

THE PAUPER HOSPITAL IN EARLY SINGAPORE — (PART II) (1830-1839)

By Y. K. Lee

Erratum: In Part I of this article, the first three sentences read as follows: "Tan Tock Seng Hospital, Singapore, started its history as a Pauper Hospital. The foundation stone of the first Tan Tock Seng Hospital was laid on 25th July 1844. This hospital built at Pearl's Hill was not used until 1847." The year should be 1849.

A general introduction to the study of the medical history of early Singapore has already been outlined. (Lee, 1973 (a)).

The history of the Pauper Hospital (and the Pork Farm) from 1819 to 1829 has already been documented. (Lee, 1973 (b)).

The Pork Farm was put up for tender for the first time in April 1830, and was sold to the highest bidder for \$820 per month. In May, the Resident Councillor obtained the approval of the Governor and Council to build a Poor House and Hospital for the Chinese out of the proceeds of the Pork Farm, and was requested to submit the Plans and Estimates without delay. (Lee, 1973 (b)). He was also reminded of the danger of such institutions expanding beyond the means of support, and was instructed to confine the benefits of the Poor House and Hospital to Singapore residents and not to exceed an expenditure equal to two-thirds of the proceeds. (S.S.R., A. 70., 1830).

In July 1830, there were complaints concerning the apathy of the Europeans for allowing more and more sick beggars and vagrants to be in Singapore. The roads were obstructed by them and the houses were surrounded by them. Some of the paupers came direct from China, the rest were collected by the Dutch authorities in their colonies and dumped in Singapore during the night. There was a call that this should be stopped, and that the Chinese, who had benefited from their stay in Singapore and had become wealthy, should be compelled to build an asylum for their countrymen:

"... In no other place is this greatest of all nuisances permitted and the evil is daily increasing from the apathy and unconcern shown to the subject by all classes of Europeans. As if we had not a sufficient supply of such living corruption continually imported from various parts of

China in junks, we are complemented with all those who find their way to Sambas and Pontiana, who are landed at Palembang and Banca, of which place, Rhio, is the grand depot. All of them are collected by our kind neighbour and during the night put on shore to the eastward of this island in droves of 20 and 30, who in course of time drag their filthy carcasses to Town, bringing in their train dire diseases with all the commitments of a leper house. Within the last few months no less than 340 have been thus landed and fresh arrivals may be every night expected. Why should MYNHEER be permitted thus to palm these wretches upon us until the very atmosphere we breathe is impregnated with malaria causing a multiplicity of diseases. . . . Next to the prevention of their increase which I doubt not Government will take every measure to effect, it is incumbent upon us to see them provided for in a manner suitable to the dictations of humanity and to the feelings of civilised society.

In bringing about this desirable event, there can surely be but one opinion, i.e. that the Chinese and they only should be compelled to provide a proper asylum and support for their suffering countrymen. In Singapore, the Chinese since the formation of the Settlement have ever possessed advantages enjoyed by no other inhabitant. . . . It is a known and decided fact that with one or at the most two exceptions, the Chinese merchants and traders are the only people who at Singapore, have made large fortunes. . . . It will be a curious circumstance if with all these advantages and many more to boot, which the Chinese possess, they should attempt to raise objections against building a hospital and endowing it for the reception and support of their afflicted countrymen. . . . All denominations and sects of people in all parts of the world support their own poor and why should Singapore be an exception?" (CHR. 1830 (a)).

This writer in his letter to the Singapore Chronicle also objected to the proceeds of the Pork Farm being used to build a hospital for paupers. However, by September 1830, there was no sign of anything being done. Another writer asked:

"Can you inform me also if the Infirmary for Chinese lepers and others is in progress of erection and where? It must be remembered that the proceeds of the Pork Farm are to be appropria-

Thomson Road General Hospital, Singapore.

Y. K. LEE, A.M., M.D., F.R.C.P.(Lond.), F.R.C.P.(Edin.),
M.R.A.C.P., F.C.L.M., LL.B., Senior Physician.

ted to this purpose, and that the sum thus raised since May last ought to amount to somewhat more than \$4000. . . ." (CHR. 1830(b)).

In November 1830, the Governor reported to the Governor-General that the Pauper Hospital had not yet been built at Singapore. (S.S.R., V. 4., 1830). The proceeds of the Pork Farm had been used only to defray the expenses of the existing Pauper Hospital. It cost about \$300 (700 Rupees) per month to run this hospital and the proceeds came up to \$820. It was rumoured that the Government had decided to appropriate the surplus as general revenue instead of using it to build the new hospital. The newspapers were critical of the proposed action of Government and of its lack of interest in public welfare:

" . . . It would be well if the ruling Authorities exhibited at the present period such a laudable desire to benefit and improve the place as is exhibited by private individuals. . . . A new Infirmary might also be commenced upon from the surplus of the proceeds of the Pork Farm, which we believe average since April last \$500 per month, leaving 300 or more dollars per month as being sufficient to defray the expenses of the present temporary infirmary.

It is said that the Government have a right to appropriate for its own purposes the residue of this Farm, but on referring to the Regulations, we find it clearly stated that all the proceeds are to be devoted to the charitable purpose of supporting an infirmary for the sick poor of the place. The public who are so far concerned in as much as they are the payers of the tax, have a right therefore to inquire into the outlay of the money and to see that the original intention of the framers of the Regulations be most religiously adhered to. It may be said the building is in contemplation and will be undertaken in time. It may be so, but from the apathy and indifference with which almost all public works are undertaken in this part of the world (except where individual interest is concerned), we are inclined to think that our Rulers are well-content with things as they are and are inclined to give themselves little trouble beyond the mere routine of their business. Of all others they should set a good example by displaying a public spirit for improvement and not allow of private individuals taking the lead." (CHR. 1831(a)).

The Editor of the Singapore Chronicle on 17th March 1831 quoted an article in the Bengal Hurkaru of 22nd February 1831 disapproving of the Singapore Government's handling of the Pork Farm:

"We perceive that numerous improvements and extensions have been made to the flourishing town of Singapore, and the community have recently established an Exchange and Reading Room. All that tends to the comfort and convenience of society in that prosperous Settlement appears to be the work of private individuals. The Government seems to have shown no interest in these laudable undertakings. . . . We happen to know however that the Pork Farm or tax upon pork was originally established for the support of a Poor House and Hospital for sick and decayed Chinese, but that the revenue being found greater than the expenses, the Government generously undertook to receive the one and disburse the other. Can the surplus be honestly withheld when its intended appropriation is the building of a new infirmary greatly wanted and which is one of the objects for which the tax was originally imposed?"

He himself joined in the fray:

" . . . We have again consulted the Regulations for that particular farm, and we find that the express words are that 'all the revenue that may result from the vesting of this farm shall be appropriated to the purposes of supporting a Native Poor House and Infirmary for the benefit of such fixed residents of these Settlements as may from time to time require such privilege.' We have at present but one temporary building made of very perishable materials in which upwards of 60 unfortunate beings are confined, most of them Chinese lepers. We imagine however it was never contemplated that a Poor House and Infirmary should be thus amalgamated, that paupers, some of whom probably are free from disease, should be thus jumbled together with lepers. . . . Surely with a small portion of the present funds, separate buildings might soon be erected for paupers while the lepers might remain in the infirmary.

The expense of supporting an attendance on the inmates of the present infirmary or whatever other name it is called by, does not amount to one-third of the proceeds of the Farm which is stated to be \$820 per month. It remains therefore to be investigated how the remaining two-thirds are expended or how it is to be appropriated. For we conceive the local authorities cannot under the most plausible pretext appropriate it to any other than the object intended or to some other useful public purpose. . . .

We think this a very proper subject to be laid before a Grand Jury whenever we shall be blest with a King's Court of Judicature, and a return from the state of barbarous anarchy and

confusion to peace and a right order of things." (CHR. 1831(b)). (There was no Court of Judicature in the Straits Settlements from July 1830 to April 1832 (Lee, 1972)).

There were also letters to the Press:

"Could you inform me under whose superintendence is the Infirmary or Leper House, or is it under any superintendence at all? I am induced to put the question from having observed for one or two weeks past, one of the most disgusting objects of the leper species who was formerly confined there, at large and begging from house to house. . . .

Such an ample foundation as the Pork Farm affords, ought to ensure the unfortunate lepers a support that should place them above the necessity of begging and procure such proper superintendence as should free the public from further annoyance from such horrible objects." (CHR. 1831(c)).

As a result of all this criticism and censure, the Governor wrote to the Government of Bengal on the necessity of building a new Pauper Hospital from the proceeds of the Pork Farm. He also submitted a plan of the proposed hospital for approval. (This plan was lost by the Bengal Government!—see below).

In 1831, there were about 70-80 patients in the Pauper Hospital. In the opinion of the Residency Assistant Surgeon, Assistant Surgeon Thomas Oxley, it was "tolerably adequate to meet the useful and charitable end for which it was instituted", but was "of a very perishable construction, being made only of the attap and being deficient in room and light. . . ." (S.S.R., W. 1., 1831).

The Court of Judicature of Prince of Wales Island, Singapore and Malacca was re-opened in April 1832, and at the Criminal Session held the next month at Singapore, the Grand Jury after inspecting the Pauper Hospital and examining the accounts of the Pork Farm, made a Presentment. They drew attention to the Pauper Hospital and the 12th section of the Pork Farm Regulations:

" . . . The next subject to which the Grand Jury would call the attention of Your Lordships is that of the Native Poor House and Infirmary. They have inquired into the management and existing state of the institution, and find that as it is at present conducted, it does not by any means answer the wise and humane purposes for which it was established. The building is a miserable attap bungalow, much too small and confined, which together with the exceedingly injudicious plan upon which it is constructed, render it all together unfit either as a hospital for the sick or an asylum for the poor. . . . The

Grand Jury having examined into the state of the accounts of this farm and finding that the receipts up to the first of the present month amounted to \$17,165.00, and that the disbursements to \$7,406.63 in the hands of the Magistrates, beg respectfully to recommend that as the present building is totally unsuitable, the erection of a substantial and commodious Poor House and Infirmary in every way adapted to the exigencies of this Settlement be undertaken forthwith.

The funds now available are amply sufficient to authorise immediate commencement of the building, and the revenue of the fund which will be accumulated before the whole of the present funds shall have been expended will be found more than sufficient for the completion of such edifice as is required. . . .

The Grand Jury beg to present as a great public nuisance the number of beggars, chiefly Chinese, who are continually to be seen in all parts of the Town, many of whom are affected with the most loathsome diseases. . . ." (CHR. 1832(a)).

The Press gave great prominence to this Presentment and strongly supported the views expressed therein. "We feel convinced that some benefit will result from the notice taken by the Grand Jury of this subject and we trust that their example in introducing such important matters into Presentments will be followed by all future Grand Juries. . . ." (CHR. 1832(b)).

After some investigations, the Governor sent a copy of this Presentment to the Government of Bengal with his comments and recommendations. He recalled that he had on 27th April 1831 sent plans of the proposed Pauper Hospital together with a letter pointing out the inadequacies of the existing hospital. Since this subject had been noticed publicly by the Grand Jury, he said:

"I take the liberty of expressing my sense of propriety of their recommendation. The Poor House in its present state is rather a nuisance than a public benefit, being the point of congregation for all objects of misery and disease without the means of concealing them from the public eye. It is (as stated by the Grand Jury) provided in the present Regulations of the Pork Farm, that *all* the revenue arising therefrom shall be appropriated to the purposes of supporting this Poor House. The said revenue now amounts to the sum of \$9,758.63, which sum will more than suffice for the erection of a building, such as would effectually obviate the inconvenience here complained of. . . .

The Grand Jury present as a great public nuisance, the number of beggars and diseased persons, who are continually seen in the streets. This is to be prevented only by the same means that are necessary to remedy the evil last mentioned, namely, by the erection of a proper Poor House. . . ." (S.S.R., R. 1., 1832).

On 11th September 1832, the Government of Bengal authorised the building of a "more efficient and spacious place of accommodation for the poor of the Classes intended to be provided for from that Fund." The Governor was asked to submit another plan of the proposed hospital, as the previous one had been lost! (S.S.R., S. 2., 1832).

On receipt of this letter of authorisation in November 1832, the Governor instructed the Resident Councillor at Singapore to submit a plan and estimate, and to start work immediately but with all possible economy:

"I have further to request you will furnish me through Lieut. Ditmas with a plan and estimate of a spacious Poor House on the site of the present Building, taking care to allot the ground as to leave another eligible site for future Convict Lines in the same vicinity. The preparation of this plan need not in the interval of approval from me, prevent the collection of materials and even the construction of the surrounding wall to the Poor House yard.

You will desire the omission of all unnecessary architectural ornament in this Building, . . . bearing in mind that durability and convenience are the principal objects to be considered. . . ." (S.S.R., Z. 7., 1832).

The Resident Councillor wrote to say that he preferred Mr. G. D. Coleman to be the architect of the Poor House. This was approved by the Governor on 7th January 1833. ". . . Adverting to the professional talents of Mr. Coleman, long resident at Singapore, you are at liberty to employ him instead of Lieut. Ditmas on the best terms you are able, in the planning and executing the erection of the Poor House." (S.S.R., Z. 8., 1833).

By the end of April 1833, the Singapore Chronicle drew attention to the fact that the Pauper Hospital was still in the planning stage: "On Tuesday 16th instant, the Revenue Farms for the ensuing year were sold by public auctions. . . . This increase of Revenue, it is to be hoped, will encourage the Government to commence on the long-talked-of Bridge and Poor House and Infirmary, the want of which buildings of a suitable description, were so ably presented by the Grand Jury at the last session of Oyer and Terminer. . . ." (CHR. 1833 (a)).

On 9th May 1833, the Governor reported to the Government of Bengal:

" . . . The building of the Chinese Poor House authorised . . . will shortly be commenced upon. It is to cost \$11,402, and I had hoped by the present opportunity to have been able to transmit for the approval of His Lordship in Council, the plan and estimate thereof, executed by Mr. Coleman, with also copy of the agreement I am about to sanction with that individual to build it. The papers however are not quite complete but they shall follow by an early opportunity. . . ." (S.S.R., R. 2., 1833).

The Agreement and Plan were sent the following month. (S.S.R., R. 2., 1833). These were approved. "The Right Honourable the Governor-General in Council is pleased to sanction the execution of the Building in question at an expense not exceeding the sum of \$11,402, per Mr. Coleman's agreement." (S.S.R., S. 1., 1833).

It had been decided to build the new Pauper Hospital on the site of the existing one. Work on the new hospital commenced in July 1833 after the existing hospital had been dismantled and removed to another place by the Public Works Department. (S.S.R., S. 1., 1833).

In the meantime, the Grand Jury again at the Criminal Session in May 1833 presented "the want of a Native Poor House and Infirmary, to be erected and maintained out of the produce of the Pork Farm." (CHR. 1833 (b)).

Mr. Coleman's plan for the new Hospital incorporated some new ideas in hospital architecture. "There was bed space on two floors, and the windows reached to the floor for the purpose of causing a free circulation of air by opening both above and below the bed spaces." (S.S.R., Z. 9., 1835). The compound of the hospital was surrounded by a wall 15 feet high.

On 17th April 1834, the Singapore Chronicle reported, "At the present period, a commodious and durable building, planned as a General Infirmary, is in progress of completion, the cost of which we suppose is defrayed out of the surplus of the revenue derived from the sale of the Pork Farm. . . ." (CHR. 1834 (a)).

After all the administrative delays and red-tape, the new Pauper Hospital (also known as the Poor House and Hospital or Infirmary) was ready for occupation in June 1834. The Pauper Hospital had two sections and admitted two classes of patients: (a) the pauper sick into the infirmary side, and (b) the destitute into the Poor House side. The first Coroner's Inquest in the Hospital was held on Sunday, 15th June 1834, on a case of tetanus. (CHR. 1834 (b)).

The paupers did not enjoy the advantages of their new hospital for long. On 24th January 1835, Mr. Coleman, who was also the Superintendent of Convicts, reported to the Governor that the Head Peon (Warder) of the Convict Jail had been murdered by some convicts, and that there had been eleven escapes during the past two months. The Convict Jail was in such a bad state that it was useless as a place of confinement. Mr. Coleman recommended that the new Pauper Hospital be used temporarily as a Convict Jail, and the paupers removed to an attap shed. This was necessary in the interests of public security:

"I beg leave to suggest as a temporary measure that the paupers be removed from the new Hospital, and placed in an attap building similar to that in which they were formerly lodged; and that the Hospital with its enclosures be for the present made use of as a Convict Jail. The enclosure is large enough to admit of two temporary sheds which with the Hospital would afford accommodation for all the convicts, except those that are in consequence of good behaviour stationed outside in charge of the buffaloes. . . .

It may be objected that the Paupers will suffer by being removed to a place not so comfortable as that in which they now reside, but when the whole of the circumstance is considered, it must be acknowledged that the measure is in every respect justifiable, as it would be unreasonable to prefer the temporary case of the paupers to the general safety of the whole community." (S.S.R., Z. 9., 1835).

The Governor immediately adopted the measure proposed "for the future custody of the convicts and to ensure as far as possible the public against the aggression of this class of persons." (S.S.R., R. 3., 1835).

The 139 paupers were immediately removed to an attap building hastily erected for them at the cost of 1263 Rupees (\$600). This was to be a temporary expedient, but later events were to give lie to this.

On 19th February 1835, the Governor instructed the Resident Councillor to assemble a Committee to report on the state of the Convict Jail. They reported back without delay, submitting a plan and estimate for a new Convict Jail. These were immediately sent to Bengal for approval. ". . . The present place of confinement, the Chinese Poor House, is totally inadequate for the reception of the Convicts, besides being required for its legitimate object. . . ." (S.S.R., AA. 7., 1835). A piece of land had been reserved for the Convict Jail when the Pauper Hospital was planned in November 1832. (see above).

But by June 1836, the paupers were still in their "temporary place for the sick", and there were criticisms in the Press regarding the high-handed action and inefficiency of the Government:

"This building (the Pauper Hospital) as is known to all our readers on the spot, was constructed out of the proceeds of the Government Pork Farm, the tax upon that commodity having been imposed under the alleged express purpose of providing funds to build and maintain a hospital or poor house. As the tax fell directly upon the Chinese who among the natives are the sole consumers of pork, and form by far the largest section of the population of the island, the hospital was at first intended for their accommodation, and that circumstance gave the building its present designation (the Chinese Hospital or Poor House), although its benefits were extended to all classes of the community. It is yet scarcely two years since the present building was finished, and for fully three-quarters of that period, it has been used by the Local Government as a Convict Jail while its former tenants are bestowed in an attap bungalow run up for that occasion. It becomes therefore we think, full time to inquire for what period and on what pretext or plea the hospital is to be appropriated by Government for the purposes of a Convict prison in violation of its own avowed pledges and to the unlawful exclusion of that class of persons for whose use and benefit it was solely designed. The setting apart and marking out of a piece of ground for a new set of Convict Lines were contemporaneous with the arrangements for the site of an hospital, the old Convict Lines having on former and repeated occasions been represented and remarked on as inadequate for the secure confinement of the large body of malefactors which they contained, and which was daily receiving additions to its numbers. A period of nearly three years has intervened, and we as yet see not a single trace of preparation for a new set of Convict Lines. . . .

It is not our intention by these remarks to lay to the charge of the Local Government the whole of the odium which attaches to the present appropriation of the Chinese Hospital. A large share of it must at all events be borne by the Supreme Government. . . ." (S.F.P., 1836 (a)).

A letter to the Editor of the Singapore Free Press on 11th June 1836 asked him why he bothered so much about the Chinese paupers as nobody else did:

". . . The Chinese paupers are most comfortably lodged in a large and airy attap bungalow,

and I am certain there is not a member of the pork-eating nation, or in fact any one of this community (saving and excepting a certain coterie) cares a straw about the temporary appropriation of the Chinese Hospital and Poor House as a convict goal. . . ." (S.F.P., 1836 (b)).

The Editor of the Singapore Free Press, however, continued his attack on 30th June 1836: (S.F.P., 1836 (c)).

" . . . Whether it be owing to the circumstance and that of the attap bungalow or rather shed substituted for the reception and accommodation of the pauper sick being deemed or found unsuitable or improper, or whether attributable to other causes, we know not, but the increased number of diseased objects frequenting the streets and suburbs of the Town, a prey to ulcers and leprosy in every stage and form, besides victims of other less obvious maladies, has of late become sufficiently and painfully visible. It has we are aware often been the subject of complaint here that numbers of diseased wretches among the Chinese migrants of Rhio for whose relief not only is no provision there made but who are actually compelled in consequence of disease to leave that settlement, have no resource but to betake themselves to Singapore in the hope of receiving those offices of humanity which are denied them by our Dutch neighbours. . . ."

He then mentioned that these non-citizens were denied the benefits of the Pauper Hospital as the Pork Farm Regulations specifically restricted the benefits to "fixed residents of the place". He was of the opinion that strict enforcement of this measure was severe and inhuman if no steps were taken to stop immigration:

" . . . even should we all together banish from our consideration those higher motives and principles which would lead to a more extensive and humane system and practice, but at any rate if such objects of disease are allowed or contrive to land on the island and become part of the population, small degree of care is at least required of the proper authorities that they be not allowed to offend the public eye and display their loathsome sores in every street corner. . . ."

The Singapore Chronicle came out in support of the Government. It was of the opinion that the concern shown for the Chinese paupers was unwarranted. If the Chinese were not happy with the situation, it proposed that the Pork Farm be abolished and a poll-tax imposed on the Chinese instead. It maintained that the Chinese enjoyed

the "liberty and protection" of the British Crown and made large fortunes, and should rightly contribute to the Revenue and support their sick and poor compatriots. It wanted legislation passed to ensure this, and to prevent the landing of paupers from neighbouring countries. It also suggested that the Government repatriate all foreign paupers. In its opinion, the Government had every right to do what it had done and in fact had done more than was required under the law:

" . . . We presume the Government as well as private individuals are entitled to apply their property to whatever use they may think most advantageous, and that Government should have found it necessary on public considerations to convert a particular building for the better security of convicts appears to us to be perfectly within their discretion. They may be bound to support a Native Poor House, but that is very far from implying that they are under any obligation to build a Poor House and Infirmary for any particular class of their subjects, or that if they have been indulgent enough to appropriate a public building for the purpose of affording medical and charitable aid to the Chinese poor for any given time that they are forever restrained from using the same on public necessity and for the public protection for totally different purposes.

The Chinese as a body are sufficiently numerous and wealthy to build an Hospital for their own sick in general, and the kind-hearted advocates might gratify their feelings by suggesting to them so beneficial an arrangement, after which they might look to Government for that support and encouragement to which they would then be fairly entitled to. As far as right goes, we are of opinion, that Government have gone beyond what under the existing regulations they were called upon (dictated perhaps by feelings of humanity) to provide any description of receptacle for the Chinese sick or diseased, and that the support contemplated cannot reasonably be stretched further than the furnishing of medical relief and attendance. . . ."

We cannot perceive because our Dutch friends may happily or perhaps inhumanly rid themselves of the diseased recrements of the native population at Rhio, that therefore it is the duty of the British Government to evince to these unfortunate outcasts either compassion or relief. Such charitable demonstrations ought and would be more properly performed by their own countrymen, to insure which it would be exceedingly desirable that some local regulation should be framed providing for such contingencies, or if that be impracticable, that

importations of diseased humanity at all events from any foreign European Settlement in the neighbourhood should not be permitted, and that unless the countrymen of the individuals should undertake for their support and assistance to which they would be then fairly entitled, the Government ought to return them to the European authorities who had the brutality to drive them from their localities." (CHR. 1836(a)).

This controversy became more heated and personal when the Singapore Free Press counter-attacked on 7th July 1836:

"... We can see only one drift or object, and that is to defend the Local Government's 'per fas aut nefas' through thick and thin in their present unauthorised occupation of the Native Poor House, and in doing this our contemporary evinces a singular misapprehension of the principles or grounds upon which the Authorities here proceeded in this matter as also a lamentable ignorance, real or affected, of the nature of the obligations imposed on Government with respect to the support of a Native Poor House and Infirmary from out of the Revenue of the Pork Farm. ... The building now occupied by the convicts was not only expressly designed for an Hospital but was actually reared out of the surplus accumulation of the Pork Farm at the time in the hands of Government. The attap bungalow which has been substituted for the proper Poor House is moreover unfit for such a purpose and has besides its other disadvantages, being found too small for the number of applicants for admission, a boon which has been refused to many upon the sole ground of its being already too crowded. ..." (S.F.P., 1836(d)).

The Editor of the Singapore Chronicle in his reply on 9th July 1836 stated that there had been misinterpretation of the Pork Farm Regulations, which required the funds to be used to "support" and not to "erect" a Native Poor House, and that the Government had done more than was required by the Regulations in erecting a hospital, which they had taken back for other purposes. The paupers ought to be thankful for what accommodation there was:

"... We humbly conceive many of the community were labouring under a popular error which we have no doubt will ere long have been entirely dissipated by the publication of that section of the Regulations by the last Free Press, which provides for the appropriation of the revenue derived from the Pork Farm. For aught we know, the Chinese may have been led to

suppose that the tax imposed upon them was intended for the erection of a Poor House and Infirmary for such of their countrymen as might require that relief, but we cannot allow our charitable inclinations and suppositions to force us against our own judgement and ocular demonstration, to put a very extended, unauthorised and perverse construction upon the wording of that part of the Regulations by which it is attempted to cast opprobrium of a want of faith upon the Government. ... We may without difficulty infer that the Authorities are very much of our way of thinking, although they had benevolently permitted the native paupers to temporarily occupy the building which had been gratuitously baptised the Pauper Hospital. Consequent perhaps on such sufferance of some five or six months continuance, their brief occupation and sojourn would also imply that the place was not intended for that specific purpose, and that they would be as suitably if not more comfortably accommodated elsewhere, for to our sight the place from whence they had been luckily removed appears more adapted for a prison than as a Poor House or Hospital, placed between and surrounded by a high wall some 14 or 15 feet high, admirably adapted for the purpose of security, however little suited from its situation, construction and by its exclusion of free air from the height of the wall and lowness of the building to the design of an Hospital. We cannot imagine any medical man would recommend such a building as at all fitted either as a Poor House or Infirmary, and if in reality, any hardship or injustice has been committed, the supposed sufferers ought to submit with patience and gratitude to a calamity which operates so very decidedly in their favour in point of salubrity of situation. ..." (CHR. 1836(b)).

While this controversy regarding the legality and high-handedness of the paupers being evicted from their hospital raged, with abuses hurled and recriminations flung, the machinery of Government went on its usual inexorable way. Budget estimates for the next financial year were prepared and submitted to the Government of Bengal for approval.

Then a bolt fell from the blue. In May 1837, the Governor-General after studying the estimates and finances of Singapore, decided that the Pork Farm should be abolished for the following reasons: (S.S.R., Q. 7., 1837)

- (a) that one section of the population was taxed to support the rest. "The revenue from this Farm is appropriated by the Regulations that raises it to the support of a Native Poor House and Infirmary. This is often called the Chinese

Hospital and originally perhaps it was one, but it is not either in fact now or according to the term of its institution more open to Chinese than to any other native. I do not understand upon what principle the industrious Chinese have been made to support the sick and idle of all other classes. They and the Europeans are the only classes that eat pork, so that a Pork Tax would be unjust, but this, a tax only on the pork eaten by the Chinese is clearly so. It is said that the Farm originated in some Chinese who proposed it as a means of supporting their own Poor House some years ago. But if the tax be bad in principle it ought not to be retained because some wealthy Chinese on whom perhaps the task of supporting their poor countrymen had mainly fallen had proposed it long ago, and at any rate now that the object of the institution is general, the support of it ought not to fall upon a few."

- (b) that not the whole of the tax went to support the Pauper Hospital (also known as the Poor House and Infirmary):

"In reality however, more than one third of the tax goes into the General Revenues, and it is therefore in great part a general tax. In this view, the exemption of Europeans seems very partial and invidious. But on this point, I must confess that in my opinion as long as the Regulations remains as it is, the object to which it professes to devote all the Revenue gained by it, which object is Charity, ought to be honestly supported."

- (c) that it was not really worthwhile to maintain a Pauper Hospital (Poor House and Infirmary) in Singapore:

"I am however very doubtful of the object being really beneficial. A Poor House in one of these small spots of civilisation surrounded by numerous nations whose poor have no national means of subsistence seems to be peculiarly liable to abuse. No period of previous residence seems necessary before obtaining lodging and food in these Houses. At Singapore, I am told, the Pauper Hospital is a lazaretto for the decrepit and maimed of Rhio and half the Malay villages at that end of the Straits. Numbers of miserable objects have been seen to land from one boat that they might be supported there. The voluntary support of these poor people in us to tax a hard-working Chinese labourer at Singapore for the support of the paupers of Rhio. At the least, if the Poor Houses be maintained at all, very strict Regulations relative to admission, food and work must be introduced, but though it is impossible not to

come to such a determination without unpleasant feelings, it is perhaps the best course to abandon the Poor Houses and to maintain only the Infirmary at the general charge for patients not incurable, at which none but those suffering from accidents or acute diseases should be received as indoor patients or at least at which none others should be fed at the public charge."

- (d) that it was inconsistent with the policy of the East India Company which forbade taxes on necessary articles of food:

"... it presses entirely on the most useful, industrious, intelligent and skilful part of our population, on the very class which we ought to encourage, for if we tax the food of one class of labourers and not that of others, we certainly discourage the taxed class, ... for certainly pork is as much a daily necessity for a labouring Chinese in the Straits where wages are high as wheaten bread is for an Englishman."

In the meantime, in June 1837, the new Convict Jail was completed and the Convicts were transferred from the Pauper Hospital which they had occupied since 1835, and the paupers moved from the temporary shed back to their proper quarters.

It was only in September 1837 that the Governor-General's instructions regarding the abolition of the Pork Farm and the Poor House side of the Pauper Hospital with the retention of the Infirmary side for "acute curable cases and accidents" were transmitted to the Governor. But it was realised that it would not be possible to implement them without causing undue hardship. A transitional measure was suggested but with strict regard to economy:

"I apprehend it would not be practicable to carry them into force at once, without occasioning a great amount of misery and destitution such as Government could not have contemplated. A personal inspection of the Singapore Poor House and Hospital has satisfied me that the great majority of their inmates are superannuated, decrepit and infirm persons, totally incapable of earning the means of support by their labour, who if they were to be suddenly discharged from their present refuge must either perish in the roads or infest them as beggars with the doubtful chance of subsistence on casual charity.

I conceive that the spirit of the instructions of Government will be acted up to if care be taken to admit no new inmates to be fed and tended at the public charge excepting such as may be 'suffering from accidents or labouring under acute diseases'. Any of the existing inmates

who may be capable of labouring for their own support, might of course, be at once discharged, but of this class, there are, I fear, few if any in the Singapore Establishment.

As the charities placed on their new footing will be a burden entirely borne by Government, justice to the public finances require they should be conducted with all practicable economy. . . ." (S.S.R., W. 3., 1837).

The Governor issued his orders to the Resident Councillor at Singapore on 8th September 1837:

"Pork Tax to be abolished on 31st October 1837. The present inmates of the Poor House cannot be dismissed, but from that date, you will consider it your duty to see that no person be admitted save those suffering from accidents or acute disease." (S.S.R., U. 5., 1837).

Straightaway there were criticisms from the Press. It warned that the wealthy Chinese would do nothing to relieve the sufferings of their poor countrymen, and that the streets would soon be full of diseased beggars again. It also contended that the Chinese were hard-hearted and selfish and unless compelled by law would not lift a finger to help:

" . . . As the Poor House which the Farm has heretofore supported is to be done away with, and an hospital to be maintained for the treatment of acute cases only, it is supposed, we understand, that the wealthier classes of the Chinese inhabitants will combine to provide a lodging and the means of support to the numbers of their wretched countrymen, who will thus be cast out in the public streets loaded with ulcers and eating sores of every description, a form of disease to which they are known to be particularly liable. If such is the case, the disinterestedness and humanity of the Chinese must have been rated higher by Government than it is likely to be by those who know a little more about them from daily personal observations. . . . And as to entering into any union or combination for the attainment of any object not having at bottom a direct and obvious principle of self-interest, and requiring the smallest pecuniary contribution, the Government may rest assured that the Chinese are not to be depended. . . . It is in vain then to expect that any relief which is not compulsory will be afforded by the higher class of Chinese to such of their countrymen as disease and distress would make fit inmates for a Pauper Hospital, and all the benefit that is to arise from the abolition of a tax which we have already said neither has nor ought occasion a single murmur, will be the spectacle of objects combining filth,

dirt and disease in every street corner as we well remember to have been the case prior to the establishment of the present hospital." (S.F.P., 1837).

The Government and the paupers were not the only ones caught unawares by the sudden decision of the Governor-General. The Pork Farmers immediately petitioned the Governor that this sudden cancellation of their contract would result in financial loss. (S.S.R., Z. 11., 1837).

In November 1837, one month after the abolition of the Pork Farm, the Governor reported that there would be an increase in Government expenditure as there would be no decrease in the number of inmates in the Pauper Hospital in the near future and with no revenue from the Pork Tax to defray the expenses. He was also pessimistic about the Chinese maintaining their poor, and predicted that beggars discharged from the Poor House would eventually be arrested under the Vagrancy Act and thus again be supported at government expense, and ultimately the Government would not have effected any saving:

"From your own knowledge of the state of the inmates of the Singapore Infirmary, I feel assured you will agree with me that it is totally impossible to dismiss them. Their discharge would indeed be the immediate cause of the deaths of a vast majority, a result, of course, not in the contemplation of Government, nor do I see that we can ever hope to be relieved of the expense of their maintenance except by their deaths. Under these circumstances for some time to come, Government must be content to pay at that Station on account of the sick and infirm of the Settlement nearly as much as it did when the consumers of pork were taxed to meet the charge. . . . I think it due to myself to say that I cannot see the necessity for Government giving up so large a source of revenue, which has never been complained of and which independent of the immediate loss, will entail forever a heavy expense on these Stations. The Chinese and others will not maintain their own poor, and the consequence will be as there is now no hospital or other receptacle for them, that the most disgusting objects will shortly be found wandering about the streets, begging and exciting compassion by the exposure of their sufferings. In fact, in a state of vagrancy when the Magistrates will be compelled if not by duty but by feelings of humanity to commit them to jail under the Vagrancy Act. During their confinement, they must be maintained at the expense of the State and as most

of them will in all probability be afflicted with ulcers and other dreadful sores, it will be out of the question for Government to expect any work from them in return." (S.S.R., V. 7., 1837).

While the administrators were wrestling with the problems of finance and policy, the doctors were more concerned with the standard of medical care. The Senior Surgeon, Mr. Montgomerie, wrote to the Resident Councillor to say that it was not possible for Assistant Surgeon Oxley to run the Pauper Hospital with one Dresser and two Peons. There were 154 patients, most of them too ill even to help themselves. There were no cleaners and the patients had to cook for themselves.

"... representing the circumstances to the proper authorities, and procuring the needful assistance for keeping the Hospital in even a tolerable state of efficiency. . . . A total of 154 patients, most of them quite unable to assist themselves and none are possessed of sufficient strength to draw water for washing and cleaning the hospital. . . . Some persons were hitherto sent daily from the House of Correction for sweeping and cleaning the Hospital, but even these have been discontinued for some days, but they were however by no means adequate for the purpose, being heavily-chained and many of them with bad sores on their legs requiring medical attention themselves. The humanity of employing men under such circumstances need not be commented upon. I would further beg to draw your attention to the circumstance of the paupers being obliged to cook for themselves, and thus compelled to keep their own pots and cooking utensils which being placed under the bed places accumulate filth and renders it exceedingly difficult even with good assistance to preserve the Hospital wholesomely clean." (S.S.R., BB. 38., 1837).

Montgomerie recommended that ample cooking vessels be fitted in the kitchen sufficient to boil rice and other food for 80 Chinese, and the employment of cooks. This would remove the chief cause of filth and render the cleaning of the hospital a lighter operation, and he asked for three attendants "to be constantly employed in sweeping or assisting the infirm and on necessary occasions, with only a few additional hands to clean and wash the hospital." (S.S.R., BB. 38., 1837).

Like their modern counterparts, Senior Surgeon Montgomerie and Assistant Surgeon Oxley were considered unrealistic and impractical by the Administrators, and were rebuffed. And in August 1839, it was reported that "our Pauper Hospital has no attendants or conveniences. . . ." (S.S.R., R. 5., 1839).

The effects of the abolition of the Pork Farm were soon felt very acutely. The Grand Jury at the first Criminal Session of 1838 held in February presented:

"The Grand Jury regret to notice the great increase of late in the number of Chinese mendicants about the streets of the Town, owing to their being permitted to leave the Native Poor House and Infirmary maintained out of the proceeds of the Pork Farm which has been recently abolished, and beg to suggest that means be immediately taken to send them back to the Pauper Hospital, and to prevent their escape from it again in the diseased state in which many of them are now everywhere to be seen. . . ." (The beggars were discharged from the hospital. They did not escape.)

They had examined the accounts of the Pork Farm and found a balance of \$17,596.66. They had also consulted with "several of the principal Chinese inhabitants of the Settlement on the subject, who are of the opinion that the Pauper Hospital ought to be kept up, and who at the same time stated that no objection to the re-establishment of the Pork Farm existed on their part." The Grand Jury from their inquiries were certain

"that no hopes are to be entertained of any voluntary contribution among the Chinese for the support of the Institution or for otherwise affording relief to their destitute and diseased countrymen",

and they recommended the re-establishment of the Pork Farm. (S.F.P., 1838(a)).

The Editor of the Singapore Free Press commented:

"... We are glad to find the Grand Jury recommending the re-establishment of the Pork Farm, the absurdity of abolishing which we endeavoured to expose some months ago. We do not believe indeed that there exists two opinions in this Settlement upon the subject, and if their previous knowledge of the Chinese character was not sufficient to satisfy the Grand Jury that it was altogether hopeless to expect any spontaneous contribution from among the wealthier classes of Chinese of the place for the relief or support of their diseased poor, their inquiries on the subject must have brought full conviction to their minds that such is the case. In this respect, there does not and never did exist a more heartless race than the Chinese. Their selfish disregard of human suffering and misery is indeed perfectly brutal. . . ." (S.F.P., 1838(a)).

The Governor, the man on the spot, in March 1838 wrote to Bengal to say that he wanted it recorded that the Local Government had not recommended the abolition of the Pork Farm. He reported that "the misery that has been caused and which still continues to exist in consequence of the abolition of the only receptacle for the poorer classes of the inhabitants except when afflicted with acute diseases" was obvious and had not been exaggerated. He mentioned that there was a balance of \$17,380.44 to the credit of the Pork Farm in the Treasury and asked for permission to use this money which would last four years, for the paupers:

"... I would suggest therefore that this sum be expended as heretofore in which case the poor and indigent will be again provided for, for the next four years, during which perhaps either some new source of revenue may be discovered or the objections that now appear to exist against this particular one and others which have been suggested, be removed. . . ." (S.S.R., V. 7., 1838).

He mentioned that the Resident Councillor had written to him reporting that "it had been found impracticable to adhere implicitly to the injunctions expressed" in the Order of 8th September 1837 respecting the Poor House or Pauper Hospital. The Resident Councillor said that he had with much reluctance refused the earnest entreaties of several aged and infirm Chinese for admission into the Pauper Hospital, but "several individuals suffering from loathsome and invertebrate ulcers, I have been necessitated to admit to obviate the unseemly spectacle of these wretched objects begging in the public streets of a British Settlement." The Governor requested that some modification be made to the order "that no persons be admitted save those suffering from accidents or acute diseases."

He also stated that since the abolition of the Pork Farm, the price of pork had gone up instead of coming down as was expected, causing more hardship to the poor Chinese labourers.

In the issue of 29th March 1838, the Editor of the Singapore Free Press after describing the sufferings of the Chinese poor, condemned the Bengal Government:

"... In issuing the order to refuse admission to the Hospital to all who were not suffering under some distemper requiring immediate relief in order to preserve life, the Bengal Government has shown either the most heartless indifference to the consequences or great ignorance as to the general character and condition of the population of the Settlement, and we earnestly hope that the weight of every

opinion from the Straits which they can have either heard or seen upon the subject will suffice to remove the film which obscures their vision in the matter, open their eyes to the light and to the error they have committed in doing away with the Pork Farm." (S.F.P., 1838 (b)).

All the appeals were of no avail. Local opinion and advice were ignored. A letter dated 5th September 1838 from the Government of Bengal conveyed "the final orders of the Government in regard to the abolition of the Pork Tax and the reform of the Poor House Establishment." These instructed the Governor to inform his subordinates that "the orders whereby it is understood that the future admission of any persons not suffering from wounds or acute diseases was prohibited, are hence forward to be strictly complied with." (S.S.R., S. 5., 1838).

These final orders were accompanied by a rebuke refuting the reasons advanced for requesting modification of the Order. Regarding the destitute and diseased in the streets, the Governor-General's Secretary wrote:

"His Honour has no doubt that these two Towns (Singapore and Penang) contained more than their proper proportion of such objects, but he regards this as purely an argument against the existing Pauper Establishments, for he holds it for certain that it is in consequence of their existence that the number of these objects is so great. It is evident from what the local officers write that any person from any part of the Peninsula or Archipelago or even China, in a state of poverty, and above all, any person with a loathsome disease, has only to present himself to a Magistrate in the streets of Singapore or Penang in order to be provided for, perhaps for life. . . His Honour is not aware of any part of this great Empire in which a public provision is made even for the native poor. . . To support out of those general resources (i.e. the revenue) even the native poor of the British possessions in the Straits appears to His Honour a very objectionable system, but to support out of these funds all the poor foreigners. . . In no part of the world is the support of the destitute and the diseased the exclusive business of Government nor is revenue contributed for such purposes. . . On the argument that Government may perhaps still find itself obliged to support these people under another name by their being committed to prison as vagrants under a humane interpretation of the Vagrant Act, His Honour will only observe that he cannot anticipate that Magistrates will habitually send persons to prison

under commitment not warranted by the facts proved. Should such a practice arise you will not fail to bring it to notice. . . . If private charity shall fail and the increase of poor and incurably and loathsomely diseased persons shall become a material nuisance, that nuisance can only be abated at the expense of the people of the Settlements to whom alone its abatement will be advantageous. It cannot be abated at the expense either of the people of India or of the Chinese or any other single class in the Straits. . . ."

This was the state of affairs in 1839. There was an inadequately-staffed and poorly-equipped Pauper Infirmary for "acute cases", and numerous chronically-ill and destitute beggars and vagrants living and dying in the streets of the Town. The official view was that this was a problem for the people of Singapore to solve themselves, especially the Chinese. The European community however were of the opinion that the wealthy Chinese were indifferent to the sufferings of their countrymen.

Following on this, certain events led to the founding of Tan Tock Seng Hospital. These will be described in the next article in this series.

REFERENCES

Abbreviations used:

CHR. = Singapore Chronicle. Microfilm. National Library Holdings. Singapore.

S.F.P. = Singapore Free Press. Microfilm. National Library Holdings. Singapore.

S.S.R. = Straits Settlements Records. Microfilm. National Library Holdings. Singapore.

1. CHR. (a) 1.7.1830.
2. CHR. (b) 23.9.1830.
3. CHR. (a) 6.1.1831.
4. CHR. (b) 17.3.1831.
5. CHR. (c) 14.4.1831.
6. CHR. (a) 10.5.1832.
7. CHR. (b) 17.5.1832.
8. CHR. (a) 25.4.1833.
9. CHR. (b) 16.5.1833.
10. CHR. (a) 14.4.1834.
11. CHR. (b) 19.6.1834.
12. Lee, Y. K.: "The Coroner in early Singapore. (1819-1869)." *Malaya Law Review*. 14, 103, 1972.
13. Lee, Y. K.: "The General Hospital in early Singapore. (Part I) (1819-1829)." *Sing. Med. J.*, 14, 1973. (a).
14. Lee, Y. K.: "The Pauper Hospital in early Singapore. (Part I) (1819-1829)." *Sing. Med. J.*, 14, 1973. (b).
15. S.F.P., (a) 9.6.1836.
16. S.F.P., (b) 11.6.1836.
17. S.F.P., (c) 30.6.1836.
18. S.F.P., (d) 7.7.1836.
19. S.F.P., 21.9.1837.
20. S.F.P., (a) 22.2.1838.
21. S.F.P., (b) 29.3.1838.
22. S.S.R., A. 70., 1830.
23. S.S.R., Q. 2., 1833.
24. S.S.R., Q. 7., 1837.
25. S.S.R., R. 1., 1832.
26. S.S.R., R. 2., 1833.
27. S.S.R., R. 3., 1835.
28. S.S.R., R. 5., 1835.
29. S.S.R., S. 1., 1833.
30. S.S.R., S. 2., 1832.
31. S.S.R., S. 5., 1838.
32. S.S.R., U. 5., 1837.
33. S.S.R., V. 4., 1830.
34. S.S.R., V. 7., 1837.
35. S.S.R., V. 8., 1838.
36. S.S.R., W. 1., 1831.
37. S.S.R., W. 3., 1837.
38. S.S.R., Z. 7., 1832.
39. S.S.R., Z. 8., 1833.
40. S.S.R., Z. 9., 1835.
41. S.S.R., Z. 11., 1837.
42. S.S.R., AA. 7., 1835.
43. S.S.R., BB. 38., 1837.