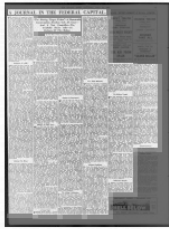




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## A JOURNAL IN THE FEDERAL CAPITAL.

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### A JOURNAL IN THE FEDERAL CAPITAL.

*"The Moving Finger Writes"—A Memorable Conversation—Towkay Goh Ah Gnee—And A New Councillor—The Symbolic Dover Sole—In Defence Of The Malay.*

(By Our Kuala Lumpur Correspondent.)

THE perception of history as a process is uncannily clear and persistent in Kuala Lumpur at the present time. Past, present and future cast a spell over the mind, so that we see cause and effect together and know that the one is unalterable and the other inevitable. The events of the past appear in their relationship to the problems of the present and the uncertainties of the future. Change and movement are in the air and the confidence and optimism which inspired our predecessors in the Malay States have vanished. It is as though this country hitherto has been navigating a landlocked sea and only now is feeling the swell of the ocean.

I have never felt this so strongly as I did last week, in a conversation that ranged over eighty years of Chinese history in Malaya. In this hour's talk with Mr. Lai Tet Loke, the new Chinese member of the Federal Council, about his career and that of his father-in-law, Towkay Goh Ah Gnee, I realised as never before the cleavage which divides the Malaya of yesterday and today. The Great Slump has written a dividing line in indelible ink across our history, and the economic era in which these two Chinese citizens of Selangor found their opportunities and received their rewards has passed away.

#### Singapore In 1850.

FEW people who have come to this country since the War have ever heard of Towkay Goh Ah Gnee, and many others have forgotten him since his death some twenty years ago, but he was typical of the Chinese pioneers of the Malay States and deserves to be ranked very close to Yap Ah Loy and Loke Yew, of Selangor, and the famous Capitans China of early Perak. His career in this country began thirty years after the Union Jack was first hoisted at Singapore. He landed in that settlement in 1850 from China and lived in Queen Street, near the Brothers' School, and one of the strongest impressions he received at that time was of the proximity of the jungle, as contrasted with the trim

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#### MAINLY About MALAYANS

1 April 1934 - THE WANDERER By ously before we let our sons depart from England. The L.S.D. Viewpoint. I should explain that Mr. Sidney Is here discussing the question of what sort of an education a boy should be given in England to fit him for wor'o in Malaya. It...

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#### A JOURNAL IN THE FEDERAL CAPITAL.

suburbs of later years.

As a business man and contractor Goh Ah Gnee made money, and he also had trading connection with the independent States of the Peninsula, as most merchants in the Straits Settlements had in those days. Later, when British administration began in Selangor in the late seventies, Goh Ah Gnee decided to seek his fortune in the newly opened territory and he was one of the first Chinese to settle in Kuala Lumpur after the British Residency was moved to this town from Klang in 1880. The railway was not then in existence, and Goh Ah Gnee always remembered how he had to travel by boat to the limit of navigation at Damansara and then walk by a hilly jungle track to Kuala Lumpur.

From the first Goh Ah Gnee put his faith in tin-mining. His first ventures were at Rawang and Serendah, where he struck very rich ground. There were no roads in Selangor at that time, and when Goh Ah Gnee first went to Rawang he made the journey of eighteen miles on foot—an interesting contrast with the London directors of modern Malayan mining companies, most of whom have never seen the mines in which their dividends are being earned! The Broga district, on the boundary between Negri Sembilan and Selangor, next attracted Goh Ah Gnee, and he was again successful in opening up a highly profitable mine.

As evidence of the difficulties which confronted pioneers like Goh Ah Gnee it is worth recalling that when Mr. Lai Tet Loke was managing his father-in-law's interests they prospected the ground now being mined by the Sungai Way and Petaling companies near Kuala Lumpur, and gave it up owing to the terribly malarious nature of the district. Since that time the two companies mentioned have earned very large dividends and rank today among the most profitable tin-dredging enterprises in Malaya—but this success was not achieved before the pioneer rubber estate of Sungai Way had paid a heavy toll to malaria in human life and sickness.

### *Finding The Mines.*

FEW people have stopped to consider how the early Chinese miners, who were working in the Malay Peninsula for centuries before British administration began, found their mines. The answer is that they did so largely by guesswork, being guided by the general lie of the land, or by the direction of the tin-bearing "karang" as indicated by existing mines strung out over the countryside. Goh Ah Gnee, however, was the first Chinese to make prospecting a matter of certainty by using the boring tool. He was a great traveller and had seen much more of the world than most Chinese of his day. He had visited fifteen out of the eighteen provinces of China and also the Philippines, Indo-China, Siam, the Dutch East Indies and India. In the course of his travels he had seen the boring tool used on the island of Banka, and he promptly introduced it into Selangor.

In other directions he showed his originality. Even when his business interests lay in Singapore he had set an example by constructing the first steam rice-mill ever used in that city, and when he became a tin-miner he continued to follow an independent path. For example, he was the first Chinese miner who dared to flout the ancient superstitions that no man must enter a mine when carrying an umbrella or wearing shoes, or that no pregnant woman must come near a mine. Goh Ah Gnee was a Catholic convert, and an ardent one at that,

3 March 1934 - A GROUP of low buildings set among coconut palms, some distance off the main road that is as much as most people have ever seen of the old leper settlement at Kuala Lumpur, and as much as they are ever likely to see. It...

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### Mainly ABOUT MALAYANS

17 September 1933 - Mainly ABOUT MALAYANS  
Diary Of "THE WANDERER" HOW much longer are military titles going to be used by civilians in Malaya? Half the Britishers over the age of thirty-five in the country today were lieutenants or captains or majors in Groat War and yet are content with plain "Mr." before...

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at beliefs which had troubled his compatriots from time immemorial. One only wishes that he had been equally successful with the superstition which prevents the Chinese coolie from using grease in his wheelbarrow, thus torturing the ears of other users of the roads.

Another and more important innovation in Malayan mining which began with Goh Ah Gnee was the direct employment of labour. Until Goh Ah Gnee started operations Chinese mining in the Malay States had always been conducted on the traditional share-out basis, and he was the first man to employ labour and boldly take the entire risk on his own shoulders.

#### **"The Three-Legged Cat."**

IT should also be recorded that Goh Ah Gnee smelted his own tin, instead of sending the ore to the big smelters at Singapore and Penang, as is done nowadays. There was nothing new in that, of course, since all miners did their own smelting in the early days, but even in this matter Goh Ah Gnee was not content to stay in a rut.

The clay-lined furnace used at that time to melt the tin and separate it from sand and other impurities was known as "the three-legged cat," and the necessary draught was created by a bellows composed of a hollow tree-trunk containing a piston lined with fowls' feathers, which was forced up and down by hand labour. Exactly the same thing may be seen in Chinese blacksmiths' shops to this day. Goh Ah Gnee scorned this primitive device, however, and he was not long in improving upon it by substituting a blast fan driven by a steam engine. In later years his son-in-law, Mr. Lai Tet Loke, showed a similar impatience with inefficiency when he invented the first effective mechanical method of separating out tin-ore from heavy clay.

As a planter Goh Ah Gnee also deserves a place in the annals of Selangor. He bought Braemar Estate, Kajang from Messrs. Toynbee and Traill when it was still in coffee and he opened up Semenyih Estate in the same crop from virgin jungle. Later he changed over to rubber, but he was one of those who made the mistake of planting the indigenous Malayan rubber, known as *rambong*, and he had to cut it out later in favour of Hevea. Goh Ah Gnee's name is especially associated with the Semenyih district of Selangor, where he founded a large Chinese settlement and made the first road from the main highway to Broga.

#### **Selangor In Later Years.**

MR. Lai Tet Loke, who came from Sarawak as a boy to live in Goh Ah Gnee's household and afterwards acted as his manager for four years, has also been a miner throughout his life, sometimes independently and sometimes as a sideline while employed in a Kuala Lumpur office. He has not operated on such a large scale as his father-in-law, (who had 15,000 mining coolies on his payroll at one time) nor under such strenuous conditions. Whereas Goh Ah Gnee had to walk on foot over difficult country to select his first mines, and open up his estates and mines in a country as wild and untouched as the American prairies of the same era, Mr. Lai Tet Loke usually found roads of a sort wherever he wanted to go, and he found amenities of life which, however inadequate they may seem in the Selangor of today, were yet a good deal better than the conditions which

his father-in-law cheerfully accepted whenever he left the comforts of Kuala Lumpur behind him and fared forth into the country.

Even so the Selangor of Mr. Lai Tet Loke's youth has vanished as completely as the seventeenth-century Malacca. Exaggerated as that statement sounds, one has only to get Mr. Lai Tet Loke in reminiscent mood to realise the complete transformation that has come over this State in the past forty years. He has travelled over the road from Kajang to Seremban in half a dozen ways unknown to post-War residents of Malaya. He has made the journey on foot and by pony, cycle, Australian sulky (a light carriage seating two people) and dogcart. He remembers when victorias and other stately conveyances were used by Kuala Lumpur society and when as much as \$2,000 might be paid for a good Deli pony.

He has even travelled from Kuala Lumpur to Kajang by bullock-bus—a long vehicle with seats on either side, holding fifteen persons. The bus left Roger Street, Kuala Lumpur, in the early morning, its departure being announced by the sounding of an Indian horn, and it arrived at Kajang at one p.m., having changed bullocks at the eighth mile. Mr. Lai Tet Loke has travelled in an even stranger way than that, for he has made the journey to Seremban at night in a hammock of sacking slung underneath the floor of a bullock-cart. Nowadays the same journey takes ninety minutes in a car and twenty in an aeroplane.

#### **A Social Gulf.**

WHEREAS Kuala Lumpur epicures feed today on Dover soles brought

from England to Malaya in cold storage, Mr. Lai Tet Loke remembers the time when sea fish was unobtainable in Kajang, only thirty miles from the coast, so backward were the means of transport available. Today sea fish is one of the principal items in the diet of the upcountry Malay, at any rate in the more accessible districts, and his own freshwater streams yield him little food.

Social differences have also emerged. When Mr. Lai Tet Loke was a clerk in the Selangor Government service in the nineties he used to play billiards with the District Officer in the club at Kajang. Today the District Officer drives into Kuala Lumpur for a dance at the Lake Club, (when he happens to be a European) and the clerk regards him impersonally as a more or less agreeable stranger—or, if you like, as a larger cogwheel moving a smaller cogwheel in the official machine.

One cannot talk to any Asiatic who was employed in Government service in these States thirty or forty years ago without sensing the very wide difference between their attitude towards the European officers under whom they served and the attitude which prevails in the subordinate service today. These veterans remember their District Officers and other superior officers with an extraordinary vividness. To put the matter at its simplest, it is clear that in those days the European officer and his subordinate, while preserving discipline and maintaining a separate social life, came to know each other in a way that is impossible today, when a District Officer is lucky if he serves more than two years in the same district and many impalpable but real barriers to understanding exist.

#### **Staging A "Come-back."**



MR. Lai Tet Loke has had his ups and downs. He was mining at Broga on his own account when a simultaneous tin and coffee slump struck Selangor in 1897 and miners were paid only thirteen dollars a pikul for their ore. "Rawang, Serendah and Sungei Besi were like dead villages," he said to the present writer, recalling that time. Then there were other depressions, in 1904, in 1920 and at other times. "I have been through five or six slumps," said Mr. Lai Tet Loke to me, "and I have made and lost several fortunes, but I am like the *lalang* of the country—I always come back." One can well believe it, observing his forceful, independent personality.

But are we not now entering upon an economic era in which it may not be possible to "come back?" During the lifetime of Goh Ah Gnee, and during Mr. Lai Tet Loke's life up to the Great Slump, any Chinese who had energy, brains and capital could invest it in the Malay States in the well-founded faith that he would reap a satisfactory return. There might be occasional depressions, as in 1897, but they only lasted a year or two at the most, and if one put by enough money to tide over the slumps one could be sure of making money in the booms. And, taking it by and large, one could expect prudence to be rewarded with a substantial fortune when the time for retirement came. When Selangor was being opened up in the last two decades of this century the demand for tropical raw materials was insatiable. There might be overproduction in one crop, as in coffee, but instantly rubber came to take its place. The idea of a world so incompetently organised that it would be glutted with wealth which the existing economic system would be incapable of distributing never entered the heads of our Selangor pioneers.

But today. . . . At the time at which Mr. Lai Tet Loke and I sat talking in a Kuala Lumpur hotel, discussing the personal history of his father-in-law and himself, the world economic conference had failed, the disarmament conference was dying of inanition, and the richest and most powerful nation on earth had been advised by one of its economists "to go forward like a sailing-ship into a fog." Thus as we looked back at the era of confidence and prosperity in the Malay States we knew that sixty assembled nations had proved their inability to tackle the root causes of the slump, that the hope of a world saved from war was as far away as it was in the days of Alexander, and that utter blindness and ignorance were being confessed openly by the economic "experts" of our civilisation.

### ***The Malay Civilisation.***

IS it any wonder that in this chaotic world the peasant civilisation of the Malay race should seem more precious than ever, and that Mr. Egmont Hake, speaking in the Federal Council, should have made one of the few speeches concerned with non-material values that are recorded in the dry and dusty proceedings of that body.

"The constitution of these States," said Mr. Egmont Hake, "as an end in itself is to my mind a matter of minor importance. What interests me more deeply is that the policy of permitting the States to conduct their own paro-

chial affairs will prove the most likely means of preserving the Malay civilisation, with all its simplicities and loyalties and traditions—a civilisation that has always appealed to those who

know a good thing when they see it, and is likely to make a stronger and wider appeal in these latter days when western civilisation is seen to be a menace even to itself. I believe Malaya has as much to learn from the Malay civilisation as we trustees have to give of our own, and if we bring to them the best thing we have—our science in the alleviation of sickness—and leave them their own traditions and mode of life instead of the false values of western materialism, Malaya, and indeed the world, will be the better for it."

A memorable tribute to the Malay peasant from a product of European culture and the most powerful and disinterested mind to be found among the unofficial advisers of the Malayan governments today! And the policy advocated is economically sound. France, with fifty per cent. of her people on the land, is the most stable nation in the world today. In Malaya the only parts of the country where the peasantry had enough to eat last year were Kedah, Kelantan, parts of Perak and the Malacca territory, where the Malays live on their own rice-fields. Not everyone agrees with Mr. Egmont Hake that the Malay civilisation is anything to boast of, or to be envied by those who do not belong to it, but others are in no doubt as to who is better off—the Malay peasant contemplating a glorious expanse of emerald crops on a breezy morning in the Malacca countryside, or the Indian estate labourer living in the glorified horse-boxes which we call "lines" or the clerk hammering rebelliously away at a typewriter in a Kuala Lumpur office.

#### *Van Wijk Memories.*

THE same note of envy of a leisurely, peaceful, contented civilisation that we heard in Mr. Egmont Hake's speech is sounded in a recent book by Sir Philip Gibbs. "In French cafes on the terraces and in German beer-gardens," he writes, "the ordinary folk sit out of doors, drinking light beer, listening to the tinkle of an orchestra, talking, watching life go by, pleasantly enjoying themselves for the hundredth part of the sum spent in a London cinema in a darkness thick with cigarette smoke." Only in one place in Malaya have I seen people enjoying themselves in this way, and that was at a Dutch hotel in Singapore, now—alas!—given over to the dreary celibacy and religiosity of a convent.

On a night of full moon in a kampong, do you know, you who despise the Malay civilisation—what the country-folk do? They sit on the ladders of their houses, watching the moonlight reflected on the polished foliage of palms and fruit-trees, talking quietly and peacefully with a blissful forgetfulness of time? What need have they to think of the morrow? In their granaries is enough rice to last them until the next harvest. On the trees around their houses and in their gardens are fruit and spices to season their simple diet. Poultry are no trouble to keep, and half a dozen small fish can be had by sitting on the bank of a stream for an hour. Is not this better than living in the Imbi Road garden village, one of a thousand other Government servants, and worrying—very reasonably too—over the salary scheme of the new clerical service?

Some there are who admit the economic soundness of the peasant's manner of life but can see nothing except an anachronism in the feudal society to which the peasant belongs. And in truth one must confess to certain misgivings at seeing Malay princes and princesses who live on



political pensions and can find nothing better to do than to amuse themselves. There unquestionably is an anachronistic side to a Malay court in modern Malaya, and the only hope lies in training the younger men for active administrative work or, if they cannot do that, in helping them to follow the dignified example of the Royal Family of England in performing the constitutional and social duties that fall to their lot.

### **Modern Feudalism.**

TO those who regard the feudal aspect of the modern Malay States as a sort of unreal facade, a thing of gilt and cardboard behind which the British administration operates, the answer can be made that the Malays are still the most numerous race in this country and incomparably the most numerous of the settled elements of the population. They are, moreover, an intensely conservative race, somewhat altered in externals perhaps but in psychology, manner of life and social organisation very much the same as they were before the white man appeared in their country. Accordingly the symbolism of royalty and aristocracy means much to them and the enthronement ceremonial performed at Pekan recently was not irrelevant to the life of Pahang but a solemn reality to the population of one hundred thousand Malays that owes fealty to Sultan Abu Bakar.

If a modern Englishman can be stirred to his depths by a royal ceremony in Westminster Abbey, what must royalty mean to a Malay! Here is a passage from a description by Mr. Blumenfeld, not an Englishman but a Canadian, of the coronation of King George: "I pass over the order of the ritual . . . how they vested the King with cloth of gold until he shimmered from head to foot, how they placed in his hands the various insignia of sovereignty—the orb, the

sceptres, one of them holding the great Cullinan diamond, as large as a bantam's egg; how the Lord Great Chamberlain touched his heels with the golden spurs and the four Garter Knights held over his head the golden canopy, while the Archbishop anointed him from the ancient spoon held by the Dean; how symbolism followed symbolism until came the supreme moment of the Coronation when the Archbishop placed on the King's head the great, glittering Crown of St. Edward, whereat the Westminster boys again electrified the Abbey with a great cry 'Long Live King George, Long Live King George.'"

After reading that it ill befits any Englishman to smile at the symbolism of Malay royalty or at the social structure of which a modern Malay sultan is the apex.

### **The Modern Tangle.**

BUT most newspaper readers in this country are neither Malays nor peasants, and for good or ill they find themselves involved inextricably in a very different civilisation in which they dare not stay up late on moonlight nights for fear of being stupid in the office next morning, in which work and employment may be lost at any moment through no fault of one's own, and in which all sorts of disappointments and deprivations have to be faced. In this anxious and competitive civilisation peace is unobtainable except by mystical means.

The prosperity of a new and boom-

was the real basis of the "contentment" and "goodwill" of which our governors have been pleased to speak —has gone for ever. The rich alluvial ground which tempted Goh Ah Gnee and his fellow-miners has all been worked over, and now the European dredge is earning precarious profits in abandoned Chinese workings. The illimitable forests of rubber trees now in existence in the Malay Peninsula and elsewhere are capable of supplying the most extreme demand which a successful Technocracy could envisage, and for the past five years have been steadily turning out more rubber than the world has been using. In our little local scene we see unmistakable evidence of economic deterioration. The Malayan governments can no longer afford to give secondary English education at nominal cost, while married clerks in Government offices are to be put on a salary scale which allows them forty-four dollars a month after ten years' service.

The political outlook is not quite as cloudless as it used to be. Kuala Lumpur is suffering from growing pains, and the Malayan Civil Service does not know what to do about it. The pro-Malay policy, which has the effect of turning Chinese and Indian clerks out of employment and putting Malays in their places (a process that is occurring at this moment in Kuala Lumpur) is causing bitterness. Economically the country has passed out of the development phase, so that a man of enterprise and energy will find it difficult to come upon suitable opportunities. Only the big capitalist will be able to start new ventures in future, and a member of the clerical class is likely to stay in that class all his days —as he does in England.

### *What Lies Ahead?*

A SPIRIT of qualified optimism has lately crept into these weekly scribbles of mine, and beyond doubt we are likely to see social progress in certain directions, but there are grounds for apprehension as well. The world economic conference has been a dismal and disgusting failure. What is

the relevance of that failure to the economic life of Selangor? We have yet to see, but if it means a relapse into extreme economic nationalism throughout the world we may yet find ourselves in Queer Street. Likewise we may expect some curious and unwelcome issues from the parish pump, such as the payment by a local-born Chinese boy of nine dollars a month for his education at the Victoria Institution while his Malay comrade sitting at the next desk pays nothing at all. Room for trouble there, don't you think?

And so we go on in this strange post-war Malaya of ours, a long, long way from old Goh Ah Gnee plodding along a jungle path to find a tin mine at Rawang. We feel that we have crossed the dividing line into a new era, but we know nothing of what lies ahead. In all that comprises civilisation we are dependent on forces outside our control, and it looks very much as though we shall have to mark time for some years to come. Libraries, art galleries, musical societies, swimming pools, playing grounds and many other appurtenances of a balanced life are lacking in the Kuala Lumpur of our time, and at the moment we see little prospect of finding the money to pay for them.

But we can always take comfort in the insatiable love of life which pos-





sesses the average human being. Last Saturday afternoon I saw a happy gathering of girls taking part in a sports meeting. They were not advanced as the English schoolgirl clad in navy-blue tunic and armed with a hockey stick, but they were thirty years ahead of the shy, stiff and self-conscious creatures formerly found in girls' schools in this country. The same night I went to see a native vaudeville company and rejoiced in an atmosphere as free and bolsterous as that of any London music-hall on a Saturday night. So people will continue to enjoy life whatever happens. Whenever I become unusually depressed I think of the most devoted gardener of my acquaintance, a Tamil coolie who lavishes care and patience upon a border of crocuses around a block of official lavatories. After all, slump or no slump, change or stagnation, progress or regress, there are always gardens and other timeless satisfactions.

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