg
Yahya Cohen
F J Isaac
Harry Elias
Jacob Ballas

1976 From 4.2.76
D S Marshall
J Grimberg
F J Isaacs
Jacob Ballas
Yahya Cohen

1978 D S Marshall
J Grimberg
F J Isaacs

Jacob Ballas
Felice Isaacs
Frank Benjamin

Trustees for Lot 3 Cementery

1937 From 26.5.37
Reuben Meyer
D Frankel
I A Elias
I B Abed
E M Elias

Ministers of the Maghain Aboth Synagogue in Waterloo Street
I J Hayeem (reasonable supposition)
Joseph Sherida (Hazan)
Elias Sherida (Hazan)
Menahem Baruch David (Hazan)
Eliyahu Isaac Shalome (Hazan)
Jacob Shababo (Rabbi)
Isaac Benzakin (Rabbi)

Minister of the Chesed El Synagogue in Oxley Rise
Ezra Meir (Hazan)

Beadles of the Maghain Aboth Synagogue
Ezra Rahameen
Joseph Rahameen
Solomon Raphael Bechore
Eliyahu Eftaya
Sassoon Manasseh

Trusts
Sir Manasseh Meyer Trust
Abdullah Shooker Trust
Flora Shooker Trust
Flora Solomon Trust
Amber Trust
R M Meyer Trust
Jewish Cemetery Trust

Sites of the Talmud Torah

First	Bungalow in the grounds of the Synagogue
Second	R M Meyer's T T in Bencoolen Street
Third	Oxley Rise

Presidents of the Jewish Welfare Board (1946–1978)

David Marshall	1946–53
S E Sherida	1953–54
E E Nathan	1954–55
Sally Meyer	1955–59
I Solomon	1959–60
V A Levy	1960–61
J Ballas	1961–62
E E Nathan	1962–64
E M Akerib	1964–65
F J Isaacs	1965–67
David Marshall	1967–68
J Grimberg	1968–69
David Marshall	1969–71
Felice Isaacs	1971–73
E S Lejeune	1973–76
Felice Isaacs	1976–78

Jewish Road and Street names

Jewish Road and Street names
Adis Road
Amber Road
Belilios Road and Lane
Elias Road
Frankel Estate/Walk/Avenue/Terrace/Lane/Street/Drive
Manasseh Lane
Meyer Road
Nassim Hill
Nassim Road
Nathan Road
Penhas Road
Solomon Street
Synagogue Street

Hotels with Jewish proprietors
Adelphi
Burlington
Grand Hotel de l'Europe
Keppel
Sea View

Prominent houses, buildings and estates owned by Jews
Adis Lodge
Amber Mansions
Belle Vue
Elias Building
Frankel Estate
Meyer Building
Rayman Estate (probably named after Lazarus Rayman)

Registration of Jewish businesses

REGISTRATION OF JEWISH BUSINESSES AS RECORDED IN THE STRAITS TIMES & FEDERATED MALAY STATES ANNUAL (1873–1921)

1899 I J Hayeem Sherida .. Minister of Maghain Aboth Synagogue.

1873 MEYER BROTHERS
Partners ..... Manasseh Meyer
Raphael Sassoon
Asst. ..... J A Meyer
Shipping ..... B Joseph
Cashier ..... E R Elias

1899 S MANASSEH & CO
6/8 Malacca Street.
Partners ..... S J Nathan
Mrs S Manasseh (Calcutta)
Manasseh S Manasseh (Calcutta)
Asst. ..... E S Manasseh
Reuben Manasseh

N N ADIS
9A, Raffles Place.
Exchange and stock brokers.

A FRANKEL
375 Victoria Street.
Clothiers, horses, carriage and horses, teak wood, Italian marble, marble slabs.

NATHAN & RAHAMIN (Brokers)
13 Change Alley.
Partners ..... Ezra Nathan
R J Rahamin

N REUBEN
8 Prince Street.
Share and general brokers.

A S SHOOKER
Merchant & commission agent.
Clerk ..... Khoo Kim Yang

ADOLPH STERNBERG
51 Victoria Street.
Upholsterer and furniture dealer.

1906 J I Sherida ..... Minister of Maghain Aboth Synagogue

Information taken from articles in the Malaya Tribune 1919 and from micro films of The Straits Times advertisement 1915 Registration of Business of Firms and Employees.

1906 E MEYER & CO
1 Malacca Street.

Partners:	Elias Meyer
Manager:	A S Shooker
Asst.	J S Judah
	M A Nassim
Cashier:	J Abed

NATHAN & SON

	Ezra Nathan
	Ed S Nathan
Asst.	E A Judah

E S NATHAN	E & S Nathan
	E S Gubbay
	E S Shallim

1909 ADIS & EZEKIEL
5 Finlayson Green.

Partners:	N N Adis
	R M Ezekiel

A CLOUET & CO

Partners:	A Clouet
	V Clouet
Book-keeper:	Mr Woelz

J BRISK & CO
7B Battery Road.
Jeweller and watchmaker.

M BOLTER

Proprietress:	Mrs Bolter
Asst:	E M Rahamin
	L Zack

Importers of special Russian & French wines, ship chandlers.

J LEVY
10 Robinson Road.
Ship chandlers & wine merchants, suppliers of sausages for German ships and Navy.

ELIAS M NATHAN
4 De Souza Street.
Importer of spices, gunny bags and matches.

A FRANKEL

Senior partner:	A Frankel
Managing partner:	A Clouet
Partner:	V Clumeck
Asst:	D Frankel
Cashier:	D Israelski
Clerk:	F Clouet

1909 S MANASSEH & CO
7 D'Almeida Street.

Partners:	S J Nathan
	Mrs Esther Manasseh (Calcutta)
	M S Manasseh (Calcutta)
Assistant:	E S Manasseh (Calcutta)
Clerks:	F Judah
	Y Abraham

MEYER BROTHERS
3 Raffles Place

	Manasseh Meyer
	Jacob Meyer
	Isaac Meyer
	Reuben Meyer
Clerk:	M Guston
Collectors:	E J Manasseh
	S Abraham

E MEYER & CO
1 Malacca Street.

Partners:	E Meyer (Calcutta)
	J S Judah

Assistant:	Fred B David
Manager:	A S Shooker
	M A Nassim
Cashier:	J Abed
Storekeeper:	A S Aaron
Clerk:	S I Jacob

1921 E S MANASSEH & CO & J A ELIAS
7 D'Almeida Street.

J B DAVID
Broker. Mines and estate owner.

DAVID A TOFT
Brokers

S J JUDAH & CO
3 Coleman Street.
Merchants and commission agents.

RUPERT MANASSEH & ELIAS
11 D'Almeida Street.

Partners:	Rupert Manasseh
	I A Elias
	Ralph Elias

S MANASSEH & CO
7 D'Almeida Street.

Partners:	M S Manasseh (Calcutta)
	E S Manasseh (Calcutta)
	Eze Manasseh
Assistants:	S I Jacob
	E E Isaac
Cashier:	Y Abraham

Trades and Professions

Trades and Professions 1920's–1950's (representative rather than fully comprehensive)

Businesses

Accountant	J N Shohet
Auctioneer & estate agents	M J Nassim
Bakeries	Joseph Baker, Luna Bakery, Ishak Habas
Car dealers and repairers	Eddie Simon (Lane Motor Garage)
Cinema and film distributors	Max Baker, J A Elias, Julian and Julius Fisher
Crockery	Abdullah Sion Ezekiel and Abdullah Abraham Ezekiel
Dairy farm	Getz Bros.
Diamond merchants	A Flinter, M Flinter, Flinter & Ginsberg, M Grimberg, Weill & Montor, Weill & Zerner
Exchange & share brokers	Jacob Ballas, J A Elias, J Etlin, E S Manasseh, Edward M Nathan, Elias M Nathan, E S Nathan, N Reuben & Co., J M Sassoon, J N Shohet
Food storage	J A Elias: Cold Storage and Singapore Food Storage Co.
Foundry	A Aman
Furniture	J Frankel, Frankel & Co.
Haberdashery and fashion	Sophie Ezekiel ("Vanity"), A J Isaac, A Lelah, Jacob Manasseh, N Nissim & Son, R Penhas
Import and export	Clumeck & Co. (Provisions and building material), M Elias & Sons (Spices copra), A Frankel (Building materials), Getz Bros.

	(Provisions), E S Isaac & Son (Spices and provisions), J N Isaac & Sons (Leather), J Khaliffa (Spices), S Marshall (Leather), E M Nathan (Spices, gunny bags matches), S Sadka (fruit), E Sassoon & Co. (Cow & Gate baby food), M Sayers & Co. (Spices, dried fruit)
Photographic equipment	M & E Nathan (Camera Center)
Property speculators and brokers	J A Elias, Manasseh & Co., N S Marshall, Meyer Bros., M J Nassim, Eddy Nathan, Saul Nathan, N Reuben & Co., D M Sassoon, A S Shooker
Radios, intercommunication systems, electrical goods	E S Isaac & Co., M & E Nathan, H M Sassoon
Records	J Benjamin, D J Kelly, M & E Nathan
Refrigeration and air conditioning	H R Aaron (Kelvinator agents), M & E Nathan (Frigidaire distributors)
Shipchandlers	H Bolter, L Hackmeyer, J Levy & Co.
Shoemaker	Ephraim Jacob
Watch dealers and repairers	J Brisk, E Nassim & Co., E. Reuben Bros., Sharbanee, Khatena & Co., S E Sherida, Weill & Montor

Professions

Advocates & solicitors	Harry Elias, Joe D Elias, Min Elias, J Grimberg, D S Marshall
Medical profession	Dr Beghiner, Mr Y Cohen,

	Dr Engle, Dr J. Flinter, Dr Hoffman, Dr F Kampfner, Dr J Lewis, Dr M Marshall Dr Wachs
Municipal and government staff	Saul Akerib, E Bekhore, Ezekiel Joseph, Alec Manasseh, Jack Manasseh, A Reuben, Ezekiel Reuben, Saul Saul, Zaida Short, Sarah Solomon
Opticians	M Ezekiel & Sons, F J Isaac, M Lazarus, Reggie Meyer
Registrar of patents	Zaida Short
Secretarial posts	Esther Elias, Sybil (nee Nathan) Ellis, Sally Manasseh, Gladys (nee Nathan) Mitchell, Rosie Solomon
Teaching profession	Rachel Abdullah, J Joshua, Esther Manasseh, Sylvia Manasseh, Max Menahem, Nina Nathan, D S Solomon, Jacob Solomon, Professor Oppenheim, D K Tweg
Welfare officer, British Airways	Rosie Marshall

New Cemetery				
Chua Choo Kang	16	12	1	29
				894

Congregants who lived to the age of 90 and over

Age	Name
90	Elias Isaac Bechore Moses Ezekiel Elias Dinah Ellis Lulu Elias Fitaya Ariana Jonah Fitaya Jacob Elias Isaac Habiba Joseph Nathan Rachel Elias Nathan Rachel Shabativa
91	Mayer Hayeem Sassoon
92	Isaac Meyer Abraham Isaac Baruch Meyer Mozelle M. Nissim
93	Jonah Joseph Fitaya Shabati Sion Moses Ezekiel Abdullah Saleh Abdullah Shooker Khatoon Solomon
95	Simha Bechore Rachel Moses Rubin Ezra Sherazie
96	Nissim Saul Isaac Aboodi Isaac Shakuri
100	Sassoon Abed Levy
101	Ramah Ezekiel Abdullah Hilda Saul Marudi
103	Sarah Goldenberg
105	Yahya Awath Cohen
108	Mindel Evenbach Raphael Sholomo

Glossary

Word	Language	Translation
A		
Afikoman	Aramaic	dessert (Lit: removal of the dishes)
Ahel	Hebrew	Ark
Aliya	Hebrew	privilege (Lit: "going up" — to take a special part in the synagogue service)
Amah	Portuguese derivation	nurse (ama), child's nurse or servant
Ashiet Hayel	Hebrew	A woman of worth (from Proverbs)
aswad	Hindustani	dark or black
attap	Malay	roof made of plaited palm fronds
B		
Baba	Straits Chinese	Straits born Chinese
Barmitzvah	Hebrew	Confirmation of thirteen-year-old Jewish boy (Lit: Son of the Commandment)
Baruchot Hamazon	Hebrew	Grace after Meals
Bene Israel	Hebrew	Jewish Sect in India (Lit: Sons of Israel)
brith mila	Hebrew	circumcision
bukit	Malay	hill
Bukit Lanangan		Forbidden Hill
Bukit Timah		Hill of Tin
C		
Challah	Hebrew	Sabbath plaited loaf (originally statutory gift of dough for the priests)
Chesed (Chased)	Hebrew	
chit	Hindustani	I.O.U. (slip of paper)
chop	Hindustani	brand name
Chuppa	Hebrew	marriage canopy
coolie	Hindustani or Tamil	Indian or Chinese labourers emigrating under contract

D

dagla	Hindustani	long coat
darzee	Hind (variant)	tailor
dhoby	Hind: (variant)	washerman
Dwek	Spanish origin	Duke — a common Sephardi name

E

el yas	Arabic	myrtle
ethrog	Hebrew	large lemon

G

get	Hebrew	document of divorce in Jewish Law
gharry	Hind: (variant)	hackney carriage
glam (Glam)	Malay	tree yielding medicinal oil used by Malay seamen to caulk their seacraft

H

habaz	Hind: (variant)	baker
hadassah	Hebrew	myrtle
Haggadah	Hebrew	Telling of a story, particularly of the Exodus on Seder nights
Halitza	Hebrew	Laws concerning the duty of a widow towards her late husband's brother
hallech	Arabic (variant)	preserve made of nuts and dates eaten at Passover
Hallel	Hebrew	Songs of praise forming part of Festival services
hameem	uncertain probably Arabic	a dish cooked overnight
Hanukah	Hebrew	Feast of Dedication
Havdalah	Hebrew	ceremony marking the end of the Sabbath
Hazan	Hebrew	Reader or Minister
Hong Kong	Chinese	Fragrant Streams
hookah	Arabic	a tobacco pipe in which the smoke passes through water

I

ikan	Malay	fish
Istana Negara	Malay	Governor's residence

J

jambu	Malay	fruit (posidium guava)
junk	Malay (Javanese)	flat-bottomed sailing vessel plying in China seas

K

kadang kerbau	Malay	cattle enclosure
Kadeesh	Hebrew	mourner's prayer
kain	Malay	cloth
kain batek	Malay	hand-printed Javanese cloth
kampong	Malay	village or settlement
Kaparoth	Hebrew	symbolic ritual of atonement
Karen Hayesod	Hebrew	Palestine Foundation Fund
kashrut	Hebrew	dietary laws
kebun	Malay	gardener
kedai	Malay	stall-shop
Kempetai	Japanese	Secret Police
Ketubah	Hebrew	marriage contract
Kidushim	Hebrew	betrothal
Koheleth	Hebrew	Ecclesiastes (The Preacher)
Kol Nidrei	Aramaic	Eve of Atonement Day prayer "All my vows . . ."
kongsi	Straits Chinese	an association (colloquially: "clubbing together")
kosher	Hebrew	permitted food
kronchong	Malay	minstrel group
kundarchee	Hind: (variant)	shoemaker

L

lallang	Malay	tall grass
Lili Bolero	from Irish	old folk tune made famous by the suffragettes in 1909 who used it as their freedom song

Lulav	Hebrew	symbolic branches ritually "waved" at Taberncales
M		
Maariv	Hebrew	Evening Service
Matzoth	Hebrew	unleavened bread eaten at Pesach
Mazeltov	Hebrew	Congratulations, good luck, from original meaning "of good augury"
Megilla	Hebrew	Name of the Story of Queen Esther read at Purim (colloquially: a long story)
Mezuzah	Hebrew	(Lit: doorpost) small case containing verses of Deuteronomy and nailed to doorposts
Mikvah	Hebrew	ritual bath
Mincha	Hebrew	Afternoon Service
Minyan	Hebrew	quorum of ten necessary for full prayers
mitzva	Hebrew	performance of a Commendent to the glory of the Almighty.
Mogen (Maghain)–	Hebrew	shield
Maghain Aboth	Hebrew	Shield of the Fathers
Mogen David	Hebrew	Shield of David (emblem of the Jewish people)
Mohel	Hebrew	authorised circumciser
moo-moo	Arabic (variant)	long loose dress (ladies')
N		
Ner Tamid	Hebrew	Perpetual Light
O		
Orang Jaudee	Malay	The Jewish People
P		
Padang	Malay	The plain (the green)

panjang	Malay	tall, long
pantung	Malay	improvised song, romantic or topical
Pardesi	Old Persian	Paradise (park)
parochet	Hebrew	curtain
pelandok	Malay	a tiny deer, native to Malaysia
Pesach	Hebrew	Festival of Passover
phylacteries	Greek derivation	see Tephillin
Pidyon Haben	Hebrew	Ceremony of the Redemption of the First Born
pontianak	Malay	female spirit, temptress in folk lore
punkah	Hind:	large fan worked by pulling a cord
Purim	Hebrew	Jewish Festival (Lit: casting of lots)

R

rongeng	Malay	traditional form of dancing
Rosh Hashannah	Hebrew	Jewish New Year Holyday (Lit: Head of the Year)
roti	Malay	bread
rumah	Malay	house

S

sampan	Malay	motor launch
Sandik	Greek derivation	counsellor, godfather
sarong kebaya	Malay	wrap-around batek skirt and tight-fitting blouse usually held together with gold fasteners
Sassanam	Old Persian	Charter
satu	Malay	one
sedaria	Arabic variant	long buttoned outer garment
Seder	Hebrew	Lit: "order": name of order of ceremony on first nights of Pesach
Sefer Torah	Hebrew	Scroll of the Sacred Law
Selichot	Hebrew	Penitential prayers
Sephardi	Hebrew	Jews who form part of

		the migration to Spain (Sepharad) Mexpotamia and the East
Shabbat	Hebrew	The Sabbath (Day of *Rest*)
Shachrit	Hebrew	Morning Prayers
Shadhon	Hebrew (variant)	matchmaker
Shammas	Hebrew (variant)	beadle
Shanwar Teles	Mahratti	Saturday oilmen
Sha-sha	Arabic (variant)	sweetmeats
Shingapura	Sanskrit	Lion City (Singapore)
Shiva	Hebrew	the first week of mourning (Lit: seven)
Sh'ma	Hebrew	Sacred prayer beginning "*Hear*" and proclaiming the unity of the Almighty
Shofar	Hebrew	ram's horn blown on High Holydays
Shohet	Hebrew	authorised slaughterer of animals for food
Sh'voo'oh	Hebrew	week
Sh'voo'oh Tov		A good week — greeting at the end of the Sabbath
Sh'voo'ot (Shavoo'ot)		weeks — name of Festival of Pentecost (Feast of *Weeks*)
Sidur	Hebrew	Prayer Book (LIT: order as in *Seder*
Simchot Torah	Hebrew	Festival of the Rejoicing in the Law
Slar	Arabic (variant)	synagogue
'Starrd	Arabic (variant)	teacher
Succoth	Hebrew	Festival of Tabernacles
syce	Arabic	chauffeur, driver
Synagogue	Greek	assembly, from about third century became place of assembly for worship

T

Talmud	Hebrew	Lit: learning. Name given to compilation of Jewish law and commentary

Talmud Torah	Hebrew	Religious school (Study of the Law)
tambi	Tamil	office care-taker or errand boy
Tashlich	Hebrew	Ceremony of the casting away of sins (Lit: "Thou shalt cast")
Tenko (Tenno Haika)	Japanese	Emperor
Tephillin	Hebrew	derived from word meaning "prayer": refers to two small boxes containing significant prayers joined by leather thongs so that they may be bound to the forehead and the left upper arm
tiffin	Anglo-Indian	light meal, lunch
tongkang	Malay	lighter or sailing boat
Towkay	Straits Chinese	rich merchant
triah	Arabic (variant)	seven little candles or wicks in a holder, lit on festivals
Tuan	Malay	Sir
tukan	Malay	workman
tukan ayer	Malay	water closet attendant
Tumasek	Malay	Sea town

W

wayang	Straits Chinese	folk opera

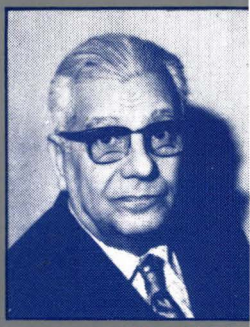
Y

Yahrzeit	Yiddush	from German "season"; annual memorial prayers for a dead relative
Yom Kipur	Hebrew	Day of Atonement

Z

Zadik (Tsadik)	Hebrew	the righteous one
zebun	Arabic (variant)	(singular)

About the Author



Eze Nathan

"Almost from his youth, Eze Nathan was recognised by all in our community as the high priest of our community's welfare and the keeper of our historical facts and figures." — from the Foreword by David Marshall, Singapore Ambassador to France, Spain and Portugal.

The author was born in Singapore in 1906. He has served the Jewish Welfare Board in the various offices of secretary, treasurer, vice-president and president. He was also the representative for the *Keren Hayesod*.

Always keenly interested in the welfare of young people, he was for many years involved in the scout movement and was awarded the Scout Medal of Merit for his work in internment camp during the Japanese occupation. He was appointed Justice of the Peace in 1964.

He, his wife and their two sons are now living in the U.K. He has just completed his tenth year as President of the Newport Gwent Hebrew Congregation and has recently become their representative on the Board of Deputies of British Jews.