

The Canadian Friend **Reached around the World** By Dana Mullen

On the evening of January 23, 1958 Vernon and I were stopped at a little railway station in northern Malaya. We had arrived there on the Thai train from Bangkok and had to wait to catch the Night Mail to Singapore. We were hungry, but since there was no restaurant, we resigned ourselves to dining on bananas and coffee at a Chinese food stall.

We sat at a small round table under the flaring light of a gas lamp. A stranger approached and asked if he could share the table with us. We learned that he was an Austrian anthropologist lecturing at the University of Bangkok. In turn, we told him that we were Canadian teacher-trainers in Sarawak, on the island of Borneo, working under the auspices of the Colombo Plan.

“Canadians,” he mused. “I know only one Canadian. His name is Murray Thomson. I knew him in Bangkok, but he’s left now. I heard that he has gone to work for the Quakers.”

Murray Thomson! I recognised that name, and I knew why I did. Just before leaving Sarawak for Bangkok, I had received the December, 1957 issue of *The Canadian Friend*. In it I had noticed a brief report on a seminar held at Friends House in Toronto on “Conscience and Service.” One of the speakers at the seminar had been Murray Thomson.

Not yet a Quaker myself, I was impressed. Surely, the Friends network reached across the world. I was stunned to think that, in a remote southeast Asian town, I would hear a complete stranger mention a name I had recently seen in the periodical of a small religious society. Moreover, I had not been reading that periodical very long, having just started to subscribe to it sometime during the previous two years when Vernon and I were teaching in an isolated Nishga village near the border of Alaska.

I would have been even more astonished if I could have seen into the future. After a few years Halifax Friends accepted me into membership, and later I moved to Ottawa. In December of 1977 Murray transferred his membership from Toronto Meeting

to Ottawa. It was a cold December when I met him there, but I was carried away in my mind to the humid heat of Prai when I recognised his name because I had read about him in *The Canadian Friend*. 🍷

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A Philosophic Footnote for ***The Canadian Friend*** By Vernon Mullen

In 1964, while I was studying philosophy at Dalhousie University in Halifax, I read an article by Gurdial Mallik in *The Canadian Friend* (October – November 1963). In it, he stated the case for being both a Hindu and a Quaker at the same time. I was impressed.

I was then writing my MA thesis, entitled “Radhakrishnan’s Idea of the Divine in Man.” In his time (mid-20th century), Radhakrishnan was considered to be Plato’s ideal philosopher-statesman: as philosopher he was known as the greatest exponent of Eastern philosophy to the West and vice versa; as statesman he was independent India’s second president and at one time its ambassador in Moscow.

I was struck by Radhakrishnan’s teaching, as an Advaita Vedantist, that the Divine is present in varying degrees in the whole universe, from earth and stones, in plants and animals to the highest level in humans. People have to go through a process of self-realisation to approach an understanding of the Divine presence in their lives.

Thus the Quaker view of “that of God” in everybody appealed to Mallik as a Hindu and to me as a student of Hindu philosophy. The reference to his article in *The Canadian Friend* got a footnote in my successful thesis. 🍷

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