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1948

DIVERSION IN MALAYA

*An incidental account of
five years' residence in the
Federated Malay States
1937-1942*

by
ANTHONY HILL



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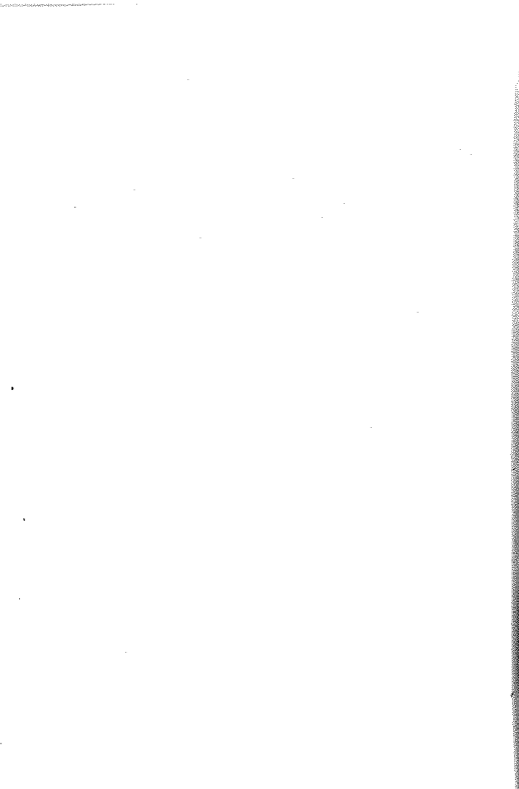
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13 SEP 1972

Perustokos Nopara

To

all my pre-war friends, European
and non-European, who shared
with me those crowded five years
of life and who through no fault
of their own became prisoners-
of-war in Japanese hands



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With Glossary and Index

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the Department of Public Relations, Malayan Union.*

MALAYA

Scale 60 Miles to an Inch



AUTHOR'S NOTE

A rich and prosperous country, Malaya has never had occasion to publicise herself in the eyes of the world, and few men today know anything about Britain's wealthiest colony beyond the fact that she supplied the world with tin and rubber. An old colony situated far from the hub of the Empire, she has remained in her isolation a mere geographical expression on the map to most people, an unimpressive appendage on the south-east corner of Asia. Until recently, she was poorly represented at imperial exhibitions and other attempts at home to promote interest in the colonies, and was therefore constantly misrepresented in the public mind. It was usual to hear people speak of the country of 'Malay', and place names like Penang, Ipoh (pronounced by the BBC news commentator to rhyme with 'Hypo') and Kuala Lumpur were all but unknown until the spotlight of war was so invidiously thrown upon her in her agony. Producers of travelogue and documentary 'shorts' have given the impression that Singapore was all that mattered and that the rest of the country, if in fact they mentioned its existence, was typified by it.

Commercially and strategically Singapore has had an independent existence and an importance infinitely greater than that of the rest of the country; but geographically it is a small island which, though it has played a large part in the commercial development of the peninsula, has had no share in its cultural history. It is to this aspect of Malaya, with its four million Malays, Chinese and Indians each with their own conflicting and yet oddly harmonising aspirations, that we must turn for a true picture of the country as a whole.

The death throes of Singapore were watched by most of the world from a safe distance. Conclusions were drawn, not unnaturally, which are unfavourable to the existing regime in Malaya. In a débâcle of such a magnitude it is only reasonable to look for a scapegoat, and it is always easiest to locate the blame on the men on the spot. At the time, anyhow, they could not answer back.

I am not attempting to prove that any of these conclusions were necessarily wrong, or to rally to the unqualified support of men for some of whose methods I personally had no use at all. Churchill described the loss of Malaya as the greatest disaster in the whole of British military history. Rightly. Both before

and during the campaign mistakes were made which ought never to have been made. But I am suggesting that it is unsafe to draw too definite conclusions when most of the facts, the real facts about life in the East, have not yet been properly appreciated.

This is not a war book. It is not on the one hand an illuminating exposé of much scandal in high places or on the other a spirited defence of incompetence. It is not even an attempt to show the whole of Malaya in its true contemporary perspective, for I have lived and worked in the country for only seven years and such a task would be quite beyond me. The book is rather a collection of incidents, most of them trivial enough in themselves, woven loosely into the texture of an autobiography covering five years, from 1937 to 1942. I have no particular axe to grind. In parts it may be found controversial, but only, I hope, on minor points. If it succeeds in arousing any interest at all in a little known part of the world it will have served its purpose, if indeed I had any purpose in writing it beyond filling in two months of enforced and tedious idleness in the life of a part time soldier and a whole time schoolmaster. Readers who reach the last chapter may discover an additional and quite illogical reason for this book, my good fortune in being alive to write anything at all.

I am very grateful to Mr. M. R. Holgate, Mr. A. W. Frisby, Mr. E. H. S. Bretherton and Mr. L. D. Whitfield members of the Malayan Union Education Department for reading the text and offering useful suggestions for its correction; above all, my best thanks go to Mr. J. N. Davies for the valuable help he gave me in recasting the book when we were together in East Africa. My thanks are also due to the Director of Public Relations, Malayan Union, for permission to use the photographs which illustrate this book.

The chapters covering the campaign in Malaya were first published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1944. The rest of the book is now presented for the first time.

ANTHONY HILL

Kuala Trengganu,
MALAYA.

CHAPTER I

ARRIVAL IN MALAYA

THE most graphic account I have read of the voyage from London to the Far East is to be found in Bruce Lockhart's 'Return To Malaya', in which he describes the long journey through the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean with delightful touches of historical and personal detail. But such a story, were I able to write it, would be out of place here. There were three of us, appointed by the Colonial Office to the Malayan Education Department, who had just finished a year's course at the Institute of Education and came out together in August, 1937.

We duly reached Penang during the last week in August. Though I have never been stationed at Penang I have been there many times since for a week-end holiday by the sea. Scenically it has always appeared to me each time I visited it as the whole of Malaya in miniature. The strange contrasts of line and colour, the legacy of western ways of living are thrown up boldly, at times half-apologetically, in relief against the subtle, disordered harmony of native life.

Down at the docks where we berthed there is always the bustle and turmoil of a seaport town. Scores of Chinese and Tamil labourers chatter at the tops of their voices as they work in the boiling sun. Chinese fishing boats, great thick wooden vessels about thirty feet long with one big brown patched sail in the middle, lay at anchor in the roads. The Chinese paint a large eye on the bows so that the boat may see her way through storms at sea. Before the war the Eastern Smelting Co. used to ship much of its tin from Penang to other parts of the world, and it was usual to see large ingots of metal stacked ready for loading on the quayside.

The name 'Penang' is not, as people sometimes think, borrowed from Chinese sources. Some place names in Malaya, like Taiping, Gopeng, and Yong Peng, which you will be hearing about later, are of Chinese origin. But the Malay name of the island is 'pulau pinang', with the accent on the first syllable, which means 'the island of Areca nuts', though I have not noticed that the areca palm is more common in Penang than anywhere else on the coastal regions of Malaya. If you take a journey using the excellent fifty-mile motor road round

the island you can see all that is typical of tropical vegetation throughout Malaya. You will pass through rubber estates, coconut plantations, sugar and sago palms and the small trunkless 'nipah' palm which grows in colonies in swampy ground and whose leaves are used by Malays for making a particular kind of thatch for roofing, called 'atap'. Up-country the Malays use the bertam for atap; it is stiffer and more durable than nipah leaves.

We reached Singapore the following morning, and shortly after landing I was being interviewed by Mr. Alexander Keir, Acting Director of Education, who had the reputation of being a man of shrewdness and understanding. He told me that I should be working for about four months in Victoria School, a large secondary school in Singapore, after which I would be sent up to Ipoh where I would be starting a science department in the local government school, this being the job for which I was originally recruited in England. "Most people", he said, "expect me to hand them out some advice when they first come out. I don't propose to give you any... except this, don't listen to half the advice you hear. You will hear quite enough of it, and most of it is wrong. This is a country where each man works out his own salvation, or doesn't as the case may be". I met Mr. Keir only once again after leaving Singapore, just before war broke out in 1939. He retired shortly afterwards and went to Borneo where he became an internee in the hands of the Japanese.

CHAPTER II

MALAYA—PAST

THE earliest peoples whose descendants are still living in Malaya are the Semang and the Sakai. These at the present time are not more than a few thousand strong, and live in the hills and the jungle far away from the highways of civilised life, supposedly driven there by the impact of superior Malay culture. Linguistically and culturally they have affinities with the inhabitants of Indo-China and northern Thailand. They play no part in the economy of Malaya in modern times. I visited many Sakai jungle settlements and learnt something of the life they lead: more of them later.

The *Sejarah Melayu*, a few shorter texts mostly of Portuguese and Dutch origin and some Chinese records supply all the written information of early happenings in Malaya.

The first settlers in Singapore (then known as *Temasek*) came, it is believed, from Palembang in southern Sumatra. The date of arrival is not known but in the fourteenth century the settlement was sacked by the powerful Javanese kingdom of Majapahit. A few hundred survivors made their way up the west coast to Malacca, and there was ushered in a period of great material prosperity, the power of the sultans spreading far and wide. They established suzerainty over most of the Malay Peninsula and parts of Sumatra. Arab and Indian traders settled in Malacca and converted the people there to the Mohammedan faith. The Portuguese, after one failure, landed a force under Alfonso d'Albuquerque and took possession of the town in 1511. But they lost their sea power and were overcome by the Dutch a hundred and fifty years later. Ruins of the old Portuguese fort and the city battlements are still to be seen in Malacca.

South of the town of Malacca there is a colony of the descendants of these Portuguese, numbering, I believe, little more than a thousand in all. They are dark brown, but with unmistakably European facial features. Some Portuguese naval officers came to Malacca a few years ago and talked to these men. The officers found that they could understand with difficulty what the men said, but they could not make themselves understood. Apparently these Portuguese descendants spoke a kind of mediæval Portuguese. I had a few words with their

chief when I was in Malacca in 1939. We spoke Malay and he mentioned some interesting points in answer to my questions. They were racially an isolated and intermarried group. There had been very little inter-racial marriage between themselves and the Malays for many generations (though presumably there was much in the days when the Portuguese held Malacca). When I asked him whether any of them were ever white-skinned or at any rate lighter in colour than the few I saw he said no, never. I am not a geneticist but this point seems to be very interesting. They were all of white ancestry, and if they are a more or less pure strain of half-castes and have been so for some time you would expect, I believe, that there would sometimes be reversions to original type amongst them; or at least that there would be noticeable variations in depth of colour from one individual to another. If this is to be expected the uniformity of their colour might be mainly or partly due to environment. I know of no other case in the world where men of white stock have lived for five hundred years in the tropics, but if there is anything in this idea it is an interesting observation on racial distinction by colour and on the whole question of colour bar.

The Dutch established trading centres at Malacca and other places on the West coast, and built a number of forts. The best known of these forts is on the island of Pangkor, off the coast of Perak. It has four massive walls built of red brick. It is gradually falling down, and it became the duty of the Public Works Department to preserve this ancient building from collapsing further. This was done by propping it up on the outside with large wooden buttresses.

A Malay people of whose antecedents we should like to know more than we do inhabits the land East and North of Malacca. This territory now forms one State known as Negri Sembilan (Malay: 'The Nine States'), but originally the nine states were all separate, each controlled by a prince with quasi-royal powers and his faithful band of followers. We are not so much concerned with petty feuds and vendettas which flared up now and then into open warfare. We are interested in their laws and customs, and above all in the fact that in the election of their chiefs by popular vote and in the general organization of their society the Minangkabau Malays followed a democratic ideal to an extent unknown elsewhere in the Peninsula where the Sultans and their royal courts often exerted over the 'raayat', the common people, a tyranny far more despotic than that of any feudal overlord of mediæval European history. They came from Minangkabau in Sumatra in the seventeenth century,

comparatively late in the true colonisation period of the peninsula. They brought with them a rigid set of laws and customs based on a matrilinear system of descent and inheritance, which are preserved almost without change up to the present time. This system is found nowhere else in Malaya. The people were divided into 'suku', perhaps somewhat similar to the clans of Scotland, each with its own titular head whose word was law to them. The laws governing marriage, payment of tithe and inheritance of property were detailed and comprehensive, and bound the people together with strong feelings of kinship. This is the nearest approach in Malaya to tribalism in the sense in which the African anthropologist uses the word. Even to-day the Minangkabau people of Negri Sembilan are more conservative and suspicious of interference from outside than are Malays in other parts of the peninsula. This does not mean that they are more backward. In strength of character they are a pleasant contrast with the urbanised Malays in the big commercial centres of Perak and Selangor.

The Dutch had driven the Portuguese out of Malacca in 1641. They established it as a military strong-point but its value as a trading centre steadily declined in their hands, although there was a revival of commercial activity there when they made it the headquarters to which all the produce of their trading stations in Malaya was sent for shipment to Europe. The British occupied Malacca in 1795, nine years after the occupation of Penang. But the value of Malacca as an eastern port of call fell to nothing with the rise of Penang and of Singapore. The mouth of the Malacca river has silted up and when I was there the only boats making use of its harbour were those of the West Coast fishing fleet, while the Straits Steamship Company's small cargo boats used occasionally to come close in to load rubber. Naval ships still make courtesy calls in Malacca, lying in the roads offshore.

On top of the hill beside the Residency you can still see the ruined Portuguese church of Our Lady of the Annunciation. The eighteenth century Dutch houses in Fort Terrace, some reputed on excellent authority to be haunted, are still inhabited. The old *Staadhuis* houses government offices. There is a large and moderately influential Eurasian community in Malacca; elsewhere they play little part in the political life of Malaya. With its historical associations Malacca is the Canterbury of Malaya, and unless you are very insensitive to atmosphere you can feel it looking back on itself in nostalgic memory of past glory. The Europeans used to call it 'Sleepy Hollow'.

The most famous name in the whole history of British ascendancy in Malaya is that of Sir Stamford Raffles. Like Francis Light he became an employee of the East India Company, and at the age of twenty-four he was sent out to the Penang establishment. Two years later he visited Calcutta where he greatly impressed the Governor-General with his knowledge and understanding of the Malays. He was in fact the first white man in Malaya to make a serious study of the native people, their language, which he spoke very well, and their customs. In 1807 the Governor-General appointed him as his agent in the Eastern Seas, and he went to Malacca and worked for four years while Colonel Farquhar was the British Resident.

The period of which I am speaking, the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, was one of intense and bitter rivalry between the Dutch East India Company and its British opponent. Faced with the threat of British encroachment on its own happy hunting grounds in the island archipelago the Dutch East India Company maintained an aggressively exclusive policy. The trade in spices and tropical fruits was very valuable. The British company in India had had its eyes tardily opened to the valuable produce East of Penang awaiting a market, and was trying to expand its activities in Malaya, Sumatra and Java. In 1811 Lord Minto chose Malacca as a rendezvous for his expedition to Java. He took Raffles with him and after its conquest appointed him Lieutenant-Governor of Java. Home in England for a holiday five years later Raffles fell foul of authority suspicious of his ambitions. He returned to the East as Lieutenant-Governor of Bencoolen, on the West coast of Sumatra, which had been a small British station for the pepper trade since the end of the seventeenth century. Malacca was returned to the Dutch by the Treaty of Vienna in 1815, but by the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 it was restored to the British.

Meanwhile Raffles was urging the establishment of a station South of Malacca. The actual choice of the island of Singapore may have been made by Colonel Farquhar but Raffles it was who first realised its unique position as a place for an entrepôt port for the trade between Europe and the Far East, and for exporting the produce of Malaya. Raffles concluded a treaty with the Sultan of Johore, the ramifications of which need not concern us here, and the island was ceded to the British. Raffles founded and developed Singapore in the face of great opposition from the British Government and from the East India Company. They prevaricated and tried to upset his plans at every turn, urging that it should be handed over to the Dutch. In the end

after much argument Raffles had his way, and he was to live to see the firm establishment of a great township, exceeding in promise even his most ambitious dreams. Raffles was as far-sighted as Cecil Rhodes. If he had been given a free hand in the Far East the whole of the East Indies might have been ours. While as imperialists we may not really regret this loss, what a vast difference it would have made to twentieth century war strategy! Certain it is that without Raffles we would never have had Singapore.

No account of the history of Raffles' time would be complete without mention being made of a remarkable Malay man, Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir. Born and educated in Malacca he became the scribe and friend of Raffles when he was there. He went with Colonel Farquhar and Raffles to Singapore, and lived there with Raffles and his wife until they left for England in 1824, after which he returned to Malacca. He wrote an autobiography which covered the whole period of his association with Raffles in Malacca and in Singapore. He called it *Hikayat Abdullah*. His style is picturesque and to our ideas precocious. Objection has been taken to his Malay by the purists, and at times it does bear unmistakable signs of anglicisation. Abdullah was the confidant of many Europeans in Singapore, and taught himself to speak English. His mode of writing is quite unlike that of 'Sejarah Melayu', although the Malay language has changed very little in the last five hundred years. But the value of his work lies in the intimate picture it reveals of life in the early British Settlements of Malacca and Singapore, and in the lavish amount of personal detail which accompanies it. He describes his early childhood and life at the Koran school, with much detail and drawings of the instruments used for inflicting punishment on bad boys! Raffles and his wife made a great impression on Abdullah, who gives a very full account of Raffles' appearance, habits and character. He describes Raffles as of medium height, with a broad waist and a straight nose: cheerful and smiling, with a kind word for everyone: generous to the poor: industrious, always reading or writing, and a clever talker.

Abdullah mentions the negotiations which went on between the English and the Chinese towkays for the purchase of a suitable site for a church in Malacca. He relates how he was told of the advent of faster ships moving by the power of steam and how he tried unsuccessfully to explain all this to his less enlightened Malay brethren. He makes a great story of the arrival of Lord Minto's expedition in Malacca, the precision with which the men presented arms and the noise of the guns

firing the salute. He describes the blowing up of the Dutch fortress under Colonel Farquhar's orders and the big impression it made on the local population; he philosophises on the impermanence of created things 'yang ada diudakkan, dan yang tidak di-adakan' ('that which is brought to nought, and that which is not comes into being').

Abdullah gives us an intimate inside story of life in Singapore during its early developmental history under Raffles. How Raffles laid down the positions of all the streets and gave them all names, a most odd idea to Malays of that period. How he gave lessons in the Malay language to some of the English merchants, and how they spoke the most dreadful 'bazaar' Malay as used by the Chinese and Indian traders and were not really interested in the study of the language. Even in my time nine out of every ten Europeans spoke only 'bazaar' Malay, and unfortunately, too, there has grown up in recent years in the big towns a number of Malays who speak nothing else even among themselves.

Abdullah tells of the preparations made by Sir Stamford and Lady Raffles for leaving to return home to England. Large numbers of boxes and packing-cases were loaded on board the 'Fame'; some contained his books and manuscripts and letters which he had collected from all over Malaya, others held his collections of butterflies and beetles, for Raffles in addition to being a born administrator was also a good naturalist. Abdullah wept bitterly at their departure and begged to be taken with them. Shortly after they left Singapore the 'Fame' caught fire and all their collected possessions were destroyed, the result, it is often claimed, of deliberate sabotage. Had we access to all the Malay documents which Raffles took out of Singapore with him we should know much more of Malayan history than we do.

After the liquidation of the East India Company the three settlements remained under the India Office until 1867, when they became a Crown Colony under the Colonial Office who appointed the Governor.

At this time few of the residents in the Straits Settlements took any interest in the hinterland of Malaya, although they knew of its rich tin ore deposits. Government offered them no encouragement in its development, taking the line that if settlers attracted by the prospect of gain traded in these parts they must accept the risks they ran. But the Chinese had been there for generations and had become numerous and powerful in the rich tin-mining area of Larut in Perak. Violent quarrelling broke out between their different societies, and, armed with

guns and ammunition, they terrorised the countryside. Piracy broke out in the Straits of Malacca and a British boat was attacked near Penang. Disorder in Perak was aggravated by a dispute over the succession to the throne for which there were three rival claimants. The Government reluctantly sent a small punitive expedition which soon restored law and order. The Chinese went back to their mines, their weapons were removed and stockades destroyed. At the Treaty of Pangkor in 1874 the British recognised the man whose claims they considered best as the rightful Sultan of Perak in return for his acceptance of a British Resident to advise him in all matters except those touching Malay religion and custom. This proviso is important.

Similar treaties were concluded with other states. But if the Government thought that all troubles were now at an end it was mistaken. They were just beginning. The Dato Manteri of Larut, who had wielded almost dictatorial powers in Larut and had had a great game playing off one Chinese society against another, found his wings clipped. The new Sultan had no love for his British Adviser, Mr. Birch, or for the Dato either. Open rebellion flared up when Birch tried to enforce the collection of land revenue to which the Sultan had reluctantly agreed. Birch knew no Malay and had to act through the medium of an unreliable Asiatic interpreter. He undoubtedly acted hastily and without discretion. He was stabbed to death while he was having his bath, while his men were billing notices in Pasir Salak, a village on the Perak River.

A protracted and costly campaign was conducted in the jungle until all the assassins either had been found or had given themselves up. They were tried in Singapore and those actually responsible for the killing were executed. The Sultan and the Dato, both of whom were involved as accessories to the murder, were banished to the Seychelles. This does not seem too hard a verdict since, although there was some provocation, they had murdered a man sent to them at their own express wish and they just did not believe in the possibility of retribution coming to them until they were made to see it for themselves. Trouble was brewing in other states, but things did not reach the serious pass they did in Perak. As has so often happened in British colonial history in other parts of the world these troubles were a prelude to a period of order, peace and great prosperity under an administration wise in its day. Able men like Sir Hugh Low in Perak, Sir Frank Swettenham in Selangor, and Sir Hugh Clifford later in Pahang, carried out their duties with sympathy and understanding towards Malay opinion. Swettenham was

a member of the expedition to round up Birch's assailants, and prosecuted at their trial. He and Clifford both became Governors in Singapore, the two most outstanding Governors that Malaya has had.

In 1896 an event of major political importance occurred when the four States of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang were formed into a federation known as the Federated Malay States. Credit for the inception of the scheme goes to Sir Frank Swettenham, who submitted proposals for a federation of States to the Colonial Office while he was for a short while British Resident in Perak. On its acceptance he obtained the full consent of the Sultans and the British Residents of those States. The idea was that the material and financial resources of all four States should be to some extent pooled. The Scheme greatly facilitated the collection of revenue through a unified system of customs and excise dues. It made easy the building of roads and railways the proportionate value of which to each State it would be difficult to assess. So far from reducing the importance of the Sultans it made them stronger, for they formed a corporate body whose official views carried much weight.

It must not be forgotten that the Malay States were not in the true sense of the word Protectorates (*e.g.* like Nigeria). They were Protected States, and the British authorities although they handled finance generally bound themselves not to interfere in matters connected with Malay law and custom. This proviso is of wide application, affecting such things as observation of the annual Mohammedan festivals and other holidays and the proper following of custom during the Malay fasting month of Ramathan, the collection of zakat and fitrah (tithes paid to the mosque), and purely secular matters like dress. A Malay's dress must cover his knees, and though this rule was relaxed when many Malays started wearing European dress there was a great outcry when the Malay police were first put into shorts!

CHAPTER III

MALAYA—PRESENT

I HAVE now traced a short outline of Malayan history, from ancient times through the difficult and factious times of the nineteenth century up to the peace and calm of the last fifty years before the outbreak of the Pacific War. Health and educational services, in the towns at least, were good. The great bulk of the population were contented and prosperous in their way. They felt they were getting a square deal, and there was hardly any dissension amongst them. The European had a job of work to do and in general, unless the climate beat him, he settled down to it quietly and efficiently. This sense of orderliness and security bred an attitude of mind which turned out to be a disastrous illusion. There was the general feeling that this was the golden age towards which all other ages had been striving ; that Malaya, cleansed, as it were, of its leprosy, had reached its promised millennium. The future was seen only as an indefinite continuation of the present. This complacency proved fatal when, with war obviously approaching, an all-out national effort was called for. Lone voices cried out occasionally in the wilderness. Tentative leads for action were made from time to time, but most of us ignored them. We were not aware that we ourselves were helping to make history. Not only were the 'good old pioneering days' over, but the generation which mourned their loss had mostly gone home on retirement. Let it not be supposed that there was lack of enterprise or initiative. There was plenty. But it was generally frittered away on trifles and not on the instrumentation of a progressive colonial policy.

I think we were better off in the Education Department than the men in the more technical departments who in the constant struggle for efficiency and yet more efficiency in their own particular jobs did not seem to see their work as part of the general scheme of things. It is not difficult to see how education is related to the needs of the whole community, and we had men like Mr. H. R. Cheeseman and many others at the head of the Education Department who did clearly foresee future developments. However, I am not claiming any special credit for my own department, for those working in it tend towards a broad rather than a specialist outlook. We all needed to know

more about general colonial policy, to have a clearer picture of the end in view, and of how our work was being directed towards that end.

Kuala Lumpur contains a number of advisory and research institutions like the Institute of Medical Research and the Forestry Research Station at Kepong. The I.M.R. does research into all kinds of tropical diseases, their prevention and cure. I spent a most instructive two days at the Institute before the war and met Dr. Lewthwaite who has been there for many years doing research into Japanese river fever. He was fortunate enough to get out of the country during the war, and reached Australia with all his specimens. Happy is the man who can carry his life's work about with him in a test-tube ! Mr. Desch of the Forestry Research Station, an expert wood technologist, was not so lucky. He had written a book on Malayan woods, the product of six years' hard work, which was in the press when the invasion started. The publishers left it in Kuala Lumpur.

I cannot give you exact figures for the population of Malaya. The total is something over five millions. Malays, Chinese and Indians make up ninety-eight per cent of the population. Up to the outbreak of war there was a small community of Japanese scattered over all parts of the country. They were mostly small traders owning their own businesses such as hairdressing saloons, photographers and cheap goods stores. As late as 1936 the official photographer to the Naval Base in Singapore was a Japanese. And there is a story of a big-shot Japanese admiral who called at Penang wearing his resplendent uniform with medals like Goering's. He was received officially with all the respect due to his rank. Before leaving he visited a small shop owned by a Japanese barber in one of the back streets of the town and prostrated himself humbly before the barber. The barber was apparently an even bigger shot in the Japanese Navy. After the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937 the Chinese imposed a trade boycott on all Japanese-owned shops ; any Chinese attempting to trade with the Japs had his shop promptly tarred by his infuriated compatriots, and the Japs lost eighty per cent of their business. Some people wondered naively how they managed to carry on.

The number of European residents in peace-time was about twenty-five thousand, of whom some twelve thousand lived in Singapore. This does not include the permanent military garrisons in Singapore. My first impression of Malaya was that it was run entirely by the Irish and the Scots, with a few Welshmen to help things along ; but this proved an exaggera-

tion. There was a fair-sized Dutch community in Singapore with its own social club. One of the biggest estates in the country, Jendarata Estate, was Danish. It had its own landing ground and planes for the use of its staff; when a new assistant came out the first thing he had to do was to learn to fly. The Tekka mines in Perak were French-owned.

It is wrong to think of the Chinese as a racially homogeneous group. China is no more one race than Europe. The speech of a Chinese from Peking would be as unintelligible to one from Hainan as, say, Russian would be to us; while neither of them would understand the language spoken in Shanghai. It is more than a difference of dialect or patois, although the languages are commonly spoken of as dialects. Many educated Chinese can speak more than one dialect. One of the Post Office clerks in Ipoh told me he could speak four different dialects of Chinese (including Mandarin) as well as Malay, Tamil, Malayalam, and very good English. The Chinese in Ipoh are mainly Cantonese, as they are in most parts of the F.M.S., although there is a large Hokkien community in Taiping. Hokkiens predominate in Singapore, and there are large sections of Khch, Hylam and other Chinese in the country.

My Chinese friends used to tell me that they could generally tell from a man's face and appearance what Chinese race he belonged to; though they admitted that it was often difficult. Whatever differences there are must be small. I could never tell the different races apart. One didn't normally need to do so for one was dealing for the most part with people who spoke Malay or English, and in any case I can't speak a word of any Chinese dialect. Hokkien is a nasal dialect, and one could tell a Hokkien from the fact that he spoke English and Malay with a pronounced nasal twang, though no more so than many Englishmen.

The written language is an entirely different matter. Chinese characters can be understood and read by any Chinese who has learnt them, whatever dialect of Chinese he speaks. This seen paradox is due to the fact that the written language is not really read but rather translated. Each character is a pictogram representing an idea or more precisely a word. A string of such pictograms conveys a phrase or sentence with a certain meaning which the Chinese expresses in his own language. I tested this out once with some senior Chinese boys in my school. I got four Cantonese and four Hokkiens, and to one boy in each group I gave a short written sentence in English. They both wrote it down and on comparison I found that the characters they had written were identical (although,

remember, they spoke different languages). They then showed what they had written to each of the other three members of their group. The three Cantonese boys 'read' what they had seen to me in Chinese. I listened carefully and wrote down what each said in phonetics. The three results were similar in sound, though none was exactly the same as any other. I ignored the tones. The Hokkien results were again similar to one another, though quite different from the Cantonese. It is a fact that not more than one Chinese in five can read or write his own language in Malaya.

Chinese is an intensely difficult language for the foreigner to learn. Police probationers and Chinese Protectorate personnel did learn Chinese as part of their official duty. They used to be sent to China for three years to learn one dialect, and even at the end of that period they were not more than passably good. The official *lingua franca* of the country is Malay, a delightful sounding language and very easy to learn. The Malay word for composition is 'karangan', a word which is also used of the stringing together of beads. There is hardly any grammar and one can make oneself understood by just stringing a lot of words together in any logical order. All unnecessary words are omitted. I have already mentioned 'bazaar' Malay, which is spoken by most Europeans and Chinese in the country. It is readily understood by the Malay who employs it when speaking to the 'tuan', though you never hear Malays speaking it to one another. In proper Malay there is quite a lot of complicated idiom, especially in writing, though it is used also in good spoken Malay. Certain oblique forms of expression are in great favour, while others are hardly ever used by Malays except when speaking to Europeans. To give a very simple example, the sentence "What is this used for?" can be translated literally into Malay and would be understood. But a village Malay would be more likely to say "Ina na' bwa' apa?" which is short for "Ini hendak buat apa?" and means literally "This want do what?"

In the palmy days of Malacca under the Malay Sultans many Arabs and Indian Moslems settled there and traded with the local people. In addition to converting the Malays to Islam they brought with them their Arabic orthography and Malay for the first time became a written language. It also absorbed a large number of Arabic words. Malay is still written in Arabic script, called Jawi, although a few of the letters used are not found in Arabic. Actually the phonetics of Malay is entirely different from that of Arabic and the Arabic orthography does not fit the language at all well. There are only three

vowels to represent some seven or eight different vowel sounds in Malay.

Roman script has now come into use. It is taught along with Jawi in all Malay vernacular schools, and is used in most parts of the country now in all official and business correspondence. It has been named by Sir Richard Winstedt 'Rumi'. But Jawi is still used for correspondence in Kedah and Johore and on the East coast. It is not difficult to read once you get used to it. It is written from right to left, many vowels are omitted following certain not quite definite rules, and some letters are distinguished from one another only by having dots above or below them. A symbol like the small Roman 'u', for example, can represent six different Arabic letters according to whether it has one, two, or three dots, and whether these dots are above or below it. In rapid writing these dots often lost their individuality in a brisk flourish of the pen, and writers of manuscripts were in the habit of adding extra flourishes *ad lib* in the gaps between the letters to lend greater artistic merit.

Four-fifths of Malaya is covered with thick jungle. I won't make the mistake of calling it impenetrable. The Japanese proved otherwise, and we all knew that provided you took suitable equipment and were prepared to go slowly, moving through the jungle was not really difficult. There are nominally ferocious denizens like tigers, panthers and pythons but you hardly ever see them. I have spoken to Malayan Game Officers who have worked for fifteen years in the jungle and have never seen a tiger. I also met in the Singapore Club a man and his wife visiting Malaya who had motored through the country from Penang. They had seen two tigers walk across the road in front of their car on the Taiping Pass. This was confirmed by the Malay driver. But it is a most unusual occurrence. I once saw the fresh tracks of a seladang, a species of wild buffalo and reputed to be the most dangerous animal in the Malayan jungle, and one look was enough to set my Sakai porters running back to the river the way we had come.

Before roads were built in Malaya the only highways were the rivers, and Malay villages clustered along the banks. The inhabitants seldom moved into the jungle far from the rivers, and very few Malays know the jungle well.

Government officials whose job it was to inspect these villages all had their motor launches. From the Malay point of view this had one great advantage. It made a surprise visit impossible. In Malaya there is no such thing as bush telegraphy, but news nevertheless travels faster than the launch and there was plenty of time to pass the word up the line so

that all could be in readiness for receiving the big white chief. One friend of mine, wishing to overcome this difficulty and find out what really did go on in a village when the tuan was not expected, bicycled thirty miles along a jungle path, coming into the village by the back door. However all was well for he had been spotted by a vigilant young Malay who jumped on his bicycle, rushed off at top speed and blew the alarm.

Malayan soil is geologically 'old'. Laterite under conditions of high temperature and moisture undergoes very rapid chemical weathering, producing a boggy, unproductive clay. The soil is not usually deficient in minerals, except nitrates, but there is very little humus because it decays rapidly at these high temperatures. There is seldom any difference in colour between the topsoil and the subsoil. One advantage of the rubber tree is that it takes very little out of the soil, and will go on growing for years on the same soil without impoverishing it too much. But most vegetable crops require a rich soil. The industrious Chinese clear hillsides and plant tapioca. After a year or two the soil, mulcted of much of its essential plant-food contents, will no longer support the crop. The ground is abandoned and the process repeated somewhere else. The bare slopes are denuded of topsoil by rain, and may remain unproductive for a hundred years. Attempts to reduce the rate of soil wash on rubber estates are made by terracing and silt-pitting; but soil erosion, which has caused such havoc in parts of tropical Africa, will make its consequences felt in Malaya before very long.

It has been said that in the Far East the British make the best roads and the Dutch build the best bridges. Certainly the roads in Malaya are very fine, though in parts they twist and wind rather too much for the liking of the modern motorist with his high-powered car. Apparently it is easier to take a road round a small bluff or re-entrant than to go up over one or to make a cutting or embankment. The result is that roads take a tortuous path through the slightly undulating country common in the plains of the West coast, following faithfully the contour lines. One theory is that in the early days of road-building the Chinese contractors were paid a fixed rate per mile of road, and that there was therefore no inducement for them to build roads unnecessarily straight! Another less improbable view is that the builders had in mind bullock-carts, which can only manage a gentle gradient.

At the time of the Japanese invasion the Public Works Department had already straightened out many sections of the main road, and the work was still in progress. A fifteen-mile by-pass round Taiping was completed in 1939. It was built

over a swamp and after six months of public use the foundations had subsided in places, creating a giant switchback as exciting for motorists as anything at Wembley Exhibition. It also had the distinction of passing through 'the world's worst rubber estate'. This was an old estate in which the top soil had been entirely washed away by erosion. Enormous aerial roots stood five feet high out of the ground, trees leaned drunkenly against each other forming a picture rather like Disney's forest in which Snow White escaped from the wicked godmother.

Topographical surveys covering almost the whole country have been made, but it is unfortunate that the Survey Department has never had sufficient men to keep its topo maps really up-to-date. Minor roads passing over tin-bearing land change their positions from year to year. The Hong Fatt mine near Kuala Lumpur, the biggest open-cast mine in the world, once shifted an entire village some two or three miles away from its original position.

A European is unlucky if he gets malaria, though I once got a bad dose from a visit to a Sakai village in the jungle. Up-country all Europeans used mosquito-nets, though this was not really necessary in Singapore or Penang. It is quite unnecessary to guzzle quinine daily. It should be pointed out that a mosquito-net is only a personal prophylactic. The real problem of malaria is how to prevent the breeding of mosquitos, and this must be tackled on a communal basis. Malays are beyond the stage of thinking that fever is caused through the malign agency of evil spirits and we used to insist on the use of nets in the school hostels; also as a matter of discipline in our military camps for the men might have to operate in very malarial country. Only a very small proportion of biting mosquitoes can carry malaria. I used a net mainly because one mosquito biting my ankles at night was enough to wake me out of the soundest sleep. Mosquitos can bite through socks and clothing. People playing bridge in the evening in my bungalow used to complain when they were bitten through the seats of my wicker chairs! Mosquito-proofing a room with wire gauze is seldom very satisfactory, though many planters have it in their bungalows.

The climate undoubtedly has an insidious psychological effect on some people, reducing them to a kind of spineless pulpy inertia which makes them disinclined to do anything except sign chits with the right hand and lift their glasses with the left. It is known as 'tidapathy' from the Malay 'Tid'apa' which means 'I don't care'. But those who talk of the state of lethargic decadence into which all white men in the East

sink in a few years are grossly overstating the case. You will shortly be hearing about Mr. E. C. Hicks, my headmaster for three years in Ipoh. He had been working with great energy in different parts of the country for twenty years. He was always in excellent health and claimed to have had five days sick leave in his life.

Beware of the person who says : " Poor chap. The East has got him, you know." It may be tertiary tidapathy, but a likely contributing factor will have been chronic alcoholism. Before the war, there was certainly quite a lot of drink consumed in the European clubs in Malaya, but not an immoderate quantity in a tropical country where the human body requires more liquid refreshment than in a temperate climate ; or so the doctors say. A lot of arrant nonsense has been talked about whisky-swilling planters. Whisky is a clean enough drink in small quantities, and our pre-war rubber planters were on the whole a very fine set of men. In two months in Australia I saw more drunkenness than in five years in Malaya, although I agree that this is not a fair argument for either country. Very few men really cracked up through drink, and the majority of those who did would probably have done so anywhere in the world.

Tidapathy affected the Asiatic much more than the European. The Malays had lived for centuries a life which demanded of them very little effort. Materially their standard of living may have been low, but to judge from the ' pantun ' (Malay : verses) which they have handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth they were contented and happy. They are that still. But British leadership came to them at a time when great discoveries in applied science were being made, and it is not surprising if in habits and ways of thought they have not kept pace with the sudden changes. What is surprising is the amount of enthusiasm and energy which a Malay will display if he becomes really interested in a thing and is handled in the right way. However, this is leading me into an argument which I propose to follow out later.

It is true that the European soon loses the youthful enthusiasms with which he arrives in the country. But this comes from a re-orientation of viewpoint following a reasonable appreciation of the difficulties, and not from any lack of keenness. Rather similar to tidapathy is ' Singapore memory '. Members of my profession have been accused of being chronically afflicted by it. Sufferers forget to post letters, pay Sanitary Board accounts, or turn up for tennis and bridge engagements. According to circumstances it may be a psychopathic condition or an excuse.

CHAPTER IV

SINGAPORE

To the commentators in technicolor travelogues all is grist that comes to the mill. You have probably seen a 'short' of Singapore, sandwiched between the news and the forthcoming attractions. You know the sort of thing I mean. 'And as we board our ocean-going liner we wave good-bye to the sun-kissed shores of Singapore, land of the inscrutable orient'—accent on the last syllable. Chinese schoolboys, who talk with a slightly American accent anyhow, used to imitate this sort of thing to perfection.

Singapore always seemed to me more oriental than inscrutable. There is an age-old belief about the place that people will never be able to settle permanently in it; sooner or later they will be put to the sword and the land desolated. I think it was Raffles who mentioned that no native would ever go up Fort Canning, a small hill overlooking the harbour and latterly the headquarters of the Malaya Command; and that rice would never grow on the island. Nevertheless, in the days before the war there was nothing suggestive of brooding tragedy in the gaily coloured streets thronged with Chinese moving hither and thither with quick, purposeful steps. Singapore River harboured a fleet of sailing sampans at anchor from their trading voyages in the Rhio Archipelago and the islands off Sumatra.

Before the war the most comfortable club in Malaya was the Tanglin Club, Singapore. From the outside it looked an unpretentious, one-storey wooden building, but it had every form of minor relaxation one could want. There were twelve lawn tennis courts, and three air-conditioned squash courts; a small swimming-pool; a well-furnished reading and writing room and a good library. There were billiards and bridge. You could get a good game of bridge almost any time, and the committee arranged duplicate matches once a month.

The Club had a good dance floor, and the New Year's Eve fancy dress ball was an hilarious show. One year eleven of us went dressed as a mixed (very mixed) cricket team of the Hambledon vintage. My W. G. Grace beard caught fire when somebody lit a cigarette near me; my eyebrows survived though they remembered the occasion for a long time afterwards. Other than that my chief recollections of the

evening are of the incessant popping of champagne corks and of a group photograph which looked like something out of grandmother's scrap-book.

The Club was used a lot by officers of the permanent garrison and they infused a touch of gaiety even into the most serious proceedings like playing snooker on Sunday morning. It was a cheerful place and unlike the Singapore Cricket Club did not have that waiter-please-remove-this-gentleman-he's-been-dead-for-three-days sort of atmosphere.

I soon discovered that my class at Victoria School, Singapore, had taken to itself all the appurtenances of a mammoth business organisation. There was a committee of ten, elected by popular vote, who held meetings every Monday after morning school, effectively keeping me from my tiffin. When invited to speak I suggested that they might help me by making notes of anything which wasn't clear to them in class or about which they would like to know more, and bringing them up at the next meeting. In one way or another I managed to find them so much work to do that there was little time left for springing on me any of the quick ones for which purpose, I suspect, they had originally been given a mandate. It says something for their keenness that they were at times very helpful.

Before we leave them you had better meet one or two of the committee. The Big Shot was, of course, Harun, known to his friends as Harun al Raschid. But he was not a good leader and allowed himself to be shouted down by the younger, more intelligent Chinese. Chief among these was the secretary, Yap Giau Kay, known as Professor Yap. He was a tall, lanky Chinese, top of the class and an outstandingly intelligent boy, the son of a rubber estate manager in Singapore. He told me that it was his ambition to design aircraft and ships, and when I last heard from his father eighteen months ago he was proposing to send him to Hongkong University to study engineering. Tan Chow Peng stood about four feet nothing but more than made up for it in effervescent energy. The son of a small shopkeeper he was a perpetual thorn in the flesh of Harun whose leg he pulled on every possible occasion. He was known as The Mouse, and had a great sense of humour. He was always very polite and helpful to me. Four years later I met him again at the Technical School in Kuala Lumpur, shortly before war came to Malaya. He was studying to become a civil engineer. He had grown considerably, and now wore an expression of serious study. This time he got his leg pulled.

Before I had been in the school very long I had the good fortune to meet a most interesting member of the school staff,

Mr. Paramsothy, a young Indian graduate of Raffles College. We soon became firm friends. He was a great admirer of Dr. Rabindranath Tagore, and it is through him that I first learnt to know and appreciate the works of that great philosopher and poet. Paramsothy used to talk to me about India. He was a most level-headed gentleman, no fanaticist; he said he knew nothing about politics or economics. But as I listened while he patiently tried to explain to me the tremendous racial problems which confront India today I began to understand something of the love he had for his own country. He had been born in Malaya and it was his hope that one day he would be able to retire to India.

We had long conversations about the British Empire. He said: "I have seen many races and many types of men in Malaya in the last twenty years. I have no hesitation in saying that the Englishman is the finest type of gentleman I have ever met. I firmly believe that the British Empire is the strongest bulwark for peace in the world today. Where you Britishers make a mistake, though, is in thinking of it as static and unchangeable. I don't mean by that that you are unprogressive. You are not. But you are very uncritical of your own institutions. You think that because an idea works well it must be good. You fail to realise that it is not the idea which is good but the men who are responsible for working it. I believe that even if you introduced slavery as an official policy your district officers, with their innate sense of fair play, would somehow make it benefit the native.

"Take, for example, the Malays in this school. They all get scholarships or free places, which enables them to drift up the school near the bottom of every class. Half of them never get their Cambridge Certificates, and they are always beaten in class by the more intelligent Indians and Chinese. And just because of some sentimental idea about supporting the weaker man. The Straits never were Malay settlements. It should be a case of first come, first serve. It is true that the other races have all the money here, but there are many poor Indian and Chinese families who would be glad of some assistance in order to send their sons to an English school. I am talking now, mind you, as a critic. This is what he would say. In practice it works out quite differently, I know. Malays get superannuated if they don't pass their exams like anyone else. Free places are given to non-Malays in deserving cases. Those who select boys for English secondary schools try to be fair to all and to prevent any hardship."

"Surely," I said, "you don't think that all Malays are less intelligent than the other races here."

"No. I certainly don't. But in Singapore the non-Malays outnumber the Malays by at least thirty to one. The number of Malays in English secondary schools in Singapore is out of all proportion to that."

"Perhaps. But only a fraction of the total school age population would be likely to benefit from a secondary education. I believe that less than five per cent get one."

"That, I think, is where you are mistaken. Your argument is perfectly sound as far as it goes. But English is rapidly becoming essential for everyone who wants any decent sort of job. You hear it spoken in nearly all the shops. The demand for an English education is becoming greater and greater. In another generation or two every Indian and Chinese will be wanting it for his children."

One night Peterson of the Hongkong Shanghai Bank and I went to the Capital Cinema in the centre of the town. I left the car outside in the car park and gave the Chinese attendant twenty cents to keep an eye on it. When we came out the car had disappeared. We pulled up the car park attendant and pointed out to him the place where the car had been. We played a rather ridiculous game of charades in which the car, twenty cents, the attendant himself and the cinema figured in gesticulatory pantomime. This attracted a small crowd, and one or two people started arguing with the attendant. There was much shaking of heads and waving of hands. Then he had a bright idea. Perhaps, he suggested, we had made a mistake; one of these cars was ours. He indicated possessively the three remaining cars. I got very angry indeed, but there was nothing to do about it except report the loss to the police. The Malay police sergeant on duty at the station took down particulars, phoned through to the police station on the Causeway to stop the car if an attempt was made to take it off the island. He assured me it would be found in the next two or three days.

I offered a reward of five dollars to any boy in Victoria School who found the car, and next day a small boy came round to my house at tiffin time in a state of great excitement. He dragged me off and there it was—in Balestier Road, not half a mile from my house. The electric horn had been unbolted from the cylinder head and removed. The battery, petrol tank cap, radiator cap and all four sparking-plugs were missing. A thief could dispose of these easily amongst the second-hand car dealers in Rochore Road where no questions were asked. I

gave the lad his reward. He was, I was pleased, the son of poor Malay parents, and it was a lot of money to him. With it he bought a second-hand push-bike, which he proudly showed me, from a friend in the school.

The thief was never caught, but we did get one interesting piece of information. He had called in at a petrol pump in Serangoon Road, filled up with six gallons and driven off without paying, wrenching the filling-pipe from the pump and dragging it away with him. The Chinese garage proprietor told me this. He hinted with the utmost charm that he was a very poor man and that if I liked to recoup him for his losses he would do as much for me one day. I was sorry to have to disappoint him.

CHAPTER V

HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALAYA

THE competition for a place at one of Malaya's centres of higher education is intense, and the process of selection a long and rigorous one. In Singapore alone over a thousand took the School Certificate examination every year, for possession of a good Certificate was for them, they fully realized, the one and only passport to higher studies and prospects of a decent job.

It might be supposed that opportunities would be eagerly sought for putting a quick one over the examiners. They are. The usual dodges do not often work. Desks are staggered diagonally across the room six feet apart, which makes ordinary straightforward cribbing difficult even for the sharpest eyes. You might get a kind friend to pass you across a written answer when the invigilators are not looking, but this method is unreliable and achieves little in the long run. Abbreviated notes written on scraps of paper small enough to conceal about the person are not likely to cover the required range and prove embarrassing if discovered. But the candidates are quite capable of thinking up some artful dodges for themselves. The best plan is to take the whole exam by proxy. You get your clever cousin, who got a Grade I last year, to come in and take all the papers for you. You are a private candidate, so nobody else in the room knows you or your cousin. I know of one case in which this method failed only because the stand-in in a fit of absent-mindedness wrote his own name instead of that of his protégé at the top of every page of one paper. This was noticed by the markers, enquiries were instituted and gradually the fraud came to light. There was a stiff official enquiry and the candidate was failed, a pathetic tribute to the vigilance of the Cambridge Syndicate Board. Previously written answers to expected questions can sometimes be smuggled into the exam room, but invigilators are on the look out for folded or crumpled answer sheets.

All private candidates had to supply photographs of themselves certified by a competent authority. These were given to the Presiding Examiner at each centre where there were any such candidates, so that a hitherto highly successful method of defeating the examiners was frustrated. But the path of those

who would elude the examiners is bestrewn with difficulties. No short-cut to success is really reliable. Those who mark the written scripts know their job and can usually spot cribbing and other forms of collusion. On the whole the best way to pass an examination is to know your stuff.

In academic circles there was a perennial argument over whether the time had yet come for Malaya to have a university like Hongkong. Informed opinion was on the whole against it. And onto the ardour of those who wished to see the rebirth of Raffles College as the university of Malaya a profound damper was placed by the report of the Maclean Commission. This Commission came out to Malaya in 1938 to examine and report on higher education in the country. It took the widest terms of reference and visited many English secondary schools taking the Cambridge Certificate examination as well as centres of vocational and other training. Its report left little room for complacency. It claimed that the teaching staff of Raffles College was out of touch with the real needs of the Asiatic community and that in consequence much of its work was not as valuable to the student as it should be. The only exception to this was the mathematics course, which was a good one. Raffles College was not wholly to blame for this state of affairs, and there should be much closer contact maintained between it and the Education Department to co-ordinate educational policy. At present a gap existed between the standard of learning reached by potential students on leaving school and the standard required when they entered the College. They were not 'Raffles College'-minded. This should be remedied by a preliminary course of study at the College itself, not by a post-Certificate course at the schools.

I cannot believe, however, that this suggestion was put forward in the expectation of its being a permanent measure. We all know what a large gap does exist between school teaching and university lecturing. The University lecturer concentrates on presenting his subjects in an assimilable form, leaving the students to make their own notes as he goes along. Teaching involves frequent testing by question and answer methods, and applying the whole complicated technique and art of imparting knowledge. There is a world of difference between the two. The Asiatic school-boy who had just passed his Cambridge Certificate examination was certainly not yet equipped mentally for listening to lectures and getting much good out of them. It should surely be the job of the Education Department to bridge this gap in the schools. The trouble always was that apart from one or two large and favoured schools there was

never sufficient staff to cope with post-Certificate work in the schools. The situation called urgently for the recruitment of more trained secondary school teachers.

The Commission professed itself pleased with the work done by such vocational centres as the Technical School, and laid illuminating emphasis on the real need for proper vocational training in Malaya. The problem of vocational training has received much more serious study in the Dutch East Indies than it has in Malaya, though the Department has started to tackle the problem now on sound lines.

It was perhaps the senior school-boy and the College student of 1941 who stood to lose most during the Japanese regime. Some took jobs with local firms, government departments of the Japanese, became lorry drivers and mechanics, or served in the obscurity of a shophouse. A few joined the resistance forces in the jungles up north or became their agents in the towns and villages. Fewer still returned to either of the Colleges where the Japanese were teaching an emasculated version of the prewar curriculum, a thin veneer to cover the indoctrination of young minds with a hotch-potch of Japanese ideologies. In one way and another they wasted irretrievably four of the most valuable years of their lives.

The Colonial Office felt that help should be given to compensate for the lost years, a gesture made to the frustrated hopes of the rising generation to make it aware of the increasing responsibilities which the future holds in trust for it. Approval was given for the setting up of a university in Malaya and Sir Alexander Carr-Saunders and his Commission have spent some time during 1946 over here studying the problem on the ground. Their report has not yet been published but we should not be far wrong in assuming that the first step will be a fusion of the three Colleges, King Edward VII College of Medicine and Raffles College in Singapore and the Technical College in Kuala Lumpur.

CHAPTER VI

ANDERSON SCHOOL

In January 1938 I left Singapore to take up my appointment as science master at Anderson School, Ipoh. I travelled by car, and spent one night staying with Ray Bomford, my opposite number at the Malacca High School. He lived in one of the very old, reputedly haunted houses in Fort Terrace. There was great excitement as only a few days before the ghost had made one of its (or rather 'her') rare appearances. I wish I could tell the story in Mrs. Bomford's own humorous way. "I was dressing for dinner", she said, "when suddenly I turned round and there, standing before me, was the White Lady. I was utterly flabbergasted. I shouted for Raymond, but by the time he came she had disappeared slowly into my wardrobe. All he said was: 'Well you'd better take more water with it next time!'" It is not everybody who can 'take it' like this and one man I knew was so troubled by the visitation of a malicious poltergeist that he had to leave his house in Fort Terrace after a fortnight. This unwelcome spirit used to start his demonstrations regularly at midnight in proper Christmas style, banging on the walls and hurling furniture about the drawing-room. I heard that some years later when daylight saving had been introduced the ghost still manifested himself at the same time. Apparently even ghosts are subject to the Straits Enactments.

Anderson School was the largest government secondary school in Perak. It had nearly seven hundred pupils, of whom forty were boarders living in a hostel inside the grounds. These were all Malay scholarship boys whose homes were in villages sometimes as much as ninety miles away.

All the rest were day boys, the majority living within two miles of the school, although a certain number came in from the outlying districts every morning by train. When I first arrived the school was in a very fortunate position, lying on the edge of the town within the Sanitary Board limits (and therefore in a malaria-controlled area) but in fairly open country well away from main roads. There was plenty of elbow room all round it, which was useful for Cadet Corps and Scout training. During the next three years the depredations of road builders rather spoilt our rural atmosphere. A large huddled

camp was built near the school and a small lane which went past it was widened and straightened for heavy motor traffic.

The school itself was of two storeys, built in the shape of a large E. The school hall stood at the extremity of the centre part of the E and my science wing occupied the whole of the first floor of one end. We thus enjoyed sufficient privacy not to be interfered with by other classes. Although Anderson School was an old one its present premises had been built only eight years before.

The school played all the usual games, cricket, rugger, soccer and hockey in season. The headmaster, an old T.C.D. man, was a great rugger enthusiast and had in the past two years built up quite a strong school team.

As a schoolmaster I found as time went on that it became increasingly difficult to separate work and play. One kept hard at it during a five-hour morning, and the few spare moments which could be scrounged from the time-table soon passed in interviewing members of the staff and pupils or in routine office work. By tiffin time the main class work of the day was over, but in the afternoon there were extra classes for the experts, games and Cadet Corps work as well as plans to be made for future lessons. I tried to give myself as much freedom of action as possible during the afternoon. I was always ready to accept a challenge to a badminton match if I was doing office work which was not very urgent. If there were no school matches there were certain to be house matches on any afternoon. There was always someone in the common room ready for a chat, and I felt that the longer one spent in the school the better one got to know those who worked in it.

I was also busy learning Malay. I had already passed the government Malay exam standard I in Singapore with the assistance of a 'munshi' who was a teacher at one of the Malay schools and spoke no English. I had learnt some Malay before I came out, under Sir Richard Winstedt at the School of Oriental Studies in London. For standards II and III I thought it was better to secure the services of a Malay who could speak English and would understand the meaning of the passages set for translation into Malay, which were often extracts from Government Enactments requiring a good knowledge of English on the part of the person translating them.

I was fortunate enough to get Enche Mahomed Zain, a member of the Anderson School staff, for one hour a day three or four times a week. He was the only Malay on our staff. Under him my Malay rapidly improved and I was able to take Standard III in eighteen months, though I did not pass at

the first shot. He was a most interesting man to talk to. He had travelled widely over Malaya and told me a lot about the history and customs of the people which are not to be found in any of the literature. He was a devout Mahomedan, and by slow and tactful questioning I managed to draw him out on the subject of the Islamic faith. I can remember periods sitting drinking tea with him which dragged on into two hours and three hours without our noticing the time. He taught me to read and write Arabic. He gave me an old copy of the " 'Bustanu' Salatin" (Garden of the Sultans), which embraces part of the historically famous period covered by the *Sejarah Melayu*.

The following year he went on the pilgrimage to Mecca. This is laid down in the Koran as incumbent on all Mahomedans at least once in a lifetime, provided they can afford it and there are no hindering circumstances like war or famine. He had intended visiting Europe and England at the same time, but the imminence of war put a stop to that and he returned to us in Ipoh some ten months after he had left as 'Tuan Haji' Mahomed Zain. The term 'Haji' is applied to anyone who has been to Mecca, and 'Tuan' though normally used of white men, can be applied to Malays of either sex of high social standing. When I addressed him as Tuan Haji Mahomed Zain on his return he laughed and remembered his attempts to teach me Malay literary idiom. "The 'Tuan'", he said, "is not necessary in speech!"

Sports Day was an annual occasion which entailed a lot of preparation, and which always found the school looking at its best. The track was lined with flags. Huge marquees were erected round the field. Masters acted as umpires, timekeepers, recorders and megaphonists. The Recorder sat in a small tent with two mathematically-minded prefects working out sheets of figures. Glass rooms on the ground floor were turned into house changing rooms and cases of soft drinks lay about on the floor. Prefects put on their smartest shirts and ties and acted as stewards or went round with tape-measures. Scouts handed out programmes printed by the schools to crowds of parents and old boys who came in to watch. First consideration was always given to those taking part in the events and guests were left to do what they liked. There was none of that super-organisation with blaring music broadcast from a loudspeaker which marred so many other school sports which I attended. There were the usual track events, long jump, high jump, and an inter-school relay. Long events like the cross-country race, cricket ball, weight and discuss were decided the previous day. There was a visitors' race, scout race, and hostel servants

race. Fortunately the dignity of the staff did not permit of a staff race.

My job was chief announcer at the microphone, up in the Library in the school tower where I got a birds'-eye view of the whole field. Unfortunately I usually forgot to turn the instrument off and the spectators heard something like this: "Competitors for Event 26, the 120 yards hurdles, please get ready now. Event 25 is just starting at the Hostel end of the field Hullo, Abdullah. I haven't seen you for a long time. How are you enjoying life at Raffles College? 'Strewth. For goodness sake turn that microphone off!" The announcement which everyone waited for was that of the Malay Schools race. This had to be given out in Malay and my efforts produced (unjustifiably) much amusement. But I caught everybody out one year when an old Malay pupil of mine came up to see me and I asked him to make the announcement, imitating my voice as closely as he could without caricaturing it. He did and there was the usual laughter and applause.

At the end of 1938 the headmastership of the school changed hands and we received Mr. E. C. Hicks, whose astonishing record of health I have already mentioned. But he had other more important claims to distinction. A bachelor, he was quiet and unemotional. You understood his meaning as much by what he implied as by what he said. He could and did speak his mind plainly on occasions: but rarely. He had an amazing flair for effective administration. Minute papers were his servants and not his masters. The school was run efficiently with the necessary attention to paper detail, but with complete absence of red tape, that last line of defence of the man who is slack or who is too afraid of authority to commit himself. Mr. Hicks was so thoroughly on top of his job that he could find ample time to attend to what I would call the humanities of school life. Though a man of principle himself he judged problems on their own merits, dispassionately and without recourse to ill-conceived prejudices or opinions hastily formed. He could see clearly the two sides to every question. People would tell you that the most remarkable thing about him was his willingness to tolerate in others weaknesses which he would have despised in himself. These are qualities which the Asiatic admires and Mr. Hicks was popular with the staff and pupils.

It has frequently been urged that the education given in Malayan schools was on much too academic lines. This is, of course, an old familiar argument between the schoolmaster and

those who employ his products when they leave school, the government office and the business agency. It has often been clouded by exaggeration. It is not true that boys leave school with a smattering of Shakespearean English and a rooted disinclination to manual labour. Like other arguments between the ordinary man and the expert it arises from a misconception, a misconception of the difference between education and training. Education is a right to which the Asiatics are entitled. It arises in response to a demand. Most jobs worth having in Malaya were in the gift of Europeans, and it would be extremely pernicious if the educational system were designed solely to further the interests of the employer class, to fashion willing tools to promote the money-grubbing propensities of the big white tuan. A liberal education whose aim is to inculcate a sense of loyalty and of civic responsibility into the young is surely one of which the native population should be encouraged to avail themselves. A system which encourages free thought while directing it along socially acceptable channels is preferable to one which forces education down people's throats by propaganda methods.

It is a moot point how far the educational authorities are morally responsible for finding jobs for boys when they leave school. In theory, I suggest, not at all. If parents send their sons to an English school merely so that they may get good jobs, that is after all their lookout. In practice the department is in touch with prospective employers in government departments and in large business houses, and does give considerable help. At Anderson School we had an Employment Bureau kept by the second master in which boys leaving school registered; they were notified for interviews whenever suitable vacancies for jobs occurred.

The fact remains that in the ten years preceding war in Malaya hundreds of young men and women were leaving school with Senior Cambridge Certificates and were unable to find jobs. This was not the fault of the educational system. It was bound to happen. Gone were the days when a boy who passed standard seven could be sure of a decent job. As the standard of education rose something higher even than a Senior Cambridge Certificate was needed. The weaker brethren went to the wall, but it is not arguable that therefore their education had been of no value to them. There were only a limited number of jobs available, and these boys were no worse off than hundreds of others who had been super-annuated in the lower classes. The Education Department selected carefully its candidates for admission to secondary schools, but

so long as there was room for them it could hardly be expected to ignore the parents' insistent clamour for this type of education. The problem really arose through parents keeping their children at English secondary schools for as long as possible when they would have benefited far more from some kind of technical training. There were Trade Schools and other training centres throughout the country, though not enough. The Education Department was improving these and adding more. One school cannot provide both education and training.

Handwork was introduced to fill in a gap in what should be an 'all-round' education, and not so much to meet the criticisms I have just discussed.

Two features of Anderson School were generally chosen for special mention by those who knew it—the good friendship which existed between members of the staff, Chinese, Indian, Malay and European, and the very active part which the staff played in the life of the school. One of them, Mr. Lee Mun Yui, must be briefly introduced here without prejudice to the many others whose work was no less commendable. Lee Mun Yui was a capable officer who gave me valuable help with the school Cadet Corps. He was also a games enthusiast and it was an annual joke in the common room that at the end of each rugby season he would say: "Well, I guess I'm getting an old man now. This is my last rugby season," and at the beginning of the next season, regularly as clockwork, he turned out to coach the school side. He was enormously tall and was known as 'The Lighthouse'. He had a very old Ford car held together with bits of string and half the coachwork missing. It apparently never broke down, and having a very high clearance off the ground it could be driven through rough fields and rubber estates like a Bren carrier. He used to lend it to me to demonstrate the internal combustion engine to my science classes. "I warn you", he said, "it is not a very good illustration. Most of the combustion is external." One day he appeared in school without it and announced that it had been sent to the scrap-heap. There was great concern, and an obituary notice appeared in the School Magazine written by the School Captain Wong Lau Lian, who was editor—'In Memoriam. It is with deep regret that we have to record the passing of PK 5629. Full of kindness and good humour, she lived to a ripe old age and was a familiar figure on her walks to and from school. She passed away quietly on the 15th of May, mourned by all. No flowers (by request)'.

One of the most successful institutions in the school was the Prefects' Board. I do not propose to digress at length on the

pros and cons of the prefect system in schools. Its opponents base their objections usually on the danger of the misuse of power by those not old enough to exercise it, and of the usurping of authority which should properly belong to the masters. Many of us can remember this sort of thing happening at our own schools. But it is far less likely to happen in Malayan schools. The Asiatic is democratically minded and the main difficulty was to get the appointed leaders to exercise the powers which were rightly theirs to anything like the full extent. I have pointed out how strong is the fear of public opinion in the mind of the Asiatic, and it is not easy to get him to risk unpopularity by taking action which he knows to be morally right and which he fully realizes that it is his duty to take. But it is not impossible. Much depends on the support he can rely on from higher up. We were very fortunate in having a headmaster who had been in many different parts of Malaya and who had a profound understanding of the Asiatic mind: and, arising from this, a succession of good school captains.

Certain principles of life are fundamental, transcending differences of national conscience, and the Asiatic recognises these as clearly as we do: sometimes, in fact, more clearly. The Malay language has a wealth of proverbs illustrating these principles. But, without wishing to reflect undue discredit on a charming people, I know of no other race which habitually falls so far short of its own declared ideals. Until recently the Chinese, a truly great race, have produced no leaders of any real merit. The Asiatic does not take kindly to having authority thrust upon him: he is shy and diffident about using his powers. It is precisely in these qualities of leadership, so lacking in him, that he needs encouragement and education. I would go so far as to say that the most important educational lesson which the Asiatic must be taught is the proper exercise of responsible authority. Does a prefect system in schools do anything to achieve this? I think so, to a limited extent. The most important thing is that the prefects must be given some real power. It is not the slightest good creating a puppet regime with smart engraved badges of rank, answerable at every turn to some higher authority. It must be obvious to them that if they do not carry out their duties properly nobody else will; and the school as a whole will suffer for it. There must be no suggestion of play-acting. They must be made to realise that they are an integral part of the school system. And they must be encouraged in a feeling of solidarity and loyalty to the school, not of mere lip-service to a system of rules.

As might be expected the prefects were better on the administrative than on the disciplinary side. There were twenty of them and pairs of them were on duty daily in rotation. Duty prefects took the names of latecomers at the school gates, put up details of the school's activities for that afternoon and the following day on the School Notice Board, conducted parties of boys to hospital, patrolled the building to see that class-rooms and corridors were free of boys during the school break, inspected the school buildings and generally supervised conduct. Prefects often refereed games. They sat on various committees like the Games Committee and the Thrift Association Committee. They arranged the chairs and supervised the plans for holding examinations, concerts, etc., in the school hall. They played an important part at official school functions and when visitors came to see the school. They had a prefects' common room with books and magazines. They held meetings once a week under the chairmanship of the school captain, where they had powers to punish offenders in detention classes held by them. The extra strain thrown on the resources of the school by the armed peace period of 1941 gave them many extra duties. The school was taken over as a military barracks and a number of the staff went off on two months military training.

The prefects formed a subsidiary board known as the Traffic Board to enforce the school Safety First rules inside the school and out of it. Once a month the Traffic Board conducted an examination of the brakes and bells of all bicycles. It was carried out at the school gates as everyone was leaving school and even masters' cars were not exempt. I always passed the test with flying colours (and much amusement) but on one occasion I nearly got into trouble with the police. There was a horn-ban in Ipoh and when I sounded my horn loudly on the orders of the Traffic Board a Malay policeman came rushing up wanting to take my number. I explained to him what the position was and he was quite satisfied.

Just before the outbreak of war in 1939 we held a Cadet Corps Camp at Port Dickson, the first for many years. Our two platoons joined forces with a larger contingent from the Sultan Idris College, and we spent eight days in barracks on the shores of the Negri Sembilan coast.

I was fortunate in having a good company sergeant-major, Dahalan. Dahalan did not shine in class work, and having failed in his exam the previous year had been allowed to stay on in school although slightly over the age limit. He was therefore older than the others in the contingent. He had

great confidence in himself, not a very usual thing amongst Malays, and was respected by the Corps.

With this camp in view I had sent Dahalan and two of the sergeants, Tahir and Yunus, down to the F.M.S.V.F. Camp Port Dickson to do a Minor Tactics Course with the Volunteers two months previously, to which Volunteer Headquarters had invited me to send a few Cadets if I liked, and to these three camp life was not entirely new. In their own eyes they were veterans, and they spent most of their time telling everyone what a slack time they were all having compared with the Minor Tactics Course. They pulled their weight magnificently.

Dahalan was conscientious and took his job seriously. Every morning he came to my Office and got his orders for the day. When I asked him for any questions he always let himself go.

"Sergeant Yunus wants to know, sir, if water-bottles can be filled with iced orange crush."

"My orders are that they will be filled with water."

"Will there be an inspection of the contents of the water-bottles?"

"No."

"And Sergeant Tahir would like a leave pass this evening to go into Port Dickson to get a special kind of tobacco which they don't sell in the canteen."

"I didn't know Sergeant Tahir smoked."

"He doesn't, sir. But one of the Sultan Idris Coy, gave him a pipe and he wants to try. And Lance-corporal Jagat Singh says he saw a ghost in Le Cateau last night, sir."

"Did you see one, Sergeant-major?"

"No, sir."

"Did anyone else see one?"

"No, sir."

"Then can we take it that Lance-corporal Jagat Singh had filled his water-bottle with something other than water?"

"Yes, sir." The joke slowly dawns on Dahalan and he smiles. Le Cateau was a large wooden barrack room in which the Corps were billeted.

Inter-school matches always produced keenly contested games. A lot of hackneyed clichés about esprit de corps and 'the team spirit' are so much arrant nonsense, but there is no doubt that having good keen school teams does more to pull a school together than all the moralising perorations of the staff. Asiatics always manage to rise to an occasion, and our school team could always be relied on to play its hardest in an important

match. There is a tendency always to set much store on winning, and individuals were apt to become despondent if they lost or if they thought they had played badly. It was absolutely essential to give equal encouragement whether the team won or lost. Anderson School had its traditional antagonisms and friendships with other schools. Its chief rival was King Edward VII school at Taiping, and the annual inter-school rugby fixture was sometimes a rather hectic affair. We were on very friendly terms with the Sultan Abdul Hamid College at Alor Star, against whom we had an annual rugby, shooting (for the Corps) and badminton fixture.

I remember the event in 1940 which took place at Alor Star. Mr. Ung Kek Cheow took up a party of some twenty-five boys who regarded it as a very pleasant form of holiday in the middle of the term. They travelled the odd hundred and seventy miles by train, and were met at the station by a large number of the home side who escorted them to the College. The rugby match next day took place before a large crowd of spectators which included the Regent of Kedah. The ground was muddy after heavy rain but we had a good three-quarter line and the game was fast. The shooting and badminton fixtures were held the next morning. In between whiles the teams were given the freedom of the College, and it was a grand opportunity for our people to see new places and make new friends, for the Asiatic schoolboy rarely gets a chance of travelling far from his home town.

After four days in Alor Star we left for Penang where we were due to play the same set of matches against Penang Free School. The only event which stands out in my memory is the first string singles in the badminton event. This was played between opposing captains Rafik, who was also School Captain playing the runner-up of the Penang Chinese Singles Championships the previous year. Rafik was up against a better player than himself and lost the first set after falling heavily on his ankle. But he went on to play a really fine game and just won the next two sets, both players collapsing at the end! I mention this rather trivial event only as a sidelight on the prevalent opinion that the Asiatic, particularly the Malay, is apt to give up easily and to stop trying when things are going badly. He often does. But not always. Everything depends on the sort of spirit which animates him.

The Science Course we took was one written by Mr. F. Daniell, Senior Science Master at Victoria Institution, Kuala Lumpur. It was a good course designed specially for Malayan students. The country is, in fact, an ideal place for plant and

animal study. Illustrations of the common natural phenomena of Malaya were usually to be found close enough to the school to warrant a visit during a class period. The Kinta River which flowed past the hostel had limestone rocks which showed typical fissures from cracking in the heat of sun and the smoothing effect of rain and river water. On the other side of the school field was a rubber estate which bore all the signs of under-nutrition due to erosion of the soil.

To understand the attitude of the Malayan schoolboy towards what he thought was an entirely new subject we must examine his home environment. In Malaya they were familiar with most physical phenomena though not naturally occurring ice, snow and hail although they had seen pictures and films showing snow scenes. And once every two or three years Ipoh has a hail storm for a few minutes. Some of the older ones swore they remembered the total eclipse of the sun in 1927. Nearly all of them lived in the town or near it and owned bicycles. They were therefore familiar, at least subconsciously, with some of the elementary principles governing the working of levers and gears. They had seen building operations and had watched cement being mixed and setting to a hard mass. They had watched 'dulang' washers at work (the 'poor brethren' of the tin-mining fraternity who concentrate the tin ore in a 'dulang', a shallow circular basin) enough to know something about gravity concentration.

One of the most ingenious mechanical contrivances I ever saw was erected on a small Chinese tin-mining kongsi. They were mining on a narrow plateau half way up a limestone cliff. They had cut a narrow path for their own use in the cliff about five hundred feet down to the ground below, but it was too laborious to carry the ore down this way. So they had rigged up a cable which carried two large baskets up and down on an endless belt. The ingenious thing was the brake. This consisted of another cable attached to both baskets and slightly longer than the carrier cable. As each basket neared its destination, travelling at tremendous speed, this cable 'overloaded' and ran slack under its own momentum exerting a backward force which pulled them to a dead stop exactly at the ends of the line. I am sure the designers knew nothing about pulley systems and velocity ratios. A British firm would have put in a power-operated brake costing perhaps hundreds of dollars.

Another ingenious device is the 'kinchir', or water-wheel. These are used to irrigate ricefields all over Java, but in Malaya I have only seen them in a few districts in Negri Sembilan. The wheel is made of bamboo and is about eight feet in diameter,

looking rather like the paddle wheels of river steamers. The paddles made of split bamboo are fixed radially along the ends of the spokes. The wheel supported on a horizontal wooden axle dips into a stream and moves round slowly. Onto each paddle is fixed a bamboo 'scoop' open at one end and inclined at such an angle that it half fills with water when it comes out of the stream at the bottom and empties the water into a bamboo chute at the top, which carries a continuous supply of water to the ricefield four or five feet above the level of the stream. It is a clever variation of the Archimedean screw.

Our schoolboys then live in an environment not out of touch with things scientific. They have no particular superstitious phobias which prevent a scientific attitude of mind. As might be expected, however, they are not usually observant because they have not been trained in what to look for. Though some Chinese boys are very observant the majority of schoolboys tend to miss the wood for the trees. They realise that there is no mystery about say, cameras or gramophones, but they have probably not bothered to formulate even the haziest idea about how they work. They just take them for granted. Theirs is an unquestioning uncritical attitude of mind which contents itself with saying, "Well, just fancy that." They see things without noticing them.

In elementary science teaching I always avoided using laboratory apparatus wherever possible. It is astonishing what a lot of physics can be taught solely with the aid of pins, rulers, compasses, miniature range targets, cricket balls, tug-of-war ropes, bicycles and so on. With chemistry it is rather more difficult though even this need not depend entirely on beakers and bunsen burners.

I am not, however, a believer in carrying this method of teaching to extremes. Nature and the more elaborate works of man seldom provide good illustrations of simple facts unobscured by irrelevant details. Physical phenomena of microscopic dimensions are the outcome of the interplay of many natural influences, of the delicate balance between opposing forces of different origin. It is difficult to unravel these sufficiently to demonstrate clearly one simple effect. In the laboratory we do experiments under carefully controlled conditions where external factors foreign to the point at issue are eliminated or due allowance can be made for them. We imitate nature. Apparently we even improve on nature. Once this fact has been thoroughly grasped we are getting beyond the stage of elementary science. Laboratory paraphernalia can be used without its being misleading.

In addition to teaching science in class I organised out-of-school visits to what were described in the minute paper as 'Places of Scientific Interest'. The most popular was to the Ipoh Waterworks. Although this was a more interesting place than might be inferred from its name I soon discovered that its immense popularity lay not in any intrinsic merit which it might have, but in the fact that there was an opportunity for a picnic and a bathe afterwards. Malays especially are fond of picnics for they help to break dull routine, the Malay's deadliest enemy.

The water catchment area was in the foothills about seven miles east of Ipoh. We used to foregather at the school early one Sunday morning, and I used to send them off in batches of ten on bicycles as they arrived. I chased after them by car and we all met again at the Pumping Station. We then went on for a further two miles to the dam which spanned the Kinta River, just beyond which the river formed a natural bathing pool with rocks to dive off and not too strong a current. At one end of the dam water is taken in from the river, passed through a sieve to block bits of wood and floating weed, and sent on to the alum station. Here soluble impurities are precipitated by the addition of alum and filtered off in a large oval sand bed.

After seeing the dam we worked our way back to the alum station, and from there along the pipeline which followed the road back to our original starting-point at the Pumping Station, where the water is chlorinated, limed to reduce the acidity and pumped up to the reservoir. Those who wished to bathe and enjoy themselves then returned to the dam.

The first time we visited the Waterworks nearly half the class failed to last the course, and disappeared quietly to bathe when we started back from the dam. Next time the class monitor unwittingly came to my rescue. He was Chong Kai Choon, son of a well-known tin miner in Ipoh, a boy who later became one of the most prominent leaders in the school. He was the proud possessor of a camera. Could he take a group photograph of the class sitting on the steps of the Pumping Station? After this had been done we went on to the dam and then worked our way back to the Station as before. When we had finished there I suggested to Kai Choon that he should take another group photograph, which he did. He handed me a print of each group a few days later which I stuck up on my notice boards. I also let it be understood quietly that anyone who appeared in one photograph and not in the other was expected to come to my office and explain why. We gave

them twenty-four hours for this and the next day Kai Choon and I held an inquest on the photographs in class.

Near this pipeline, by the way, is one of the very few places where 'Brookiana' butterflies are common. This rare butterfly, named after its alleged discoverer Sir Charles Vyner Brooke, Raja of Sarawak, has a wing span of eight to ten inches. The wings are black with green and yellow streaks which glisten in the sun like golden sheen. They have an ungainly, loping flight but can soar like a seagull high above the trees. I have seen them nowhere else in Malaya. I tried to keep some in captivity in the covered fish-pond in the school garden, but although we reproduced their natural habitat as closely as possible they never lived for more than a week.

I conducted three or four visits for my science classes to a local open cast tin mine, owned by a Chinese towkay I knew. Many of my Chinese pupils were sons of local tin miners and knew more about mining conditions and the finer points of mining a tin mine than I did, so there were opportunities for interesting discussion. Chinese methods of mining are conservative. They use gravel-pumps and water-power or sometimes changkuls for their open cast workings. Dredges, all of which are owned by European firms, can work profitably in soil too poor in cassiterite (tin oxide) to be worth working by open cast methods. But nevertheless the Chinese own more than fifty per cent of the wealth of the country in tin.

Cassiterite is found in pockets in alluvial soil mixed with ilmenite, zirconite, scheelite and other minerals in smaller quantities which are mostly a drug on the market (except scheelite in certain parts). The depth of the tin-bearing stratum varies but tin is rarely found at surface level. An open cast mine is a large irregular hole in the ground dug initially by hand. The sides are broken up by a powerful jet of water delivered from an iron hose, called a monitor, shaped like a gun. The crumbled tin-bearing soil is washed in small streams down to the lowest point of the mine. The water-power is supplied from catchment areas in the hills down which the streams flow, and there may be three or four monitors all working at the same time in different parts of the mine. The wash is pumped up to well above ground level by means of a petrol or electrically-driven gravel pump, and onto the top of a 'palong', a wooden conduit about twelve feet wide and perhaps four hundred feet long sloping down at a gentle gradient, and supported on high wooden poles. Wooden slats are laid across the water channel about eight feet apart all along it. The grains of cassiterite being heaviest settle and separate by gravity concentration,

the waste 'tailings' pass over the lower end of the 'palong' and must by law be disposed of in a proper tailings area and in a manner not detrimental to the land round the mine. The first separation is not a very efficient one, and when sufficient ore has collected on the 'palong' further collection of ore is stopped, the accumulated ore is raked back, and ordinary water is pumped along the 'palong' for some time. This results in a further concentration of the cassiterite. It is then removed by raking off the 'palong' and is taken in trucks to the kongs house where it is finally concentrated by sieving and 'dulang'-washing and is dried in an oven. It is then practically pure tin oxide and is sold to the smelters. The oldest smelting company in the country is the Straits Trading Company in Singapore, though most of the tin ore is smelted at the Eastern Smelting Company's Works in Penang. Both are European firms. There are a few small Chinese-owned smelters in Malaya. One I saw in Kuala Lumpur reduced his tin oxide with coal from the Batu Brang collieries in a large furnace like a lime kiln, completing the process by 'puddling' the molten tin with green poles. While the price of tin remained high it was a most profitable business.

CHAPTER VII

HOLIDAYS IN THE JUNGLE

I SPENT my first school holidays in a Sakai village with George Tacchi, a colleague of mine on the school staff, and two other members of the Department. I reached the village shortly after the others to find them unloading themselves into a large Sakai house. Someone said facetiously: "Dr. Livingstone, I presume", my Sakai porters dropped their burdens with a sheepish grin, and I was invited to make myself at home.

This particular village was comparatively near civilisation, being only twelve miles from the main road. A side road over which a car could be driven took me as far as the River Korbu; only the last mile or two went through jungle. Owing to its accessibility the village had been chosen by the directors of the film 'Boo-oo' for their jungle location. The film was one of those exotic pictures about the tropical moon, the hostile pygmies and ferocious denizens of the jungle, and hot passion to the haunting strains of native music. It created a riot when it was shown in Singapore. The house we occupied was one which had been put up in the village by the Sakais especially for the film. It was therefore, of course, haunted by the ghosts of the 'orang puteh' (white men) and it was courting disaster for any Sakai to live in it afterwards. It had been untenanted for a year. We chased out a few mice, shot one small python which was sleeping on the rafters, and took possession with the full permission of the local headman.

The house was rather newer than the rest of the village, but it was a typical Sakai house. It was built entirely of bamboo poles with a roof of attap. There was only one room, about ten feet square, with the floor raised eight feet off the ground. One side of the room had no wall and acted as a window, with a narrow raised balcony along it. The room was reached by a bamboo ladder leading up to a hole in the wall. The floor was covered with coarse bamboo matting, made by chopping half way through the wood of a bamboo pole all the way round until it is soft and pliable then slicing down one side and folding flat. This makes a strip about twelve feet long by a foot wide. For making these and in fact for all building purposes the only instrument used is a 'golok', a chopper with a wooden handle and a sharp convex cutting edge which the Sakais have borrowed

from the Malays and are very expert in wielding. We rigged up a crude table and benches beneath the floor of the house. We fixed up mosquito-nets with bits of string, hung hurricane lamps from the rafters, put up our camp beds and settled in feeling very comfortable. There were two attap shelters attached to the house, one with a raised floor. These were used by the four boys from the Anderson School hostel who had volunteered to come with us and help with the cooking. We had brought lots of tinned food and two primus stoves with us, and we turned the smaller shelter into a kitchen.

To describe the settlement as a village may be misleading. There were four other houses like ours, and the headman's which was much larger with four rooms, one for each wife and her menage. The total population at the time was twenty-two. I determined this by counting the heads, including the children, at a village reception which was organised in our honour by the headman. His own estimates varied between forty and a hundred. But population statistics are meaningless here where the people are nomadic and move on every two or three years when the ground on which they are living has become worked out, although settlers on the fringes of civilisation have become semi-permanent. People pass to and fro between the settlements, staying a month here and a month there. The Sakais are not an acquisitive people; the idea of private possession except by the headman is little known to them. Life is entirely communal. A more usual type of village, which I was to see later further inside the jungle, consists of two or three houses of enormous size. Each house has one big central room and as the population grows small adjoining rooms are built up on either side of it. I have seen as many as a hundred Sakais living in this way in one house.

Our ostensible reason for making this trip was to get away from the telephone so that we could get down to learning some Malay. In this idea we were grossly deceived for the Sakais occupied our attention and maintained all our interest. They are a docile, peace-loving people, friendly in a quiet, inoffensive way. The first night as we were feeding they came and squatted in silence on the ground, dim motionless figures faintly illuminated by the light of our hurricane lamps against the inner edge of darkness which enshrouded us. We gave them cigarettes. This broke the ice and soon they were sitting with us, chattering to each other in a nasal staccato tongue. The headman appeared and thanked us (he spoke Malay). His people had not smelt tobacco since the last white tuan had been here. (This was not quite true for they smoked little

cheroots made of some dried palm leaf). Could we spare a few more? A tin perhaps, or two tins? We handed them over. In return they brought us some 'sekoi', a starchy tasteless food like cassava. George did his best but the rest of us after a few mouthfuls said we would eat the rest when we felt hungry next morning.

The next day a young Sakai offered to give us a demonstration of his prowess with a 'sumpitan' (native blow-pipe). These are straight tubes about eight feet long by half an inch in diameter made of a certain type of bamboo which is not very common in the jungle. The bamboo is hollowed out. The blowpipe is in two sections, a barrel about six feet long which fits tightly and concentrically into a short shaft. The blowing end of the shaft is reinforced with a circular wad of fibre. The Sakais take great pride in the workmanship and no modern gun barrel was ever straighter or cleaner than that of a blowpipe, which is rubbed with a plug of resin. The arrows are made from the midriff of a certain kind of leaf, and are dipped in 'upas' poison. This is obtained from the sap of the ipoh trees, which grow singly in the jungle. The sap of this tree contains a poisonous alkaloid principle. When first tapped the upas is a pale yellow colour. It is then smoked over a fire for two or three hours on a wooden ladle until it has reached the colour and consistency of black treacle. The arrows are dipped in this and left to dry.

Our demonstrator knelt on the ground and held his blowpipe to his lips gripping the shaft with both hands, the left hand back an inch or two from the 'butt' the right hand about a foot further forward, rather in the manner of a Bren gunner. He inserted an arrow, raised it to his lips, took careful aim at a small tree trunk about thirty yards away and blew. The arrow hit the tree squarely. We stuck a miniature range target on a tree about fifty yards away and he scored three hits out of five. Sakais use these blowpipes for killing birds and small animals for food and their accuracy is amazing. We all tried our hands at the game but to judge from our efforts I don't think any of us would have hit the proverbial haystack at ten yards. Before war broke out I had three blow-pipes in my bungalow which had been given to me by Sakais, one of which had very ornate carving all along the shaft and may have been of some value. I also had a number of arrows dipped in upas poison.

The official reception arranged by the headman for our benefit was held in the large room of his house some days later, and took the form of a dance. Now I had heard about this

Sakai dance, known as the 'chin-chan' dance. I had also, seen cinema pictures of the dancing of primitive peoples—a series of apparently superfluous steps, interesting, no doubt, to the anthropologist who can trace in them the relationships between different primitive races, but meaningless and inelegant to the uninitiated. I therefore went along in a mildly supercilious frame of mind, expecting to find it an uninteresting entertainment. It was not. I was most impressed.

The headman received us and led us off to one corner of the room where a small fire was burning in a stone grate. Round the walls ran a raised bamboo ledge on which we sat, with openings leading off here and there to the adjoining rooms. The only light came from two or three fires in the room and a small rush candle belonging to the headman. The orchestra was entirely female and sat at the further end of the room. The only instruments were bamboo scoops of various lengths hollowed out at one end, which when struck on the ground produced a deep resonant note, and a metal gong suspended from the roof. But the most amazing thing was the vocal accompaniment. The refrain was a simple melody of three notes repeated over and over again in subdued harmony. The voices, in which those of the orchestra predominated, sang now very softly now rising slightly in volume, but always the same three notes. Every twenty minutes or so the voices rose to a crescendo and then abruptly stopped, to resume the same thing a minute later. The effect was indescribable.

The dance, an individual one in which only the men took part, was also a simple repetitive movement of arms and legs, easy to follow and not ungraceful. About an hour after we arrived some flowers were brought in and given to the dancers. They looked like enormous white double dahlias. The dancers buried their faces in them while they went on dancing and inhaled deeply. After a time this seemed to produce a strange hypnotic condition in them which sapped all their physical energy. They cried out sharply, staggered across the floor and often collapsed at the side, when they were assisted to their feet in a daze. I thought at first that this might be a put-up show for our benefit, but I am convinced that it was not!

I was handed a flower by the headman and invited to dance. I had not been on the floor for more than a minute before I put my foot through a weak spot in it and went in, so to speak, up to the thighs. This did not affect the dancing which went on without interruption. I do not think that anyone noticed except our party and the four Malays who rocked with laughter. The flowers have a strong sweet smell, and although they did

not produce in me quite the same effect as they did in the Sakais I must admit that after fifteen minutes dancing and deep breathing I did begin to feel rather lightheaded. George and the others also tried it without experiencing any noticeable effects.

We tried to teach the Sakais to play cricket, just to see how they reacted to us. This was after we had made friends with them and had come to be regarded as *bona fide* holiday-makers and not white men wishing to exploit them. With the assistance of the headman we explained a few simple rules and produced a tennis ball and a crude bat fashioned out of a bit of wood. We chose a fairly level area between the houses and invited the headman to open the first innings. The first ball he missed; the second one he hit for six right into the jungle. There was a pause while we fetched another ball. He handed his bat to a small boy. This was a mug's game. It was too easy anyhow. However we gave them some cigarettes, and some tennis balls to the children.

I managed to get the headman to teach me some Sakai. He sat with me one afternoon while I wrote down in phonetics the Sakai equivalent of about two hundred Malay words and some short sentences. I certainly do not claim to speak Sakai. I doubt very much whether any European ever has. Even Paul Schebesta who spent years among the aboriginal peoples of Malay never claimed a knowledge of their language. I compared my word list with a published Sakai vocabulary and found the two sets of words completely different. I am told that in Perak alone there are five different dialects of Sakai spoken, so this is not surprising.

After a stay of a fortnight we left the village to return to Ipoh. For the first part of the journey we had chartered an elephant one belonging to the entourage of H. H. The Sultan of Perak, which happened to be near us in Jalong. The 'gembala', its keeper, was the exact antithesis to Sabu the Elephant Boy. He was a shifty old man who helped himself to our cigarettes and to as much of our luggage as he thought he could get away with. We haggled shamelessly over the charge to be made for the elephant, finally agreeing on three dollars plus the cigarettes which he would have got in any case. To the saddle we tied six suitcases resting against the animal's flanks, the packing cases were placed on top and last of all we got on from the balcony of our house. It was not a comfortable journey and the Malays, who insisted on going on foot, reached the road before we did. The elephant forced its way along the narrow jungle track and we got lots of biting ants down our necks brushed off from trailing branches. In the jungle an elephant

moves cautiously along feeling its way and bringing its foot down very slowly the last two or three inches to the ground. While one foot comes off the ground and down onto it again the animal takes its whole weight on the other three feet. It has been said that an elephant can put its foot down on an egg without breaking it, though so far as most people are concerned this rather extravagant claim has little more than academic interest.

At the beginning of 1941 I did a five-day jungle trip in Upper Perak. It differed from previous trips mainly in that I was well off the beaten track and reached Sakai villages where only one or two white men had been seen before. I was anxious to see conditions amongst Sakais remote from contact with civilisation and went with Mat Isa, a village headman from Upper Perak who knew the country well. The jungle through which we went lies to the north-east of the settlement at Jalong which I have already described.

We spent one day poling up the river Plus, a tributary of the Perak River, in a sampan, a Malay fishing boat. The river was narrow and winding. Gigantic over-hanging trees formed an arch blotting out the sky, with long twisted creepers swinging fantastically from the boughs like enormous ropes festooning the roof of a gloomy cavern. The banks were steep and thick with undergrowth. Water-moles ran off into holes at our approach. Myriads of insects buzzed and swarmed in the air and everywhere was a smell of rotting vegetation. Here and there shafts of sunlight lit up the clear water. Always a strange hush brooded over the water like a lull before the storm, as though some cosmic upheaval was about to occur. But nothing ever did occur to disturb the tranquillity of the jungle. That is its nature. Occasionally we came to clearings where the Sakais had 'ladang,' plantations usually of tapioca or sugar-cane. I remember a bamboo house built in the fork of a tree forty feet above the ground.

We reached Kajang, a big village, by nightfall the first day. Above Kajang the river has rapids and waterfalls and we could no longer use the sampan. We made our way along a narrow jungle track next morning, taking with us eight porters from the village. The next day we were in Kuala Legap where there was a small Sakai settlement on an alluvial flat two hundred feet above the river. The settlement was an old one and the headman told me they were preparing to leave it. There were only about twelve men and women left in it now. Their first shyness over they became quite friendly and gave me sugar-cane to suck (a bit cloying, but an improvement on 'sekoi'). Fore-armed, I handed out cigarettes and salt.

Their health was poor. Their bodies were covered with scabies and they were rotten with malaria. The old people had nasty consumptive coughs. I gave them some quinine tablets for which they asked, which were of course useless as a cure but may have afforded them some temporary relief. The young children looked healthier than the grown-ups, their teeth whiter and cleaner.

The headman spoke very little Malay and most of our conversation had to be done through Mat Isa who could speak some Sakai. I would not care to say whether it was the same dialect as that used in Jalong but it had the same nasal intonation. Mat Isa was not the ideal interpreter. He was apt to decorate his translation of what was actually said with interpolations of his own. But I did find out a little about Sakai ways of life, and the following is a digest of my own observations, based on the few visits I have made to Sakai villages.

The Sakais are to some extent animists. They believe in spirits which reside in rocks and trees. The old headman told us of the spirit of the river who watched over them and said that his people always stayed near the river. The spirit of the jungle was hard and frightening. Men who stayed out at night were caught by were-tigers who carried them off. They were never seen again though sometimes their voices could be heard at night. The same belief is held by Malays in certain parts. The Sakais have an intense superstitious fear of thunder and lightning, though I could not find out to what exactly they attributed it. They believe that disease is caused through the malevolent agency of spirits but they have not created an elaborate priesthood to mediate with them and there is nothing corresponding with the medicine-men and witch doctors of Africa. The headman intones an incantation for its safe return whenever a party leaves on a hunting expedition into the jungle.

They do not now depend on the blowpipe for their food and live mostly on vegetables which they grow and small animals which they catch in traps. Their traps, borrowed, I think, from the Malays, are ingenious. A row of stakes converging along a narrow jungle track forces animals using it to pass through a narrow opening where a bent stick is held down by a wedge placed across it. The stick has a lasso of rattan tied on the end and when the animal passes, the wedge is knocked out of position, the bent stick flies up and the lasso traps the animal. Traps are examined and reset by the Sakais every day. The headman told me that they often caught small deer with these snares. I have passed such traps along a jungle path and usually found them already 'sprung' though I have

never seen an animal caught. Sakais use the 'bubu', 'jala' and other Malay devices for catching fish.

The headman told me that blowpipes were still used by some tribes for shooting birds and bats. He gave me one which he said had not been used for a very long time. It was the only one he had, but he did not seem to attach any value to it and pressed me to accept it for 'my kindness', which had not, I thought, amounted to very much. He also gave me a Sakai drum, a crude affair made of a small hollowed out section of a tree trunk covered with the hide of kambing gerun, a rather uncommon mountain goat hunted by the Sakais. He offered me the use of a corner in the house but I had brought camp equipment with me and preferred my own tent.

I stayed two days at Kuala Legap while rafts were being built to take us down river back to Kajang. The rafts were made of bamboo poles lashed together with rattan. Three layers of poles thirty feet long were lashed together to form a platform about six feet wide. This gives a very buoyant structure which will remain afloat for two or three weeks until the water seeps into the air-pockets between the nodes of the bamboo, when it becomes gradually waterlogged and sinks. In the centre of the raft was a raised part, two feet higher than the platform, with an attap roof over it giving shade from the sun. On this we put all the luggage and sat on the front ourselves. It was covered with the usual bamboo matting. Right on the front of the raft two forked wooden branches were stuck upright. They were held rigid by bamboo stays tied down to the platform, and through them were fixed two bamboo paddles about fifteen feet long. By pulling hard on these paddles at critical moments it was possible usually to avoid hitting rocks. My terminology is, I hope, correct: the Malay does not think of bamboo as a species of wood. There was some excitement before we started caused by a small python which had climbed under the platform of one raft during the night and was now resisting ejection. I had not brought a gun, but they got rid of it by turning the raft over and floating it for a short distance down river. The baggage was loaded onto four rafts. Mat Isa explained that we had some high rapids to shoot and only a small amount of stuff could go on each raft. It was lashed firmly on with rattan cords. Other rafts carried sugar-cane which was being taken down river to Kajang, and Mat Isa and I sat in the last raft each armed with a paddle. Shooting the rapids was a mildly entertaining business. Every half mile or so we came to a place where scattered rocks formed a bar across the river over which the water splashed into a basin below

with rocks all along the side. The drop was never more than ten feet. When we came to the first one I halted the convoy and sent one of the sugar-carrying rafts over first. I watched the raft as it approached the drop. The Sakai raftsman stood there at the back of the raft with his feet firmly planted on each side of it, knees flexed and the paddle held horizontally in both hands, like a circus performer on horseback waiting to jump through a hoop. The raft reached the bar and for one second it hung still, the front part sticking out in the air and tilting slowly as it overbalanced on its precarious perch. Then it plunged down, struck the water, righted itself and careered onwards the raftsman still standing on the back shouting and yelling. Reassured by this I sent over my baggage rafts; I was relieved when the box containing my camera outfit got over safely. Mat Isa and I went last. We were not so lucky, or rather not so skilful. We made the drop all right but shot off in the wrong direction in the pool below, hit a rock and overturned. There was no harm done except to the raft. We drifted down clinging to the raft to a spot where the current was not so strong. We turned the raft right side up and carried on. The Sakais who were waiting for us roared with laughter, and Mat Isa and I got a lost of face. I was wearing only a bathing dress and shorts, and suffered no damage beyond a few large bruises where I had hit submerged rocks. We lost our paddles, and the raft had badly impacted bows.

I stopped at the next Sakai village where the headman, introducing himself as Pa' Awang, presented me with a brand new raft made only that morning. It was smaller than the others and had no raised platform. But it was very strongly built and tightly lashed together—just the thing for rapids—and Mat Isa and I had no more difficulty. Towards sunset I suggested to Mat Isa that we should use our paddles so as to reach Kajang before it was dark. But he only laughed and quoted me a Malay proverb: "When you pole down stream the crocodiles laugh", a metaphor for wasted effort. Kajang is a big settlement with two houses, one enormous one in which I counted over sixty people, another smaller one on the other side of the river where lived the headman and his family. On our way up to Kuala Legap I had told the headman that we should be back again in a few days and had asked him if he would arrange some dancing for us. He obliged and the entertainment was arranged to take place in the large house opposite. I paddled him across proudly in Pa' Awang's raft. The ritual was the same as I had seen at Jalong with only minor variations. The band, to whom I lent the drum I had got at

Kuala Legap : the singing and rhythmic dancing : the white flowers : all were there. I did not dance this time, but sat round a small fire at one end of the room talking with the headman and Mat Isa. I asked about the words they were singing. "We do not know the meaning now", said the headman, "a long time ago we understood the words, but now their meaning is lost. But I believe they describe hunting and killing animals in the hills."

The next morning I took Pa' Awang's raft back on the river to our starting point. I said good-bye to Mat Isa. "Next time you come, tuan," he said, "I will take you further up beyond Kuala Legap. There are many more villages where you can see interesting things." I made up my mind to bring George Tacchi next time. But there was not to be one.

In addition to several Sakai objets d'art obtained at Kuala Legap I picked up a stiff dose of malaria. I had found two anopheline mosquitos inside my net one morning but had thought no more of them. Fifteen days later I got up and went off to work feeling as usual. By eleven o'clock I had a splitting headache and by noon I was beginning to feel like death. So I decided to give up the unequal struggle and went round to see Dr. Strang at the District Hospital. He did a blood test. "Aye", he said in his very Scottish accent, "you've got malaria." We were at the time in a temporary building, the school having been taken over by the military. It was my duty to blow a whistle at the finish of morning school and I knew there would be chaos amongst the staff if this was not done. Dr. Strang shoved me into an ambulance and sent me off to the European Hospital at Batu Gajah, but I managed to persuade the driver to call in at the school on our way through the town and I saw several pairs of eyes anxiously peering round out of windows. I was already twenty minutes late. I stopped the vehicle, opened the back door, gave a feeble puff on the whistle (the noise nearly blew my head off), and told the driver to move off quickly.

I lay for four days in hospital in a semi-conscious state, shivering and sweating profusely in turn. They dosed me with quinine until I was quite deaf without it having any noticeably beneficial effect on the fever. They scratched their heads, then got a bright idea and squirted atebtrin into me. This brought my temperature down with a bump and in two more days the fever had gone. Malaria is a curious thing. The fever comes on you suddenly and equally suddenly goes. On the sixth day I was perfectly normal but very weak, and spent the day doddering round the corridors puffing and blowing like an old man.

CHAPTER VIII

SOCIAL LIFE IN MALAYA

THE Ipoh Club stood on a grass bank above the field which formed a natural grand stand for watching the tennis. I have sat many times in front of the clubhouse in the cool of an evening, during the Peace-In-Our-Time period when to us at least war seemed very remote, looking over the town and watching summer lightning playing in the gathering darkness over the blue hills beyond. It was a time and place for fore-gathering with one's European friends for a chat and a drink. The day's work was done—not all of it, we hoped, in vain. The lengthening shadows carried a sense of hushed peacefulness. We felt as one with the centuries. A picture of infinite well-being conjured itself up before our minds like an ancient tapestry, timeless and abiding. To those long ago grown unaccustomed by temperament to scratching far beneath the surface of things such superficial grace could be cruelly deceptive.

Part of the Ipoh Club grounds were shared with the town, and by arrangement with other clubs which used it the same keeper looked after the whole area. He was an enormous bearded Sikh whose chief affliction was *anno domini*. He boomed at his coolies like the voice of doom ; except, of course, for the beard. The last time I saw him I was removing all his chairs and garden seats and scattering them over the field to prevent the landing of troop-carrying planes. I don't think he ever survived the shock.

The Ipoh Club was open for membership on election to all European residents in Perak. Country members living more than ten miles from Ipoh paid a reduced monthly subscription. A few prominent non-Europeans were also admitted to full membership. In the club there was absolutely no social difference between them and the white members, a point which might be borne in mind by those who support the principle of the colour bar in some of our other colonies. It was a pity, I think, that we had not got more non-European members of the Ipoh Club. They were always popular, and pulled their weight in all our social activities. Dr. Khong, a private doctor with a big Ipoh practice, was an ex-Malayan lawn tennis doubles champion, and at the age of nearly fifty still played a good game. His daughter, Helen Khong, won the Ipoh Club

Ladies' Singles at the age of seventeen, beating the best European players on the way. A popular though infrequent visitor to the billiard room was the Dato Panglima Kinta, a member of the Perak royal family, who could put up a hundred break at billiards with ease.

The 1st (Perak) Battalion of the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force was on paper a large 'mixed' battalion of one machine-gun company, four rifle companies and a head-quarter company. The machine-gun company was entirely European. I do not know why, because the Penang and Province Wellesley Volunteer Force had some very good Malay machine-gunners. The rifle companies were of four platoons each, of which one was European, two Malay and one Chinese or Eurasian. The European platoons were always very much under strength, as most of the men had important jobs as tin miners and planters and did not find it easy to get into town for parades. There was not any widespread lack of keenness. The attitude of the average European in the old piping days of peace was rather that he was perfectly prepared to 'do his duty' by becoming a Volunteer but he did not see what good it was doing him or anyone else to attend the regulation eighteen parades and G.O.C.'s inspection every year. He learnt very little on parade, although it was a good opportunity to take his wife into town for a bit of shopping. Volunteer arms and equipment (1908 pattern) were out of date, and at the rate we were going he would never become even a partially trained soldier. He, like all of us, was the victim of a civil administration long grown used to the ways of peace. It is easy to criticise this attitude now but this was 1938, remember, and to none of us was vouchsafed a forecast of the holocaust that was to come. It was easy to blame the Volunteers for their shortcomings when the real responsibility lay elsewhere. It was surprising how many Europeans did join up.

Malay platoons were usually over-recruited. They were in a different position. For many who were unemployed it meant the prospect of contact with European Officers who in their civilian capacity might find them a job; or so they hoped, not always without reason. They made money out of being Volunteers. There was nothing underhand about this. They bicycled to parades and back and drew travelling allowance at four cents a mile. They received army pay at week-end and annual camps. Junior government workers hoped by becoming Volunteers to improve their chances in the struggle for promotion. These advantages were later to cut both ways when training became a really serious matter and made inroads

into time which they ordinarily spent on their civilian jobs. There were some shocking cases of Asiatics losing their jobs because they were obliged to spend too much time away on military duty. Legislation was at once introduced to stop this sort of thing going on, but it was not altogether effective.

A period of stronger more resolute activity—I won't say feverish activity—slowly permeated the battalion after the Munich crisis. Coincident with the arrival of a new adjutant spasmodic efforts to encourage interest and to swell the ranks of the Europeans were made, the forerunner of the really big effort which was to come later, like a man stirring fitfully in his sleep before waking. The F.M.S.V.F. Battery, erroneously described as a light battery (actually a 'Mountain' battery of 37's), was recruited up to strength. It had two sections, one in Kuala Lumpur the other in Ipoh.

His Highness Sir Iskandar Shah Sultan of Perak died in 1938, and the Raja Muda Sir Abdul Aziz succeeded to the throne. There is no crown in the Perak regalia and a legend says that the crown was lost some centuries ago. This does not in the least detract from the magnificence of the installation ceremony, officially attended by all the Sultans, or their representatives the High Commissioner, and all the Royal Princes of Perak. The ceremony is described less effectively in English than it is in Malay, with its picturesque superlatives and its genius for hyperbole. The arrival of the official guests in their Court uniforms at the gate of the Palace, the playing of the State anthems and the salute given by the Malay Regiment Guard of Honour as the Sultans passed with their retinue; crowds of 'raayat', the common people, standing at the side of the carriage way on Bukit Chandan hill, dressed in gaily coloured sarong and baju; as a background to this the palace and the rolling terraces in front of it sloping down to the Perak River: all combined to make an unforgettable picture of colourful festivity. The Throne Room on the third floor of the Palace and the throne itself, were magnificently decorated with hanging curtains and embroidery all in yellow, the colour of Perak royalty. The Malay orchestra whose appearance at all Malay state functions is enjoined by tradition, sat on a raised platform on the balcony with its flutes, cornets and the 'gendang nobat', a big bass drum beaten at all royal ceremonies.

The traditional ceremony is impressive. The body of the long Throne room is filled with Malay Princes, District Officers and penghulus (village headmen). Representatives of other nationalities sit at the back and round the sides. The Raja

Bendahara (heir presumptive) raises his hand and whispers die away to silence. He reads an address, followed by the High Commissioner and others. The Raja Muda then shows proof of his fitness to be Sultan. It is necessary in Malay eyes that he shall be 'berdaulat', possessed of the royal spirit which resides in sovereignty. This spirit, the Malays believe, resides in the blood of a man. It cannot be passed on arbitrarily to others. One of the difficulties that the Malays had in accepting the abdication of King Edward was that his successor would not be 'berdaulat'. The Raja Muda takes the Sword of State and slowly withdraws it from its sheath, holding it up before the eyes of the audience. Only a man who was 'berdaulat' could do that. At once he is acclaimed by the assembled voices, the Raja Bendahara leading. "Daulat!", they cry, "Daulat! Daulat!"

I was in charge of a party of Cadets, half from the Anderson Cadet Corps and half from King Edward VII Cadet Corps, Taiping, who were doing guard duty inside the Palace. I was standing just inside the door near the throne, and had a close-up view of the whole proceedings. That evening in the Palace there was a State Banquet and a State Ball with, very wisely, nothing more intoxicating than orange crush. The drinking of alcohol is, of course, forbidden under Mohammedan law. The Palace grounds overlooking the Perak River were a scene of much holiday-making for a week. There were Javanese ronggeng parties and several Malay bangsawans (straight plays). There was a 'wayang kulit', a shadow play in which a large white screen is illuminated from behind. A man sits at the side and brings against the screen different figures, moving them about and all the time keeping up a running story in pantomime. The figures are of wood and leather intricately carved representing giants, fire-breathing dragons and all the familiar paraphernalia of wonderland.

The Palace and all the important buildings in Kuala Kangsar were floodlit and decorated with fairy lights, and crowds who had come into Kuala Kangsar from the surrounding villages thronged the streets and palace grounds all night. Malays are always orderly and even on festal occasions retain their calm, unruffled dignity. There was much singing and dancing, but nothing reminiscent of Boat Race Night in the West End.

One of my colleagues went on leave at the end of 1938 and he was given a popular send-off at the station of the type that used to be common before the war. Shortly before one o'clock on a Saturday afternoon about sixty Europeans drifted onto

the platform and with one accord made for the bar. There was a two-dollar kitty, and glasses ebbed and flowed like well-regulated siphons. At one end of the bar a small hired band played all the latest numbers out of tune.

At the sound of the five-minute whistle everyone trooped out onto the platform. The band struck up the Palais Glide, the party formed itself into lines and danced. The Station Master came out of his office, took one look round and fled inside again. The person in whose honour all this nonsense was taking place, never good on his feet at the best of times, tried to dance while retaining possession of his two unfinished glasses and fell over. He was assisted to his feet noisily and shepherded onto the train. His luggage was thrown in through an open window. He kissed the ladies one by one from the step, but in the middle of this there was a piercing shriek and he was suddenly whisked away. He was last seen leaning out and looking back nostalgically, a full glass in each hand.

Cameron Highlands is the largest hill station in Malaya, situated on a series of small plateaux up in the hills on the borders of Perak and Pahang. The village of Tanah Rata in it is just over five thousand feet above sea level. As the crow flies it is only twenty-five miles from Ipoh, but there is no motor road this way. There is a jungle track, quite a good one, going from French Tekka Mines to Tanah Rata, followed for part of the way by a mine pipeline. It is quite an easy journey though it is very uphill going and takes a whole day.

In the middle of the day the climate at Cameron Highlands is almost as hot as it is in the plains. But it is much drier and the temperature drops at night to under sixty degrees Fahrenheit. The mornings and evenings are cool; in fact for the first day or two it feels positively cold and, such is the effect of prolonged exposure to the steamy heat of the plains that you sit huddled over a fire, shivering. All the hotels and bungalows have large log fires. I suppose those used to the English climate would say that this was unnecessary, but it is very pleasant.

Cameron Highlands is much more than just a holiday station for Europeans. The Agricultural Department maintains a large experimental station on it, where it has tried numerous crops with a view to finding if any could be grown on an economic scale at high altitudes in Malaya. Mr. Low, the Agricultural Officer, told me that the only crop with a definite future was tea. At that time a small amount of tea was being produced and exported, though its market value was nowhere near that of rubber. Malayan tea is strong and bitter and requires blending before it is marketed. The largest plantation

in Malaya, the Boh Tea Gardens, is near Tanah Rata, and the well-known Indian lawyer Mr. Sharma, of Penang, had another plantation there.

The real development of the Highlands had started only ten years before the war. Land values were high and speculation in land was prevented by government order which laid it down that land must be developed by the owner within a year of its purchase. There were hardly any mosquitoes although nets were used. Large tracts of jungle had been felled, and I believe it was intended to make a wide ring of open country all round the Highlands. It was interesting to see English flowers, roses, dahlias, chrysanthemums, hollyhocks and many others growing as well as poinsettia, jacaranda and agapanthus lily which do not grow well down in the plains.

The largest hotel is the Cameron Highlands Hotel overlooking the nine-hole golf course. Over Christmas and Easter holidays the place is packed with visitors sitting outside on the sun terrace, presenting a typically Mediterranean scene. Occasionally a Sakai comes along selling blowpipes at exorbitant prices. I have seen a visitor from Singapore pay five dollars for a very ordinary-looking blowpipe obviously made for the tourist trade. Adjoining the golf course is the Smokehouse Inn, built by Mr. Warin, head of a big advertising firm in Singapore. It is built in the form of an Elizabethan mansion, with creepers and rambler roses growing all over it. Before the war it had the same historical atmosphere with low rafted ceilings and huge fireplaces with built-in alcoves. Hortatory inscriptions in burnt wood hung on the walls: "Planters please remove their boots before entering", etc. There was a small buttery where the barman handed out the necessary through the hatch. There were spinning-wheels, elongated frying-pans and all the other appurtenances of olde worlde atmosphere. Warin had been equally successful with his garden. He had a small glen where he was trying out daffodils, crocuses and bluebells.

Probably the most popular place to stay was The Green Cow, owned by Mrs. Rattray. It was an inn like The Smokehouse, but larger and without the same lavish attention to period detail. 'Mrs. Rats' was a great hostess and the same crowd always came there year after year. I used to stay there whenever I went to Cameron Highlands. You could be certain of having a good time. Once we spent most of the morning chasing a cobra which had got into one of the drains. We prodded about with sticks without moving it. Then we built a bonfire of damp wood and smoked it out with the aid of a pair of bellows. It came rushing out of the hole

sibilant with anger. A passing Tamil labourer hit it on the head with a changkul and we then administered the coup de grâce beating it with walking-sticks, umbrellas and anything we could lay our hands on until life was extinct. This is not the approved way of killing a cobra.

On another occasion when 'Mrs. Rats' was staying with us on one of her periodic visits to Ipoh she got a frantic telephone message from her head boy to say that there had been a landslide and he was not sure but he thought half the house had fallen down. The house was built near the edge of a deep rift. So she rushed back to find that there had been a small landslide, but the house was still standing and only a garden seat had disappeared.

In many places in the Highlands roads were driven through solid clay and laterite, the embankment on each side was sloped and terraced, reinforced with logs of wood. These logs have rotted in the soil and landslides are quite common. Once I was driving along at night on the golf course road when a small landslide came down fifty yards ahead of me. It was cleared in an hour or two but it was just as well for me it did not come down a few seconds later.

From a short visit to Cameron Highlands I returned to Ipoh at the end of August 1939. The morning papers announced the signing of the non-aggression pact between Germany and Russia. I think we realised for the first time then that war was inevitable.

For several months there was no noticeable increase in Volunteer activity. This was in no way the fault of Volunteer Headquarters, or of the military authorities in Singapore. Adjutants (regular officers seconded to the volunteer forces), senior officers and above all Brigadier Moir himself fully realised the woefully inadequate state of our training and tried to get something done. He was an Argyll and Sutherland Highlander and was typical of the senior officers of that very fine regiment. What made him popular with his volunteer troops more than anything else was the fact that he never allowed his subordinate staff to come between himself and them. This, the hallmark of all true military leaders, was not always the case with volunteer officers. He displayed the same interest talking to troops resting on manoeuvres as he did addressing a conference of his Os.C. Battalions.

Regulations were tightened up as much as they could be, and parades were rather better attended than they had been. But under the Volunteer Enactment a volunteer was efficient who did his eighteen parades a year, ten of which could be done by

attending Battalion Camp at Port Dickson for a week in August. It was useless for adjutants to discharge men who failed to take any more than the minimum interest necessary to become efficient, for men were needed. We should never reach even a moderate standard of training unless the number of parades was greatly increased and we got down to some really serious work as Battalions.

I can remember a lecture given in Ipoh before war broke out by one of the Singapore brass hats in which he said: "Gentlemen, the Imperial War Council after a careful examination of the facts has laid down categorically that there does exist at the present time a potentially serious threat to the safety of this country". This may sound absurdly mild now. But at the time it was unusually plain speaking. Our unprepared state was not primarily the fault of the military. Government tried to listen impartially to both sides of the question, but vested interests shouted very loudly. Malaya was the largest producer in the world of rubber and tin, two vital commodities in war. The volunteers were too small in number to make much difference to the defence of Malaya anyhow. To enlarge the scope of their training would mean taking planters and miners away from important jobs. Let them stay there and continue manufacturing the sinews of war.

To give them their due, encouragement was lent to their views by that initial period now known as the 'Bore' War. This was going to be a war of attrition. The side would win which held out the longer, which had the greater material resources at its command. A little was achieved. By the end of 1939 compulsory parades had been increased to fifty a year for trained (sic) men and a hundred a year for recruits.

I used to spend every Christmas in Ipoh with Roger and Gwen Pitt. Roger was Senior Executive Engineer in Kinta and one of the most overworked men in Perak. While some critics of the Malayan administration like to argue that jobs in government were nice cushy sinecures Roger's was certainly not. He designed all the camps and supervised the construction of all the huts which sprang up in their thousands in rubber estates round Ipoh, in addition to his normal engineering duties. Gwen used to pack him off with sandwich lunches and he sometimes did as much as a twelve-hour day in the field, using his home as an office for work at night. In a country where married happiness is not the invariable rule it was pleasant to find a couple so devoted to each other, and so full of tolerance and understanding. In the three years they were in Ipoh I got to know them very well.

Gwen was one of the most competent women I have ever met. She was a good gardener and in a year after they moved into a new house on Tambun Road she turned a piece of waste land into a very fine garden. She and her sister Mrs. Scott, wife of Colonel Scott who became headmaster of Malacca High School and commanded the 4th (Malacca) Straits Settlements Volunteer Battalion, were both good tennis players and we played a lot together at the Ipoh Club until the end of 1940 after which war work became so acute for all of us that there was no time for anything else. She knew how to treat Asiatic servants properly and had kept her Malay chauffeur and Chinese boy for many years. Mat, the chauffeur, was an old warrior and looked after the car as if it was his own. Whenever it went into a garage for repair Mat watched over it by the hour and brought back to Gwen a full report about what had been done and whether it had been done properly. Her Chinese boy was one of the very few boys I know who could answer the telephone intelligently. In the backquarters I was known as 'Tuan Kurus' (the thin 'tuan'). Christmas parties at the Pitts' house were informal, cheerful entertainments with half a dozen mutual friends in for the evening, and Gwen's inventive genius made the evening as much like an English Christmas as possible.

Roger and Gwen were fortunate in being on leave when war came to Malaya and Roger was not able to get back in time. I stayed with them in Melbourne for a month shortly after I reached Australia. Roger had been invalided out of the service as his health had not been good in the tropics. But for a man of his engineering experience there was still plenty of prospect and they were both battling along as merrily as ever. I gave them the story of my escape. "Now I'm certain of it", said Gwen, "I always said you were born to be hanged!"

CHAPTER IX

THE NON-EUROPEAN RACES

NEARLY everyone agrees that the Malays are a really charming race to know. Their unfailing courtesy on all occasions takes the form neither of cold politeness nor of effusive apology, but of a correct and attentive attitude to those with whom they hold social intercourse. They completely lack on the one hand that mincing servility and on the other that flippant familiarity, shown by the native races in some other colonies. When a Malay speaks to you he treats you, with all due courtesy and deference, as an equal. He may cheerfully tell you that black is white, but he looks you in the face without flinching.

The Malays have been accused with some justification of being slack and idle, and certainly many of them lack the necessary moral fibre to get down seriously to a job of hard work. They prefer to spend their time in the Kampongs laughing, talking and eating ; in fact in exercising their social talents to while away long hours of leisure. Their language is admirably suited to this pastime, containing as it does a wealth of proverbs, 'kiasan' (flowery hyperboles of speech) and all manner of decorative forms of address. This has been the Malay's pattern of life for centuries, sitting cross-legged in the family circle making up 'pantuns' (impromptu quatrains of rhyming verse, each line being contributed by a different member of the group). These pantuns, or the more famous of them, have been handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. Many of them contain very subtle and often salacious double entendres.

The Malay eats when he feels hungry and sleeps when he feels tired. Life is occasionally diversified by a cock-fight, a bull-fight or a hunting trip to catch deer. Not for him are routine timetables and the dull tyranny of the clock. His attitude is : "I know people call us lazy. I know we are continually defrauded of what you think is our rightful place in the sun by these more industrious and hard-working Chinese. We don't mind." While for centuries their standard of living remained low they could satisfy all their bodily needs by a few weeks' work during the year, at times fixed by the 'pawang', the local medicine man, for sowing and harvesting rice and for collecting the edible fruits of their trees. In between whiles

they could play 'sepak raga', dance and sing. And who will say that in thus eschewing material progress they had not found at least a short cut along the road to happiness?

Temperamentally the Malays are phlegmatic in the extreme, not given to any display of emotion. I have never seen a Malay angry. Children never cry except when they are ill. Malays, too, are utterly unimpressed by any display of emotion on the part of others. When you find that a Malay has not done what he has expressly promised, and what you were relying on him to do, it is often difficult to avoid anger. Usually he is utterly unmoved by it: "Tuan sakit", he says, "the Tuan is ill", and leaves it at that.

The only way to get a Malay to do what you want him to do is to convince him beyond any doubt that such a course of action is necessary, often a difficult task requiring infinite patience and a profound understanding of his point of view. It has been said of the Malays, as of the Egyptian fellaheen, that you either get to like them or you get like them, and I have seen many Europeans unconsciously take their choice of these two alternatives.

Nowadays much of this is changed. The rapid growth of large prosperous townships has attracted many Malays within the orbit of modern bustling life, and it is surprising how with such an unsuitable background they take to it. Their ambitions are not high, and they still prefer sedentary work. Many becomes peons in offices, and boys and chauffeurs in European households. They required careful training, a slow lengthy business, but they often became good workers in the end. One of my most difficult jobs while commanding a platoon of volunteer Malays all recruited from a local Kampong was to find them jobs. Most of them were unemployed and looked to me to find them work as a sort of *quid pro quo* for their joining the battalion. I used to get two or three letters a day—often written in the most appalling Malay. I remember one addressed to:—Tuan Bluntia Officer ('Bluntia' was the sender's best attempt at 'Volunteer')! I used to keep in touch with local departments and try and snap up a vacancy for a peon or a messenger whenever one occurred, but it was not always easy to avoid giving them the impression that their confidence was misplaced.

I have already touched on the social implications of this vast change in the environment of the Malays, and will not elaborate it further. It is worth mentioning that the Malays have never been tribal in the African sense, and that even now they do no coolie or organized labour except in the rice growing areas

organized on a communal basis, so that the problem is not so acute as it is in many other parts of the colonial Empire.

The Malay is an orthodox but not very strict Mahommedan. He is not thorough about observance of the five daily hours of prayer enjoined upon his followers by the Prophet. But in a predominantly Malay district most attend Friday morning prayer. The 'bang', the call to prayer, is intoned by the 'bilal' standing on a platform on top of the mosque. I have often heard this at the big Ubadiyah Mosque at Kuala Kangsar. The service is conducted by the 'imam' assisted by the 'khatib', the congregation facing the 'mimbar', a niche built into the wall indicating the direction of Mecca. The service is in Arabic which is not understood by Malays, but its value to them is no more questionable than the value of Latin masses said in the Roman Catholic churches in Britain to-day. The Mahommedan religion is full of dogma and injunctions based on the Koran giving rules for the orthodox observance of the faith. Two aspects of religious doctrine are stressed, the outward and devotional attitude to faith (imam) and the inward and spiritual revelation of truth (islam). Of paramount importance is the insistence on the unity and indivisibility of God. 'Allah ilahi 'ul-illah', 'Allah is one God', and any idea of the Christian trinity of godhead is abhorrent to the true Moslem.

The Mahommedan calendar is ten days shorter in the year than ours. It concludes with Ramathan, the Fasting Month, during which no strict Mahommedan may eat anything between sunrise and sunset. Special dispensation may be obtained from the chief Kathi by sick or old persons, and children are exempt up to the 'umor baligh' (age of puberty). In districts like Kuala Kangsar where strict observance of the Fasting Month is enforced by law severe penalties are meted out to offenders. Malay police may arrest and the Kathi's court has power to imprison the offender in a pool of water up to his neck for a period up to two days: or more usually, in these days of enlightenment, to fine him. A really strict Mahommedan will not even swallow his saliva and Malay boys doing examinations during Ramathan bring small spittoons with them. The saliva may be swallowed if it is behind the teeth. No conjugal relations and no visits to places of entertainment are allowed during the Fasting Month.

The night before the rise of the new moon which heralds the breaking of the long fast is known as 'lailat'ul-kadir', the Night of Power. Mahommedans believe that it is the night on which the powers of darkness are lying in wait: it is a holy night full of terror on which even the angels fear to go abroad, and even

the trees in the forest bow down before Allah the Most Glorious and the Most High. To the devout of Islam it is a night of ceaseless prayer, of supplication for grace to avoid all temptation.

Two days of feasting known in Malay as the Hari Raya Puasa, follow the appearance of the new moon. In every Malay house there are cakes of flour and sugar, rich salads and fruits. Housewives make curries of fish and chicken with lots of rice. They all put on their finest clothes. The festival spirit is everywhere. The younger ones bring gifts to their elders and ask their forgiveness for the sins of the past year. Abdul Kadir, son of Tuan Haji Mohamed Zain and a pupil in my science class, took me on one Hari Raya Puasa to see some friends in a Malay village near Ipoh.

The etiquette of calling on a Malay household demands a slow, cautious conversational approach and for some moments we talked of light matters. When the ice was broken they accepted me almost as one of them and we sat chatting away for hour after hour. They produced large starchy cakes and jellies which were good but very filling. Abdul Kadir's capacity was prodigious but I had a job to do justice to our host's kindness. By degrees the conversation turned on the prospects of war. Our host was a Forest Ranger and spoke, of course, only Malay. He was a most cultured gentleman and I was interested to hear what he had to say. "The Malay people," he said, "will always be loyal to the British. Make no mistake about that. If our enemies attack us we shall try to help you to defend us. Those whom you are training will fight well at your side. But at heart we are not a fighting race. We prefer the ways of peace. We do not believe in standing up always for our rights. If we allow others to do the work and make money it is not because we are idle. We like doing other things—talking, singing, making up verses. But please do not think that because we do not take kindly to some of your modern ways we are lazy good-for-nothings". I said: "What about the old days in Malaya, the days of Mahmoud Shah and the great Sultans of Malacca? Would you like to see those days back again?" "Those were stirring times", he replied, "men did great deeds. I have heard about them. I do not know." "No," he reflected, "now we are safe from our enemies. The British will look after us. I think we are better off now than we have ever been."

The young members of the party had made a cannon. A thick bamboo had been opened at the top and a small hole cut in one side. Some water was poured into it and it was propped up against the back of a chair. Bits of carbide were dropped in

down the barrel and the acetylene gas was touched off with a lighted match pushed through the hole. It went off with a loud bang. All the neighbours had thought of the same idea and it sounded as if an artillery barrage was being put up.

Mahommedanism came to Malaya with Arab traders in the palmy days of Malacca. When Malays embrace a new idea they do not discard the old, but superimpose one on top of the other, so that in their traditional ceremonies of birth, marriage, death, etc., there is abundant evidence of earlier Hindu and primitive animistic beliefs, traces of which still play an important part in the lives of the East Coast fishermen.

In 1940 I attended the wedding of Abdul Aziz who had been School Captain at Anderson School three years ago and was now in the Malayan Administrative Service. A full-dress Malay wedding is a colourful affair with traditional ceremonies borrowed from Islam, Hinduism and even further back still from the primitive animism of early Indonesian religions. It may last as long as eight days. But the pace of modern life, when the young bridegroom has probably got two days' leave from his European boss, is not conducive to prolonged festivity. In my time the ceremonies rarely lasted more than two days unless it was a royal wedding. Theoretically the arrangement of the match is still a matter solely for the parents of the two parties, and the young Malay is supposed to have seen nothing of his bride until they meet at the 'bersanding'. In practice he can usually exercise some choice in his future wife. He may have seen her when visiting a football match or a dancing party at a neighbouring village, looking surreptitiously through the chinks in the wall of the house. Moreover Malay girls through centuries of practice are experts in the art of 'main mata' (eye-play). To the parents, however, belongs the job of making the first official representations. The bridegroom's parents, scenting a match, visit the house where the girl lives. They are admitted after some hesitation, and slowly, evasively, with that flowery circumlocution so dear to the Malays they explain their mission although that is perfectly well understood already.

"You have here a beautiful garden."

"Yes. We have here a beautiful garden."

"It is like the Garden of Allah."

"What interest have you in the Garden of Allah?"

"It is a beautiful garden. We would fain hear more of the flowers that grow in it."

"There are many beautiful flowers in this garden."

"Some are more beautiful than others?"

"Perhaps."

"You have one flower that is the most beautiful of all, such that none can measure its beauty."

"I do not know but I will ask the gardener."

Eventually a match is arranged, the amount of the dowry payable by the bride's father is settled, and a day is fixed for the wedding. The wedding is celebrated in the bride's house and the friends of both families turn up in force. Sometimes there is simulated reluctance to admit the bridegroom's friends into the bride's house and a minor free fight takes place before they are let in. The bride is prepared by staining her fingers and toes with henna, though this custom is rapidly dying out; and other preparatory ceremonies like filing the bride's teeth and 'fringing' her hair have disappeared altogether. The 'akad nikah', the marriage contract setting out the names of the contracting parties, the date, and the amount of the dowry is then signed by representatives of both families in the presence of the Kathi. The 'belanja hangus' ('money to burn') is paid for the expenses of the wedding festivities. The 'bersanding' which follows is the ceremonial showing forth of the bride and bridegroom to the assembled company. They sit on a raised dais decorated with flowers and coloured bunting. They are dressed in their finest clothes chosen by their parents. The Malay bride I saw was most attractively dressed in a purple and gold sarong and a tight-fitting yellow satin coat. But Abdul Aziz's parents had made him wear European evening dress with a white waistcoat and black bow tie, which contrasted oddly with the rest of the colour scheme. The 'bersanding', the ceremony to which it was the custom to invite Europeans along with the other guests, lasted about three hours during which the bride and bridegroom sat perfectly still without talking. When it was over Malay cakes and salads were handed out to the guests who played and danced outside the house. They gathered round in a large circle and one man, an uncle of Abdul Aziz, started to 'main bersilat'. This is a dance imitating the art of fencing. The man squatted on his heels and kicking his legs out in front of him moved slowly round the circle, all the time jabbing forward and sideways with his arms as though thrusting with a rapier. By and by his challenge was accepted and a man from the crowd came forward and started the same thing facing him eight feet away. They circled round each other warily every now and then jumping in when they saw an opening. The show was acted more with a view to its theatrical effect than with the idea of scoring a symbolic victory. It delighted a highly appreciative audience who

laughed and applauded wildly every sally. It is a difficult dance to do properly and considerable skill is required to ring the changes on the three or four different forms of movement which are traditionally recognized. Any variation from these is not permitted and I have seen two inferior performers booted out of the arena by a critical Malay audience.

Before the guests left each of them was presented with a small plaited basket containing a hen's egg with a paper flower and stalk sticking out of it. This is the 'bunga telur', symbolising fertility. I saw Abdul Aziz' younger brother who had left the school six months before. "Isn't it time you were thinking of getting married, Ahmad?" I said. He smiled broadly and his glance swept the assembled company. One or two girls who had been trying a spot of 'main mata' looked hastily away. "That", he said, "depends on father's wishes."

You have already been shown the rather anomalous position of the Chinese in Malaya; officially they are a minority, but vastly in the majority in actual numbers wherever trade and industry went on throughout the country. A list of their various activities would be useless, since there was no enterprise of any importance with which they were not actively associated. Tin-mining, rubber broking, building and works contracting of all kinds, transport services, hotels, cinemas, all were carried on by Chinese. Corporate activities like market gardening, pig-keeping, fruit cultivation, dulang-washing, and fishing on the west coast were engaged in by 'kongsis' of Chinese run by rich towkays, who collared all the profits of an almost feudal system of capitalism. I have explained the different groups into which the Chinese race is divided. Chinese do not think of themselves as all of one race, they claim allegiance only to their family or 'kongsi'. A branch of the Malayan Civil Service, the Chinese Protectorate, existed partly for the purpose of protecting themselves from themselves, so to speak, of preventing the unbridled exploitation of their poorer brethren by rich towkays and landowners.

Many Chinese had small family businesses; market stalls, and retail shops selling food and all kinds of merchandise. At the other end of the scale were the big wholesalers who imported their stock from all over the world, and as time went on were competing more and more successfully with the big British firms, though they voluntarily accepted a big handicap in barring all Japanese goods in 1937.

Chinese make good artisans and technicians of all kinds. Many were employed in government technical departments. Some of the ornate woodcraft in Chinese temples is exquisite

in design and workmanship, and every town has many jobbing carpenters whose standard of work is as good as any in the world. Most of the semi-skilled labour in Malaya, joiners, fitters, painters, etc., was supplied by the Chinese.

The ethics of Chinese business methods have often been called in question, though I doubt if they are any worse than those of rival British firms. The Chinese are certainly astute business men. Related trades organized themselves into 'friendly' societies ostensibly for the purpose of free exchange of information benefiting their businesses, but frequently developing into 'rings' and other commercial rackets for creating black markets and keeping prices up. These organizations flourished in spite of the watchfulness of the Food Control Officers and the Chinese Protectorate when prices were controlled as a war measure, to the detriment mainly of the poorer Chinese in the towns.

The Chinese have an elaborate system of book-keeping and credit almost incomprehensible to a European, a system, it seems, in which financial considerations are intimately bound up with social implications involving 'face'. Big business deals are approached gradually and circumspectly through intermediaries who meet and discuss the matter at length on behalf of their mentors. The conclusion of a deal is cemented with 'kumshaw', an exchange of costly presents between the contracting parties in which all the intermediaries benefit. Chinese have a well-developed money sense, though they do not deserve the stigma sometimes placed on them of being 'the Jews of the East.' They can be really generous and altruistic on occasions. The rank and file of the big European banks in Malaya were entirely Chinese.

It can readily be understood how much Malaya owed to the hard-working efficiency and thriftiness of the Chinese. The vast majority were law-abiding and as honest as it is possible to be in a world where fear and mistrust are all too prevalent. Their few illegal activities took the form of routine offences against revenue and excise laws, rather than crimes of malice.

For two years I lived in a government bungalow in Ipoh with the Preventive Officer of the Customs Dept., whose job it was to suppress illicit samsu distilling and opium smoking in the district. Samsu is a potent alcoholic spirit made by distilling fermented rice-mash and much favoured by Indian labourers on rubber estates and elsewhere. The manufacture and sale of toddy for the Indians was a government monopoly. It was cheap but not so potent as the illicit samsu which was preferred by the Indian when he could get it.

The distillers were always Chinese. Their lot was a hard one. If they distilled on a scale big enough to be really remunerative sooner or later they were generally given away to the Preventive Officer or to one of his Outdoor Officers by an informer. The informers were given a reward by the courts after information laid by them had led to a successful prosecution. The reward varied with the severity of the sentence. It was necessary to gauge it accurately for if it was too high the informer made a comfortable living out of giving less information than he could if he tried, while if it was too low the game was not worth the candle. Some informers came out of malice or spite but the majority made a regular living out of rewards and were more like private detectives. Many of them no doubt indulged in a little blackmail at the distillers' expense.

When information had been laid a night for a raid was fixed by the Preventive Officer, who was given the full powers of a Police Officer to arrest and prosecute under the Customs Enactment.

Raids were sometimes exciting. The P. O. took me on one or two of his. They needed careful planning and, as the army manuals say, resolute execution. The distillers were no fools and made it their business to know the movements of the Preventive Officer as far as possible. Even the Malay police in the villages had been known to tip them off when he was coming, for a small monetary consideration. Every distiller knew the P.O.'s car by sight. Once we deceived them by using my car, but even then they were too quick. When we reached the small shed where they had been distilling, the Chinese, warned of our approach, had run away, but we found and smashed up a large condenser and distilling vat, as well as several jars full of samsu.

It was illegal for anyone to distil samsu, be in possession of samsu on which duty had not been paid, be in possession of distilling apparatus, or have more than six gallons of rice-mash : (rice-mash was used as food for pigs). The informer was taken on the raid and was dropped when he had pointed out the place where the distillation was being done. Woe betide him if his identity became known to the distiller, after which his value as an informer rapidly sank to nil. The ideal was to catch the distiller 'sa-tengah masak', in flagrante delicto. If not, his house was turned upside down for any signs of distillation apparatus. The Chinese were ingenious and used to disguise their condensers and ovens as innocent-looking rubbish bins but the preventive branch were up to most of the tricks of the trade. Distillation was often done not in a house but in a cave

or some quiet spot. A little quiet stalking was then called for. A canny distiller would place guards along likely approaches to his hide-out and the P.O. sometimes arrived on the scene of a big still in full blast to find that the bird had flown. Then it was the devil's own job to prove possession.

I have mentioned opium-smoking. It was an offence to smoke any opium other than government opium without being a registered smoker, to sell or buy opium except at a government chandu shop, to fail to notify the death of a registered smoker (his card was immediately snapped up by an unregistered smoker) or to smoke except in a recognised smoking saloon. It was a constant war between thousands of unregistered smokers and a small preventive staff and the smokers usually won. The P.O. reckoned that there were many more unregistered habitual smokers than registered smokers in Ipoh. The preventive staff usually concentrated on catching the smugglers and sellers of Siamese opium and on the keepers of unregistered saloons. There is no doubt that its job was made very difficult by the fact that registered smoking was allowed. If all opium-smoking had been forbidden the work would have been much easier, though it would have been very unfair on the registered smokers.

To become a registered smoker it was necessary for the applicant to get a certificate signed by a European doctor. Some doctors only gave certificates when the applicant was an old addict and obviously needed it. Others gave it whenever the applicant was a habitual smoker on the grounds that if he did not get government opium he would certainly get non-government stuff which was much worse for his health.

One of the government chandu shop clerks in Ipoh was a friend of mine. He was Lo Ah King, father of Lo Guan Seng. Needless to say he was not a smoker himself. He was a man of intelligence and culture and he had a fine family typical of the best Chinese families in Malaya. He had five sons and one daughter. The eldest son Lo Guan Hock had got a Grade I Cambridge Certificate but just failed to get a Raffles Scholarship from King Edward VII School, Taiping. Ah King had only just joined government service and could not then afford to send him there as a paying student. He got a job in the Posts and Telegraphs Department with good prospects but of the slow plodding kind involving work well below his mental capacity. He was doing well in it but he used to tell me after a hard day's work at the counter that it was all he could do to keep going and live down the tedious monotony of it. He got married about six months before war broke out. The

wedding was accompanied by great celebration at Ah King's house, and even Ah King himself, a total abstainer like the rest of his family, so far unbent as to sip a little brandy in response to my proposals of health to Mr. and Mrs. Lo Guan Hock.

The next three sons were all in turn in my classes in Anderson School. The second son, Guan Kim, was no particular good in class though he was a hard worker. But he had plenty of sound common sense. He and Guan Seng joined the Volunteers when they left school, and he was in Major Cockman's X company during the fighting in Johore. Guan Seng was in some ways the most outstanding of Ah King's sons. He had a tremendous capacity for hard work and for overcoming difficulties as they arose, which is rare in an Asiatic. He represented the school at most games, and gradually gained a quiet, respectful confidence in himself which made him a reliable and competent School Prefect and sergeant in the Corps. This confidence in turn enabled him to overcome the Asiatic's mistrust, based on misunderstanding, of others, particularly of Europeans, with the result that he made friends amongst Chinese, Malay and Indian boys very easily, and was unusually frank and straightforward with members of the European staff. Although he was not clever he had plenty of initiative, and to his surprise he got a Grade I Cambridge Certificate. His mother wanted him to get a job as soon as he left school but I persuaded Ah King to send him to the Technical School to do civil engineering. It is usually the schoolmaster who advises the parent against sending his son for higher education, but I felt that Guan Seng deserved the chance which Guan Hock had missed through no fault of his own. Ah King's only daughter Guan Lee, a tall, very graceful girl, married an assistant master at the Anglo-Chinese School, Kampar. I used to meet them from time to time at school football matches.

But I was interested in them as a family rather than as individuals. The Chinese beyond doubt have the most highly developed and civilised domestic system in the world. Their family life is more organised and complete than that of any other nation. It is not a static anachronism. It has been evolving steadily for four thousand years. Western culture, which has had so disruptive an effect on the weak social systems of most coloured races, has had little effect on it, even in a country like Malaya which is not the real home of the Chinese and in which the influence of twentieth century materialism has been very strong. Because of this strong family system

China has never been conquered. She has assimilated all races which have lived for long in her, and unless the Japanese are driven out of China piecemeal this will be their fate after a century or two. The rich Chinese towkay may build himself a marble palace but he does not forget his ancestors, and builds shrines and says prayers in their honour. He sends his sons to an English school and gives them the finest education that money can buy. But such culture is absorbed into the framework of their family life.

A Chinese has three names. He is customarily addressed by the last two, which are the equivalent of Christian names. His first name is his 'family' name, that of the social unit to which he owes unquestioning loyalty and obedience. All the Chongs, no matter how far and wide they are scattered over the world, are one family or 'kongsi': similarly for the Ongs, the Chiews, the Boons and so on. They are perhaps comparable with the clans of Scotland, though the ties that hold them together are much more sacred and binding. In each locality there is one head of each family. His word is law and his decisions cannot be disputed. No Chinese boy brought up in the proper family tradition would ever think of questioning his authority. Chinese boys respect their own fathers, uncles, and older relations to a degree almost unbelievable to us. Guan Seng would no more tell a lie to his father than he would kill his best friend. I often went round to Ah King's house and talked to him. He was a kind, understanding and rather lenient father who let his children do what they wanted to do to a very large extent. But they never took advantage of this and never ran the slightest risk of incurring his displeasure. When Guan Hock wanted to get married Ah King's permission had to be sought through the good offices of an intermediary in case he should disapprove of his son's choice.

The younger ones must ask the father's permission to sit down with him before they eat food at the same table. This is a convention but it is just as important as introductions in English society. The father of the family has many duties. He is in honour bound to support all members of his family financially if they need it, even to the extent of letting them live in his house. He demands no recompense. They are his own flesh and blood, and if he can help them when they cannot help themselves he does so. This has unfortunate results with the present economic structure of society. Promising Chinese officials in good well-paid jobs often have a great struggle to make both ends meet because they are sponged on by all their impecunious relatives. But this is not how it appears to them.

It would not occur to them for one moment to throw off their incumbents. A Chinese well-known in Kuala Lumpur for his public life had a brother who was a rickshaw puller. Both had jobs and neither demanded anything of the other. But sometimes the rickshaw puller after work would enter his brother's rich mansion and sit down perfectly at ease. They would talk together on terms of perfect equality; neither saw anything in the least unusual in their respective positions in life. Marriage between people of the same family, *i.e.*, with the same first names, even though they may be very distant cousins, is never allowed.

The system has other disadvantages. It has prevented the Chinese achieving any sense of national unity, at all events until Japanese aggression produced Marshal Chiang Kai Shek. For centuries China produced no outstanding leaders, and even today her greatest trouble is that she has not enough of them. The system encourages that abstract, reflective philosophy which is characteristic of the Chinese and of which Mr. Lin Yu Tang is so able an exponent. It does not make for the progress of free thought along scientific lines. But it has carried men with a fine culture through four thousand years of suffering and hardship, their forbears having lived for generations a life of agrarian peasantry never far from the starvation line, each family energetically cultivating its own little area in the impoverished soil of the river valleys of China, often more or less cut off by geography from the rest of the world. It is easy to see how their system of living came about.

Statements about the Chinese as a race are apt to be misleading, for in my opinion they deviate more widely both above and below their accepted standards of intellect and morality than does any other race. This is, I believe, the most significant fact about the Chinese, and all generalizations about their behaviour need examination in the light of it. It was not unusual to find very clever Chinese boys passing their Cambridge Certificate exams at the age of fourteen, and yet I doubt if you will find anywhere else men so dumb and unintelligent as some rickshaw coolies. I doubt if the average intelligence of the Chinese is any higher than that of Malays and Indians. In English schools we were dealing with a select five per cent of the school age population, and if my contention is correct you would expect to find more Chinese in the well-above-average intelligence groups than other races who cluster more closely round the average. I cannot explain why this should be so; perhaps differences in psychological make-up account for it.

Again, some Chinese are absolutely reliable and trustworthy ; their spoken word is binding on them and they will go to any lengths not to break their word of honour once given ; some others will let you down on every occasion without a qualm or a word of explanation.

Emotionally, too, the Chinese vary greatly. Normally they conceal their feelings fairly well, but by no means with that poker-face inscrutability which is popularly ascribed to them. It is usually not difficult to discover what they are thinking. Some have an almost puckish sense of humour ; others are more introverted and serious-minded, and though they appreciate a good joke if you make one they rarely attempt one themselves.

The family system I have discussed lends itself to either austerity or frivolity according to the whim of the father. For some it is a never-ending round of gaiety and indulgence. The majority of Chinese, like Ah King, take a middle course with the emphasis on clean, plain living. While some fathers I know bring up their children in an atmosphere of strait-laced Victorianism which appears to our eyes prudish to a degree. It is no hypocritical pose on their part. I knew a boy who had just left Anderson School showed acute embarrassment (for no good reason) when at the wedding of his elder brother I made a harmless, light remark : " It's about time you started thinking of getting married, isn't it ? "

The Chinese worship their ancestors. But in Malaya in their constant strife for improved material standards of living and their relentless pursuit of the more mundane affairs of life many of them have become agnostic and pay only lip service to reverence for spirits and devils, and the awesome polytheistic beliefs of their ancestors. Chinese funerals are lavish affairs in which huge papier mâché models of all the deceased's possessions are ceremonially burnt to the musical accompaniment of tambourines and flutes, so that he may continue to enjoy their use in the world to come. Spirits are propitiated with burning joss-sticks, shrines of well-to-do towkays are illuminated with rows of fairy lights. But it must be admitted that the necessity for impressing the neighbours is nowadays at least as important in Chinese eyes as the pacification of malevolent spirits.

Some Chinese boys became Christians, taking their religion seriously and often being admitted to holy orders in Malaya. These boys went usually to one of the mission schools where religious as well as secular instruction was given. It should be mentioned that though there was no objection to the

proselytising of Chinese and Indians, missionaries were expected in practice not to attempt the conversion of Malays. The mission schools provided nearly half the English secondary education in Malaya. They claimed that no pressure was brought to bear on the boys to become Christians, but this was not always true. I know of more than one case where boys threatened with superannuation were told that they could be retained only if they became Christians, and also of an Asiatic master axed in the slump who was told that he might be re-engaged on the staff if he embraced Christianity. The mission schools did a fine job of work, but it is necessary to record that abuses of this kind were bound to occur from time to time.

Sports Day at Anderson School was always followed with a staff dinner held in one of the Chinese restaurants in the town. Mr. Lee Mun Yui made all the arrangements and it was regarded as an occasion for a certain amount of good-natured ha-ha at the expense of the European masters who were popularly supposed (1) not to be able to use chopsticks, (2) not to like bird's-nest soup, (3) not to know what Yam Seng means. Chinese dinner is at one and the same time a gastronomic ordeal and no mean feat of social acrobatics. Participants are seated at a round-table. In front of each is a large bowl and several smaller bowls containing sauces. Endless courses are placed on the table one after another on large dishes, everyone selecting a choice morsel after careful probing with chopsticks. There is no grabbing, which would be the height of bad taste. Shark's fin or bird's-nest soup (sometimes both) is followed by perhaps fifteen fish and meat courses. The food is appetising and deliciously cooked. A whole pig is brought in with the crackling fried in fat and cut into small sections. It is then removed and reappears some six courses later as roast sucking pig. The finish of the meal is signalled by the arrival of the sweet, usually stewed fruit.

Every five minutes the entertainment is punctuated by cries of 'Yam Seng' (bottoms up) whereupon everyone drains his glass and places it upside down on the table. Yam Seng is always done in brandy. It is considered just permissible though highly decadent to mix soda-water with it. A Chinese dinner has none of that air of mass gluttony associated with a Bump Supper. It is a dignified, decorous affair. Though some latitude is permitted it is very bad form to get indecently drunk. Finally bowls of weak tea are handed round and hot, steaming towels are produced for the perspiring guests. Tea and towels have marvellous revivifying powers and are grasped eagerly

by those who may be feeling the effects of an inelegant over-sufficiency. Ineffectual attempts at after-dinner speeches are made and the party breaks up.

Most of the Indians in the country are Tamils, who until unrestricted immigration from India was stopped came into the country attracted by good labour prospects, worked for three or four years and were then repatriated. Most of the coolie labour on rubber estates is Tamil. But many Tamils are permanent or semi-permanent settlers in the country, and there are more educated Tamils in government service, especially in the Education Department, than Chinese or Malays. Many were Roman Catholics.

The Tamil is temperamentally less stable and phlegmatic than the Chinese and the Malay. The only boys who ever lost their tempers and went for each other in schools were Tamils, but it is perhaps a little unfair to thousands of law-abiding men to say that Indians were responsible for most of the crimes of violence in the country. Though they lack those staid gentlemanly qualities which characterize the Malay, and those deeper, subtle strains of character which command admiration for the Chinese, they are a hard-working people who are playing their part in the development of Malaya.

The Sikhs in Malaya are a tractable but proud people, faithful to their own national ideals and preserving intact their own culture. Many are employed as police. The Sikhs carried on the business of money-lending, and the very unkempt and bedraggled-looking Sikh 'jaga' you see sleeping on a charpoy outside the doors of all big shops in the town at night is probably owed an average of half a year's salary by each of the Chinese clerks in the shop.

Before the war the most astonishing thing about the Asiatic races in Malaya was the way in which they all lived peacefully together. Quarrels arising out of racial antagonisms were almost unknown, an amazing thing when you consider how closely interwoven their lives were. Those who deplore the effects of British administration in Malaya might remember this.

I have given an account of how the various Asiatic communities appear to European eyes. In conclusion, we might give the Asiatics a short break and see what they think of Europeans. The Malay is prone to judge the tuan by his conversation and his behaviour towards other Asiatics. He sets great store by the outward demeanour of a European, and does not usually try to see into the working of his mind, which he assumes to be more or less incomprehensible. Sufficient for him if the tuan be 'baik hati', literally 'good in heart'. He

is always polite and courteous to everyone by an instinct which is second nature to him. Rarely does he find a tuan who is so 'baik hati' that he can place his full confidence in him. He appreciates above all understanding and 'insaf', justice tempered with mercy, and upon this he places a very individual construction.

The Chinese are certainly the better judges of a European's character and his real worth. Above all they value in him consistent fairness without favouritism and one-sided discrimination, the consequence no doubt of their fiercely competitive struggles for a livelihood. They cannot understand why he does not usually bother to bargain in shops or haggle interminably before coming to an arrangement involving money. They are keen students of human nature: Lee Mun Yui and I used sometimes to chat about mutual European acquaintances in Ipoh, and I found that he revealed a very keen insight into their characters and that his opinion was often much better than mine.

Malays and Chinese both consider the English language an ugly-sounding one compared with their own. Malays complain that it has too many sibilant sounds, but they do not think it sounds as bad as Tamil, which, they say, must be the language spoken in hell.

Of all the races in Malaya the Tamils have the most profound respect for the 'tuan' and are the least aware of his faults, perhaps because they are the most concerned about creating a good impression themselves. The European manager of a rubber estate is treated normally with the most profound respect by his Tamil labour force, such respect as they would never give to one of their own race.

CHAPTER X

STEPPING UP FOR WAR

THE years 1940 and 1941 saw a gradual change-over from conditions in peace-time to conditions in war time, an attempt to find a formula for carrying on civilian life within a framework of military activity and under the constant threat of war. The process was never complete. It presented problems never before contemplated in how to make the best use of the limited manpower available, problems which were never wholly solved. So far as Volunteers were concerned I have already outlined the views of the two opposing schools of thought. Fortnightly week-end camps were started which were compulsory for all enrolled men. The military garrison in Singapore was strengthened. Headquarters Local Forces at Fort Canning, a peace-time organisation, was abolished and the Malaya Command was for administrative purposes split in two: Singapore Command and Northern Area Command with headquarters in Kuala Lumpur.

In the Perak Battalion of the F.M.S.V.F. a Signal Section was started which created a vacancy in one of the rifle companies. I was fished out of the obscurity of the Intelligence section and given a commission.

The rapid overrunning of Denmark and Norway by Germany and the invasion of Holland and Belgium gave a salutary jolt to complacency. Emergency regulations were brought into force and registration of all Europeans under forty-two years of age for military service became compulsory. Under these regulations all Volunteers were liable for two months continuous training during the year, subject to the right of appeal to a military tribunal. This question of exemptions became a more and more difficult one as time went on. No proper guidance was given to local man-power committees who in the absence of authority from higher up maintained a policy of *solvitur ambulando*. They were doing the best they could. There seemed nobody whose job it was right at the start to appreciate exactly what civilian services would have to be carried on in war time. I had a very competent Malay sergeant who had been a Volunteer for ten years, who in civilian life was a telephone engineer in the Posts & Telegraphs Department. He had done numerous courses at Port Dickson as I do not know

at what cost to government. It was tardily realised that in the event of war many technical Posts & Telegraphs Department personnel would have to stay at their civilian jobs and keep telephone communications going, and six months before war broke out he was discharged from the Volunteers, much to his annoyance, all his training wasted. This was no isolated case. The problem of the correct use of man-power was never seriously thought of until it was far too late.

The main trouble was, I think, that the role of the Volunteers in an emergency had never been clearly defined. In peace-time they had been occasionally called out to assist the police in maintaining law and order, once in a small Chinese riot in Penang, and once during the coal strikes at the Batu Arang Colliery near Kuala Lumpur. It was assumed in many quarters that in war time their main job would be the preservation of internal security. The nuisance value of the native population was an unpredictable quantity. If we expected a long static campaign a shortage of rice might cause serious rioting.

We were probably trained sufficiently well already to form an adequate military police force. But it soon became obvious that we would be required to fulfil a much more important role in the defence of Malaya. With the collapse of the Low Countries and then France in June it was clear that England would be so preoccupied with the defence of her own island that, with the best will in the world, she would be in no position to send troops to the defence of outlying parts of the British Empire. We were to get Australian and Indian troops to bring the garrison up to what was considered sufficient strength for purposes of defence.

Even the role of the volunteers was not finally fixed. At the beginning of 1941 the officers of the 1st (Perak) Bn. did a reconnaissance in Penang when it was thought that we should be taking over the south coast defences of the island. A month later a similar reconnaissance was done in Kedah when it was thought that we would have a support role in the North. Finally Brigadier Moir prevailed on Headquarters, Malaya Command, and we were given back the role for which we had been earmarked some time before, the defence of aerodromes, bridges and other vital points along the lines of communication in Perak. The idea of one battalion taking on this herculean task in an area the size of Yorkshire may cause some surprise, but such was the case.

At the beginning of July the F.M.S.V.F. were called up for the first period of two months continuous training. Each battalion was embodied for training in its own State. Although

our exact war role was still undefined there was plenty of work to do during the embodiment. It was long overdue. The Brigadier sent a typical message to all troops which went down very well indeed. He spoke simply of the need for this training and of the period of 'growing pains' through which we should have to pass.

There were growing pains all right. The cooks were in trouble right from the start. They were Volunteers just as much as anyone else, and they were learning to cook just as others were learning to shoot. Only for them it wasn't a mock battle; it was the real thing. For the first two weeks or so meals were invariably late and almost uneatable. As one wag put it 'Never had so many waited so long for so little'. The cooks had a difficult job. There were four separate other ranks messes each with its own diet sheet and hours of meals: Malay, Chinese, European and Eurasian. By the end of two months, however, the cooks had learnt their lesson in the hard school of experience and were producing good results. We could at least exist in the field, even if we could not yet fight there.

The 1st (Perak) Battalion was embodied in the Ipoh Turf Club. It was a spacious building as big as an aeroplane hangar, and above all cool even in the heat of the day. The whole of the ground floor was turned into a mess room for all other ranks. Seats were removed from the grandstand and camp beds installed to fit in all Europeans. Non-Europeans were housed in the long row of stables behind the clubhouse. These were not as bad as they may sound. They were concrete boxes with a tiled roof and held four fairly comfortably. The main trouble was dust until the end of the first month when we got some rain. There was no proper accommodation for officers who were split up all over Ipoh. The C.O., Colonel J. Staley, and Bn. HQ Officers were in a house near the Club, Os. C. Coys. in the new European Mess which had been one of the Sultan's subsidiary palaces in Ipoh and which he had given for the use of the volunteers at the outbreak of war, and the rest of us three miles away at the old peace-time headquarters.

I had a European platoon, composed mostly of miners from the Kinta districts immediately south of Ipoh. They were a very fine crowd indeed; the more work they had to do the more they liked it. They were all as keen as mustard, being thankful like the rest of us that at long last something was being done to improve the efficiency of the Volunteers. There was sergeant 'Billy' Anderson, a first-rate man who carried the whole platoon with him. Our brightest effort was a night compass march in pitch darkness through a rubber estate. Anderson

and I were in front of the platoon as we were moving forward. Suddenly we both stepped into air at the same moment and landed at the bottom of a deep silt pit, I on top of him. This laid him out completely for the time being. When he recovered sufficiently to speak he utterly refused to be supported home and tried to fall the platoon in. The platoon thought otherwise and he found himself yanked off his feet and carried off forcibly. Before war came he and I had both been transferred to other units and I saw him only for one week during the whole campaign, when we were on coast defence at Port Dickson. We should have done well with more men like him.

There was L/C Price 'the toughest Lewis-gunner in the battalion', whose favourite racket was to volunteer for all the hardest jobs and fatigues that were going in order to enjoy a really good grouse afterwards. There was Arthur Job, even taller and thinner than myself, about whom it was said that he could take cover behind his rifle. He was afterwards commissioned in the R.A.F. We were the largest European platoon in camp, and there were no lead-swingers.

The first month of the embodiment was devoted to individual training and here the principal difficulty was lack of modern weapons and equipment. Our equipment was 1908 pattern webbing, and although quite serviceable it was large and unnecessarily bulky compared with the modern type. We had no Bren guns and although it was rumoured that my platoon was to go over to Bren Guns in 1941 nothing ever came of it. We had Lewis Guns on a scale of two per platoon. So far as warfare in Malaya went they were only less serviceable than Bren Guns in that they were rather less mobile, especially in the hands of an Asiatic gunner.

The greater part of our weapon training was on the rifle. Here we rather fell between two stools. Precious hours of training were spent on the niceties of rifle fire control and discipline ('up—one—two—three—four—five—down') and it looked as if attempts were being made to bring our standard of rapid fire up to the level of the 'Old Contemptibles' of 1914, whose fire was so accurate that the Germans thought they were up against some new form of machine-gun. Actually although everyone fired his annual course in rifle, L.M.G. and revolver we had not got enough ammunition and we averaged second class. What was not realised was that this was perfectly good enough for Malaya, where the average target was to be at about twenty-five yards range. Too much time was wasted on sight-setting, aiming and firing at 300 yards. Nobody (except the Japanese) thought of preparing a syllabus of weapon training

which took into consideration the peculiarities of the terrain in which we were going to fight. Many of our senior officers had had distinguished war careers and thought of battle entirely in terms of the 1914-1918 vintage. Naturally and inevitably they had an almost hallowed reverence for trench warfare. Some of the lessons were applicable, others were not. I am not blaming them a bit. In default of guidance from higher up what could they do? Many of our officers had been regular officers in France, who had come under the Geddes axe after the Great War and had settled in Malaya as planters, miners, etc. No discredit attaches to them if the only methods of warfare they knew were twenty years out of date.

The Officers' Mess was inclined to be sticky. It was held together largely under the strong personality of Colonel Staley. But underneath the surface petty jealousies grew in an atmosphere of icy politeness and cynical aloofness. Tempers were quick. Storms in a teacup blew up and subsided equally suddenly. I suppose the truth of the matter was that we were still thinking of ourselves for what we really were: civilians brought together fortuitously in an emergency. Our ages and our interests were too divergent for us to find much in common. The courageous ones who tried to instil a more friendly atmosphere into the mess did not always succeed. One person's sense of humour was not always the same as another's.

Captain X: (to Captain Y): "I couldn't help seeing your company on exercises to-day, John."

Captain Y: "Oh yes?"

Captain X: "God. If I had your lot I'd make 'em throw their rifles in the river."

Captain Y: "Oh, yes?"

Captain X: "Yes. And not let go of them either."

This was admittedly childish. There was an unfortunate amount of backbiting and unhealthy rivalry, which I could not help contrasting later with the Officers' Mess of a regular battalion with which I did an attachment. There the atmosphere was one of friendliness and if there were any 'raspberries' to be handed out they were kept out of the mess.

I would be doing a great disservice to many fine officers in our mess if I gave the impression that this sort of attitude was universal. It was not. The behaviour of only a few officers suffices to create this feeling of disunity. Many regretted it and took no part in it. If a popularity vote could have been taken in the battalion Major H. J. Cockman would have been easily top. 'Cocky' had been Chairman of the Kinta Sanitary Board for many years and had done more for

the Perak Battalion than any other man. His knowledge and understanding of the Malays was perfectly astonishing, with the result that his company was easily the best in the battalion. Cocky was always outwardly calm and never got angry or raised his voice unduly—qualities which rank highly in the opinion of Malaya. He knew how to make them like work and at the end of two embodiments had a company well-trained, so far as conditions permitted, even by European standards. Above all, he never spared himself.

Another good officer was Captain W. G. Scott, an expert machine-gunner and a natural leader of men. He was never really given his head until after the outbreak of war in Malaya when he took over the command of a company of Asiatic troops and was later appointed Welfare Officer. A real fighter himself he did as much as anyone to keep up the morale of troops under very trying conditions. He was, I think, one of the very few officers who did realize the limitations of our training methods and had some idea of what might be in store for us.

Our training officer was Major J. Phelps, seconded from the Dogra Regiment to the Perak Battalion for the period of our embodiment. I have exhausted a number of superlatives, in describing the officers already named. To say that they really bore no comparison as officers to Major Phelps would be only to do him justice. His are the only sand-table lectures I have ever been able to listen to for an hour and be as interested at the end as I was at the beginning. He had, he told me later, made a special study of Army lecturing and he was quite first-rate. He ran an Officers' Course for all subalterns and his lectures covered such divergent subjects as fighting patrols, movement of troops by train and lorry, enciphering and deciphering of messages, and man management. His lecture on man management, a difficult enough subject for anyone to 'put across' in a talk, was full of wisdom and humour, a subject about which, if I can judge from his treatment of us junior officers, he knew more than anyone else I have ever met. He had a kind of laughing seriousness which kept you guessing the whole time. He had a fund of illustrative stories and you were never quite sure until right at the end which way they were meant to be taken. He fitted in perfectly in the Officers' Mess and if he saw any of the difficulties I have briefly analysed he gave no sign of it. He knew every officer by name and quite a number of the W.Os. and senior N.C.Os. too after the first week or two. He would spend hours sitting in his tent handing out advice to junior officers on every conceivable aspect of their work. He had that rare faculty of giving his

whole attention to you and making you feel that for the time being you were absolutely the centre of the stage. His popularity in the mess was evident from the amount of hand-shaking he had to do when he turned up again for the second embodiment in 1941. His nickname in the battalion was 'Verbal Orders', a tribute to the excellence of his earlier lectures.

I did hear on rather unreliable authority that he was caught by the Japanese in Borneo or Sarawak. We thought a lot of him. I often wondered what he really thought of us.

We followed up our weapon training with platoon and company training programme and finally with two battalion schemes. One of these was a re-enactment of the legend of Princess Hula-Hula who (if I am not deceived) was abducted and incarcerated by her wicked uncle ; she was rescued by a large force personally commanded by her faithful consort. Our version of the story did not quite work out this way. The Princess (a Malay sergeant dressed up in sarong and baju) got shifted about the countryside from one house to another with bewildering rapidity and eventually got lost. The perimeter defence was too good for the attacking company which failed to penetrate to her virgin solitude.

It was a night show and my platoon was on outpost. We captured some prisoners and I can remember Price holding the opposing company commander by the scruff of his neck and whispering hoarsely : " What shall we do with this ? " The officers fought the battle over again on the sand-table next day and the umpires professed themselves pleased with the results. It was, in spite of the frivolous general narrative, an interesting scheme and one of the best ever carried out by the battalion. It did not suffer from too much preliminary rehearsal which destroyed the value of many other battalion exercises in which I have taken part.

In the six months following the first embodiment for training of the F.M.S.V.F. the political situation in the Far East deteriorated. A spineless government in Indo-China under orders from Vichy had handed over bases to Japan, and it looked as if the balloon might go up almost any time. It was therefore decided that the 1941 embodiment would be held at the beginning of the year. We were called up at the beginning of February. We did not go into the Turf Club. It was thought preferable to hold the training under conditions more nearly approaching what we might expect in war and we went under canvas in Sultan Abdul Jalil Camp about half a mile from Anderson School. Another reason for this may

have been the fact that the Perak government made half a million dollars revenue a year out of race meetings in Ipoh.

It was really unfortunate that our war role was only decided in time to give us a week at our actual war stations. However, a week's training in the field is better than nothing. It showed clearly that one company and two machine-gun sections is not sufficient, as a company commander put it, 'for the outward, inward and upward defence' of an aerodrome with a perimeter three miles long. In practice we concentrated on outward defence, and schemes against parachute landings were carried out with one company retained at headquarters to provide the 'parachutist' enemy. The parachutists nearly always won, as they knew the country as well as we did and there was ample cover for them to move through. An umpire would arrive at our aerodrome headquarters in the rubber and would say: "We have just had a report that two hundred parachutists landed twenty minutes ago in this area." This was local colour allowing for the degree of exaggeration expected from the average Malay villager. It was probably one platoon. We had everything taped as far as possible and the mobile platoon usually got off in its lorry in under three minutes. The difficulty was to find them when you got there. Aerodrome defence is a highly complicated business requiring very careful co-ordination between different units. It has been worked out with great precision now, and any attempt on my part to give an account of it would sound like Cæsar's invasion of Britain.

At the beginning of 1941 large reinforcements had reached Malaya from Australia and India. The coast defences of Singapore Island had been brought up to what was considered adequate strength. The A.I.F. had taken over Johore and the south-east coast, and there were British and Indian regiments in Kedah near the Thai border, also at Kota Bahru in Kelantan. Ancillary units of all descriptions straddled the lines of communications for five hundred miles up and down the country. There was an Australian Motor Transport unit in Ipoh. Ipoh was in fact one enormous transit camp for the new armies and in spite of the erection of large hatted camps in rubber estates round the town the demand for accommodation was still acute. Most of the big buildings were taken over. Schools make ideal barracks and two of the three big secondary schools in Ipoh, the Anglo-Chinese School and ourselves, were commandeered by the military.

With the appearance of masses of regular troops in Malaya the old complacency born of ignorance and inertia was replaced

by another more insidious form of the disease. We understood something of the powers that threatened us but flocks of armoured cars and Bren carriers induced in us a false sense of security. The danger was real but we had saved ourselves by our own efforts. (We even tried tentatively to save Thailand by our example). At last we were safe. Japan had missed the bus. If she had attacked in 1940 it would have been all up with us; then we were weak and unprepared to resist aggression. Now she had missed her Big Chance. We were strong. At the first hint of trouble we should be up in Singgora within a few hours, and in Bangkok after a day or two. We were safe at last. "There is now no question of any enemy cake-walking down the peninsula," one Singapore brass hat said. "Although," he grudgingly admitted, "if a big enemy force can mass against us we may have some hard fighting to do to hold it in the north until we can get sufficient reinforcements to liquidate it." We had at last become war-minded.

It would be entirely wrong to accuse Malaya of suffering still from the old tidapathy. The last lingering illusions were soon dispelled in the smoke of monstrous engines of war in every village. You could not walk through any village without seeing on every side signs of military activity. Lorries were busy loading or unloading military stores. Parties of engineers and coolies rushed about in vehicles covered with camouflage netting. Carriers haunted rubber estates. Petrol dumps sprang up in improbable places. Everywhere you went there were officers out on reconnaissance.

There is no doubt that the military were doing their very hardest. So were all the other fighting and defence organisations. Local defence corps were raised in every State, armed and equipped with anything that lay to hand, and trained in their spare time. Auxiliary medical services were formed under the aegis of the Health Department. Women volunteered for service and trained as nurses, ambulance drivers and canteen workers. The work done by the women both before and during the campaign deserves the very highest praise. Morning bridge and coffee at eleven o'clock became a thing of the past. With negligibly few exceptions they took up war work with real enthusiasm. Complaints I have heard that they did very little to help are so much arrant nonsense. They trained hard and did a very fine job of work. I am thinking of Asiatic as well as European women. Mrs. Chong Tak Nam, wife of a well-known doctor in Ipoh, organised Chinese voluntary workers who did valuable service in the medical auxiliary services.

An enormous amount was done to entertain the troops billeted near towns. Honorary membership of the European Clubs was made available to all officers. I have heard complaints made that the same facilities were not offered to other ranks. Admittedly it was bad luck on a volunteer Australian private to arrive in Malaya with perhaps letters of introduction to local clubs from the best clubs in Sydney, only to find that he was not allowed to join. But it must be remembered that clubs in Malaya were small in size and intended only to cater for a peace-time white population of perhaps two hundred. It would have been impossible to swamp them with ten times that number. There simply was no room. The effect of throwing open the Ipoh Club to all regular officers in Ipoh, was to double its membership. It could just take it, but only just. Canteens run by voluntary women workers catered for all soldiers. There was the Anzac Club in Kuala Lumpur and the Y.M.C.A. in Ipoh, run by Gwen Pitt. Dances and social evenings were held every week, and invitations to private houses were frequent. It cannot be said that the troops in Malaya were accorded anything but the warmest reception from the civilians.

A.R.P. organisations sprang up and local people of all nationalities gave willing help. Local scout troops, cadets too young to join the Volunteers, office clerks and others formed the backbone of the rank and file who worked in the passive defence services. Auxiliary fire-fighting units were formed. Blackout arrangements were made, and frequent tests were held to co-ordinate the work of the different services. Mock raids and town alarms occurred regularly to train the workers until they were reasonably efficient. There was no lack of keenness.

Nevertheless most honest people would admit that they did not really expect war, nor did they have the faintest conception of what it would be like when it did come. They joined the various defence services because their friends were doing the same and because they liked doing it. Corporate effort in a good cause appeals to people even if they do not see its immediate value. It says much for the qualities of the heads of these services that their work engendered so much interest and rallied so many willing workers. This wishful thinking was not their fault. It lay higher up and its origin further back in history. In spite of warning hints and some fighting speeches made by the High Commissioner the complacency of the masses was not disturbed. Keep calm and everything is going to be all right.

CHAPTER XI

JAPANESE INVASION

ON December 8th, 1941, with the suddenness of thunder in a clear sky, Japan struck. Ten weeks later to the day Singapore offered an unconditional surrender. In a thousand years time historians in a survey of the life of the civilized world may content themselves with the statement of these two bare facts. I propose to fill in briefly the gap between them.

I was with the F.M.S.V.F. throughout the campaign except for a short period as a Liaison Officer with a regular British brigade. I was in many different places but for all that saw only a small part of the war. And indeed in Malaya where the fog of war is made even denser by the thickness of the jungle it was often impossible to know what was going on in one's immediate vicinity, let alone elsewhere. For that reason there has been little cohesion or perspective about any of the short accounts I have read of the campaign. This one is no better. The information I have given in this chapter comes first and foremost from first-hand experience, secondly from what people I met during and since the fighting have told me, and lastly from intelligence summaries, news reports, and other official sources.

This is most emphatically not an exposé of any scandalous state of affairs. I have given as faithfully as I can a picture of Malaya in peace and preparing for war. Some of its life was bad. Much of it was definitely good. I hope the short, rather disjointed pattern of Malayan life I have sketched has given no other impression.

Two questions will one day need answering. Could the Malayan catastrophe have been averted by proper action before and during the war? And if not could the fiasco which led to a quick collapse have been postponed, and could we have held out or at least turned a shameful rout into glorious defeat? Obviously I cannot answer either of these questions. But I have tried to suggest that the responsibility for these misfortunes lies far higher up than the Europeans in the country and those actively engaged in its administration. When an epidemic of influenza occurs it is idle to blame it on every man who blows his nose.

The F.M.S.V.F. were mobilised on December 1st, a week before war. The Perak battalion mobilisation went smoothly.

It involved a large amount of paper, but the problem of calling up over a thousand men, some of whom lived a hundred miles from Ipoh, and finding accommodation was a big one. By the fourth day it was complete and we were in a hutted camp known as Canning Camp in a rubber estate about four miles out of Ipoh. Our operational headquarters with the C.O., the Adjutant, various specialist officers and HQ staff remained in its old building on the other side of Ipoh. We had just been appointed a new Adjutant, Capt. M. Coltart, who had been in the country only three weeks. He rang me up at the school that morning. "We're mobilising", he said, "and I want you. How soon can you get in?" "Forty-five minutes." "O.K. then. Make it." I was invigilating an exam at the time. I got one of the Asiatic masters to substitute for me, took a look round the science department to see that everything was all right, locked up my office, rushed home, changed and threw the rest of my kit into a valise and kitbag, and arrived at HQ.

I was appointed Assistant Adjutant to Michael Coltart, and went out with the Quartermaster to Canning Camp to fix up accommodation. My appointment meant relinquishing command of my Malay platoon at a time when I should have liked to see them prove themselves. I set up an office in the camp and got a Chinese clerk from HQ to assist me. Major Drysdale, who was second-in-command of the battalion, became O.C. Camp. We had five of our six companies in camp (the sixth was mobilising at Taiping), and I had a busy time getting out orders. Before companies were moved out to their war stations one of the rifle companies was split up between the other three to make them up to full strength, and the move was made at the end of the first week. By the evening of the seventh day two rifle companies reported themselves in position at their war stations. With each, was a machine-gun platoon and its complement of drivers, signallers, and ancillary personnel from HQ Coy. The two companies were on aerodromes, one at Ipoh, half of the other at Taiping and half at Sitiawan.

That same night my clerk woke me up and handed me a message he had received by telephone. I read it. "Japanese forces have made a landing at Kota Bahru. X Brigade is in action," I showed it to Major Drysdale. Other officers came down to the office and saw it. There it was in black and white. One junior officer went off muttering. "I don't believe it. It's a stupid sort of practice message." Is there any way of convincing some people?

Major Drysdale got hold of a wireless and we listened in next day to the news from London. "Early this morning a small Japanese force made a landing at Kota Bahru, on the north-east tip of the Malay Peninsula. This was repulsed but a later landing has made some headway. Our forces have fully contained the enemy. A communiqué from Singapore says that Singapore was raided last night by enemy planes. Our anti-aircraft defences went into action. Some bombs were dropped but damage was slight. Fighting has broken out on the Thai border."

Actually we had only one brigade in the whole of Kelantan. This did repel the first landing but was overwhelmed by the second, which was in considerable force and drove it off the Kota Bahru Aerodrome after bitter fighting for a day. The raid on Singapore was not very severe. Two bombs hit Raffles Square, one damaging Naina Mahomed a large retail store on the North side of the square. Houses in Serangoon road were also hit. Bitter fighting had broken out on the Thai border and considerable forces had infiltrated through our very thinly held positions.

Colonel Staley came out to the camp the same evening. The news was grim enough. I can see the scene now. The C.O. sitting down in Major Drysdale's office and spreading a large map over the papers which littered the table. Sitting on a wooden bench opposite Major Drysdale, Major Cockman, Lieut. Crowther-Smith (Transport Officer) and myself. The heavily shrouded hurricane lamp threw a dim fitful light which left the walls in heavy shadow, and cast into high relief the lined faces of these officers as they pored over the map. "The news is grave, in fact very grave," said the C.O. and began reading. "Large bodies of troops have infiltrated through our position along the Jitra Line, and the situation there has deteriorated. Enemy planes raided aerodromes in Kedah, inflicting heavy damage and we have evacuated these aerodromes." "Sungei Patani aerodrome," he continued, "was heavily bombed and we lost eighteen aircraft. The men said they were caught completely by surprise and against very accurate bombing they could do nothing." "We have no definite information about the fighting in the North. The Japanese are known to have had six divisions on the Thai border, two mechanised. We have been forced to withdraw from Kota Bahru aerodrome and are evacuating Kelantan." "But," the C.O. went on, "the local news is a bit brighter. The battery has come up to Ipoh, and I found quite by chance a hundred Gurkhas here. Nobody knew what they were doing and I have in-

corporated them into our defensive scheme. So gradually we are building up quite a nice little army in Ipoh." Colonel Staley was a great fighter and there was something reassuring about the last part. Tension relaxed. Although the news was very bad I think we had been expecting something of the sort. Major Cockman, big-hearted as ever, managed to force a smile. "Anyhow," he said, "there's the Perak River between us and them."

I cannot say what odds those fighting in the Jitra line, about ten miles south of the Thai border, were up against. It was estimated later that more than fifty thousand Japs had moved over the border and between our lines, many dressed as Chinese coolies or as Malays in sarongs with tommy guns under them. The native population had not been evacuated. Indeed, in Kedah where the native population outnumbered the white by over a thousand to one how could they be? The boundary line is along one. It was impossible to distinguish between friend and foe, and difficult to shoot any native on sight. There was some fifth columnism in Kedah where the people are inbred with the Thais. Elsewhere in the peninsula there was very little treachery, much less than is supposed. The natives were in the main loyal, especially the Chinese, and they did not take up arms against us as some of the Burmese did later. Also the Japanese were doing well as it was and did not have to rely on natives, possibly untrustworthy, for much support.

I heard more details of the bombing of Sungei Patani aerodrome from Sandy Edgar and also from Lieut. Lock who became attached to our battalion when the K. V. F. were evacuated. The airfield had about thirty Brewster Buffalos on it. It was defended by a few Bofors units and the K.V.F. whose strength was, I believe, three companies, with Lewis Anti-aircraft guns mounted round the perimeter. The enemy aircraft came down over Kedah Peak and completely surprised them. It was their first intimation that there was a war on. Bombs fell, a lot of smoke hung about, someone said 'Gas', respirators were hastily put on, someone else said 'False Alarm' and respirators were taken off again. In the meantime over half the aircraft on the ground were burning fiercely. The order to evacuate was given and preparations were made to blow up the landing ground. Demolition charges were laid all over it connected up with lengths of fuse. The evacuation was perfectly orderly, but unfortunately the firing of the first charge broke the fuse in half and none of the other charges went off: so the demolition was no good.

In the absence of more precise information about Butterworth (about which there had been an unconfirmed report on 10th December that the aerodrome had been bombed) wild rumours were circulating that the whole town was in flames and that there had been heavy casualties in the streets. We eventually traced these stories to a dispatch rider from Kedah who had arrived at L. of C. HQ in Ipoh. We put him under close arrest after the C.O. had gone to the trouble of ringing through to Penang and finding out the truth, which was that Butterworth aerodrome had had a small raid and that it was being evacuated for the old, old reason that the front line was getting far too near it.

The information received by the C.O. that we were evacuating Kelantan was a little premature. Actually X brigade turned round and made quite a spirited stand for a few days near Kuala Pergau.

In a news summary from Singapore on 8th December we had heard of the attack on Pearl Harbour, but no details beyond the fact that it was a 'heavy' raid. And on 11th December came news of the sinking of *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* off Kuantan on the East Coast. These Japanese successes completely altered the balance of naval power in the Pacific. Before it we believed we had about naval parity with the Japanese. After it the Japanese Navy reigned supreme. As Tokyo radio pointed out only too truly, our 'decapitated naval forces' could do nothing to stop the Japanese landing wherever they liked on either side of the peninsula. The attack on Pearl Harbour was a bad break for the Americans who cannot altogether escape the stigma of carelessness. The loss of our two big naval ships does not, I think, merit the same censure. Churchill has said that had we been lucky the sending of those two ships North might have prevented the landing of twenty thousand enemy troops in Thailand. Equally dangerous things were accomplished successfully in the Skagerrak in the last war. To ask why we had not got the aircraft to support them is to beg the question. We had to take a big risk. We took one, and it did not come off.

The vessels were sighted as they were steaming northwards by enemy aircraft and they then turned back. Opposite Kuantan they were ordered to stop and investigate a reported landing there, and they wasted some hours standing off-shore. Actually there had been no landing, and the report was believed to be due to a windy sentry mistaking a moving cow in the dark for the enemy and raising the alarm. Had the ships not stopped there they would have been caught much further South, probably near Mersing, but I do not think their closer

proximity to land-based aircraft at Singapore would have saved them. Once they had been sighted their fate, as we know now, was certain. It is fair to place on record that after the Japanese attack, which was pressed home with the utmost vigour and lasted six hours, had accomplished its task the planes made no attempt to interfere with the destroyers which were picking up survivors in the water. According to a naval Officer I met in Java, who had been on the *Repulse*, they circled round once or twice and then flew off.

The original plan had been to race the Japanese for Singgora as soon as war was declared. This was known as the 'Bangor' Scheme. If everyone had played fair we should by all the rules of the game have got there first. But while we waited on the last-minute negotiations going on in Washington, and cheerfully accepted the assurance of the Japanese that the transports seen sailing South were for South China, the enemy acted. They kicked off forty-eight hours before the whistle blew, and scored their first two or three goals while we were still slapping our thighs in the changing-rooms. The tail-piece to this is a message in an envelope marked 'Secret and Confidential', which I received about a fortnight after war broke out when the Japanese were over a hundred miles South of the Malayan border. "For your information. Bangor Scheme has now been cancelled."

The next day the news was poorer still. "The situation has deteriorated further, and parachute landings and or troop-carrying planes may be expected hourly at Ipoh and Taiping; and later, Kuala Lumpur." This caused quite a flap. Companies out at war stations had left their drivers, C.Q.M.S's, and staff in camp to collect stores and rations each day, and we were a scattered collection of isolated units all over the rubber estate. Major Drysdale collected all these together and made a short perimeter. (A camp in a rubber estate is quite different from one in open country like Aldershot or Tidworth. Your field of view is limited to about two hundred yards). We spent the next three days almost in a state of siege. I rang up Captain Shepherd, O.C. C Coy on Ipoh aerodrome. "How are you getting on?" "Oh, pretty grim. Come up and see us tomorrow morning."

This was one of the occasions when the military appreciation proved wrong. We had no parachutists or troop-carriers to contend with in Malaya (except one reported parachute landing on the East Coast early on; they landed almost on top of a brigade HQ and were wiped up), and the first air-raid in Ipoh did not occur for six more days. But it was grim enough at the time.

When I got to the aerodrome I found C Coy in fine fettle. They had filled empty petrol tins with sand and stacked them round the sides of an open lorry to make an armoured fighting vehicle with slits for Lewis gun mountings. Coolies were digging deep trenches across parts of the large landing ground. I found my old Malay sergeant and his gang busily digging weapon pits. He pulled a parang out of his belt and drew it suggestively across his neck. "That's what I shall do to any parachutist who lands near me," he said.

Living in a rubber estate has a depressing effect on one. It is dark and gloomy. Water drips from the leaves after heavy rain and nothing is ever properly dry. There was little to do except hang on to one end of a telephone waiting for orders. Only the efforts of Major Cockman prevented the Asiatic troops from becoming demoralised. We were all very glad when we had orders to move into the Turf Club and were joined there by the whole of our HQ staff.

Brigade came up to join us and the presence of Brigadier Moir had a tonic effect on everybody. I met Major Long, D.A.Q.M.G. L. of C., who had come up, he said to see that we were 'fed, clothed, housed and happy'. "I expect there'll be an air raid here tomorrow", he said, "once the Jap discovers we are basing fighters on an aerodrome he doesn't waste much time bombing it as a rule." He was right. I was on the aerodrome when the siren went, talking to Paddy Jackson in his barracks. We dashed outside to find all the slit trenches filled with Malays, so I flopped down on the edge of one and hugged Mother Earth. Three Brewster Buffalos got into the air but instead of doing the chasing they got chased by the Japanese Zero fighters which were escorting their medium bombers. Someone said afterwards that they saw a Messerschmitt fighter in the sky, though I did not. It is certain that Messerschmitts were used in Kedah and in Penang. One of our Buffalos fired a few shots and then his gun jammed. The other two, apparently taking their cue from the first, did not fire. However, I am entirely ignorant of the finer points of aerial warfare, and I would not like this to be taken as a slight on the R.A.A.F. who certainly did fine work in Malaya. The enemy planes came down over the hills from the East and scattered bombs over the aerodrome. They then machine-gunned round the place and flew off. Other bombers dropped about six bombs on the town.

The very first bomb on Ipoh aerodrome landed square in the middle of the petrol dump, which for some unknown reason was right out in the open for all to see instead of under the

rubber two hundred yards away. This was rather a poor reward for the Perak battalion who had spent months in the armed peace period defending it as a training exercise! It burnt fiercely for two days, eventually setting the clubhouse and hangars alight. The Malay platoon round it suffered no casualties and they reckoned they got one plane which wobbled and was last seen losing height with smoke pouring from its tail. A small forty-pound anti-personnel bomb landed about fifteen yards from me in some thick bushes. I was quite unscathed but covered with mud, and got up wondering at first which world I was in.

The damage in the town was not very considerable. The first bomb took the roof off the largest Japanese-owned premises in Ipoh, the Nishiki Hotel. Others hit William Jacks, a large European wholesaler, several Chinese shophouses, and one of the two bridges across the Kinta canal, without however, upsetting the passage of traffic. But the moral effect was tremendous. A.R.P. organisations, auxiliary medical and fire services went into action and did their jobs well. But there were about two hundred casualties, a few of the poorer sections panicked and left the town to hide themselves in the surrounding villages. A certain amount of looting broke out, but this was severely dealt with according to emergency measures then in force. About ten offenders were convicted of looting in the magistrate's court and shot. This stopped the rot for the time being, though it was to rage unchecked a fortnight later when we were compelled to evacuate Ipoh. One cannot blame the population unduly, but it is right to mention that there were public shelters for all of them and they had all had practice air-raid drills. It was not the fault of the civil administration.

The town was not bombed again for the next ten days, although we had daily raids on the aerodrome. I got caught in one more raid on the aerodrome, a fairly heavy one; C Coy lost two casualties. It is surprising how very small casualties are from bombing provided the troops are well trained and keep their heads. It is certainly not pleasant sitting in a small area armed with little more than pea-shooters and knowing that they are going for you, but the Malays stuck it extraordinarily well. By this time the companies at Taiping and Sitiawan had been withdrawn back to Ipoh. One of them was sent to Ipoh aerodrome to thicken up the fire and we were getting some more Bofors down from the north. As usual, of course, the air force had to move away further south, and the two companies of our battalion were sitting on the aerodrome for a week with only a wide open space intersected with newly

dug drains to defend. It was a great pity that we had so many aerodromes in the country without the aircraft to put on them. Clearing a landing field in jungle-covered Malaya takes some time, and these ready made bases were a godsend to the Japanese: for when a piece of ground is once levelled it cannot be put out of action for more than a few days by blowing up. The Japanese could always get enough labour to level off a landing field which we had 'destroyed' in a day or two, and we had not enough bombers to keep it permanently out of commission.

I arrived back at headquarters to find Lee Mun Yui, who had now risen to sergeant in the Intelligence Section, in a great state of excitement. "Boy", he said, "they've taken the roof off the Nishiki Hotel!"

This time the tail-piece is the remark made to the Quartermaster by the R.Q.M.S. after the first raid on Ipoh. The R.Q.M.S. was Dinnie, a regular from the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders and the finest permanent staff instructor the Perak Battalion ever had. "Hooray, Sir!", he said. "Now we've been under fire. We shan't have to get any more company signatures on our ammunition returns."

The Jitra line had been outflanked and overwhelmed. 11 Div., hopelessly outnumbered, put up a very fine fight. One battalion of Gurkhas entirely surrounded by the enemy had gone in with the bayonet and caused heavy enemy casualties. But they were decimated in the process and five Japanese were not worth the life of one Gurkha with our present numbers. One night our HQ got a telephone message about a subsidiary enemy advance from the Thai border in the direction of Grik. A company of Argylls were fighting a rearguard action all the way down the Grik road. The situation 'needed clarification.' Grik had been evacuated and the District Officer with twenty Sikh police was in Lenggong. The Argylls had been compelled to withdraw under 'heavy machine-gun and mortar fire', and our spare rifle company was sent up the Grik road to cover their withdrawal. Orders were sent to the Perak Hydro platoon to destroy the power-house at Chenderoh Dam and withdraw. A Major from the R.E. dashed up from Kuala Lumpur, nearly blew the receiver off our HQ telephone demanding 'very urgent and immediate No. 1 priority'. He got a lorry load of explosives and dashed up to Lenggong, taking our non-European engineers with him. The Japanese were using their usual tactics. Lightly equipped with tommy guns and grenades and in superior numbers their forward troops infiltrated through our positions making use of the abundant

cover on either side of the road. Having got behind us snipers climbed rubber trees along the road and fired at us as we withdrew in our vehicles. A favourite trick was to sit in a rubber tree and lob grenades into passing Bren carriers, which were later fitted with a wire net sloping roof to prevent this.

Meanwhile a steady stream of civilian evacuees was coming down from the North. Some were stopping anywhere they could find in Ipoh, others continued on to Kuala Lumpur. They were mostly British, with a few Asiatics. The Asiatics usually preferred to evacuate to the surrounding villages when they were ordered out by the military. Their homes were there and they felt more inclined to risk facing a Japanese occupation of the place where they lived than to trek southwards and lose everything they had. Members of the Medical Auxiliary Service and some Asiatic A.R.P. personnel North of Ipoh volunteered to evacuate with the Europeans and carried on their work all the way down the peninsula and later in Singapore itself. It should be emphasized that with the exception of Penang there was no official evacuation except as ordered by the military authorities to conform with the military situation, and that in this evacuation the Asiatics were at liberty to participate if they so desired. Many of them did so, but the vast majority of Chinese, Malays and Indians were in no position to leave their homes for long. As events turned out they were very wise to remain. I mention this point in contradiction of the statement that Europeans were evacuated while others were deliberately left behind.

It was all part of the wider question, "whose job should it have been to foresee the possibility of a collapse of this kind occurring and make the necessary preparations beforehand?" Our Headquarter Coy clerk was a fine young Chinese who had been Rafik's predecessor as School Captain at Anderson School. He held a promising job in the Posts and Telegraphs Department. He was a potential leader of men, the type who was wanted in Malaya, and will be wanted even more now. I had been to his wedding the day before we were mobilised. His wife was a charming girl, a voluntary nurse at the Ipoh District Hospital. Within twenty-four hours of his marriage he was called up. He had not seen his wife since the day on which we mobilized, and had no idea what had happened to her when we evacuated Ipoh, after which he had lost all contact with her. He carried on cheerfully and efficiently, impelled by that strange spirit of fatalism which possesses the Chinese in moments of crisis. But it is not difficult to imagine what he must have

been thinking, and his was no isolated case in the Battalion. It was quite impossible for the Battalion to legislate for individual cases on the spot, and no arrangements had been made for the evacuation of volunteers' wives and families.

All evacuation was perfectly orderly. There were no scenes of refugees crowding the roads and blocking all traffic. It was carried out competently by the civil authorities acting under orders from the military.

The famous Meuse bridgehead tactics were tried a few times without much success. An Indian subedar was standing on guard at the North end of a bridge in Province Wellesley. The engineers were just about to blow it up. A car drove up, a European stepped out and requested permission to cross. He walked slowly across and when he got to the subedar he grappled with him. The subedar shot him dead.

On another occasion a brigadier was standing at one end of the bridge counting his vehicles across before giving the order for its demolition. After the last lorry three motor cyclists dashed across. One of them smiled and the brigadier saw that they were Japanese. He drew his revolver and fired. The first cyclist raced on and got away, the second one was thrown off his cycle but escaped on foot into the mangrove; the third was killed.

II Div. moved back to Ipoh and all troops in the Ipoh area came under divisional command. Two days later we evacuated Ipoh and II Div. prepared a line at Kampar, forty miles South of it. The last morning in Ipoh was unforgettable. Enemy planes were over the town the whole time bombing and machine-gunning. Our Bofors scored an occasional hit, but not enough to worry them. They hit an ammunition train which had been waiting in the railway siding since the night before; it was supposed to be moving South early that morning, and it was never satisfactorily explained why it was still there at ten o'clock. The Asiatic Petroleum Company's oil installations were left burning furiously. The Argylls, who came through after we had left, said that there were so many burning buildings that they had difficulty in getting their vehicles along the roads.

Before leaving Ipoh I had managed to find time to call on Chong Siew Kee and his father, known to his friends as Mr. Chong. Siew Kee was one of the most intelligent boys the school ever had. He had got a Cambridge Grade I Certificate the year before at the age of sixteen, and had been allowed to stay on another year as he was still well below the leaving age to take the exam again with additional subjects (these were

Chemistry and Latin!) The candidates had to take the exams all through the earlier air-raids on Ipoh. Siew Kee had been a school prefect and an under officer in the Corps. He wanted to become a doctor and Mr. Chong and I had hopes of his going on to King Edward VII College of Medicine in Singapore. Mr. Chong had been head clerk in the Asiatic Petroleum Company in Ipoh and had retired some years before on a good pension. He was a charming man whose friendship and confidence anyone might be proud to have. He was a semi-invalid and his younger son, Siew Ying, had had his leg in plaster of Paris for a year owing to an unlucky accident playing football. Both depended on regular treatment at the Hospital near which they lived. I asked Mr. Chong what he thought of the air-raids. "We are all right", he said, "though our next door neighbour, Dr. Sugana, had his arm torn by a shell splinter. I think what Siew Kee learnt in the Corps has been of value to him", he laughed and pointed to a shelter in the garden.

"Are you thinking of moving?", I said.

"My wife wants to stay here. It is better to risk the bombs than to leave all our property to be looted. Besides, my nearest relatives are in Kuala Lumpur, and with no trains running it is impossible to get there."

"How did the exams go?" I asked Siew Kee.

"Quite well, sir." He pulled a lot of question papers out of his pocket. "Here is the Latin paper. I knew most of the words, and guessed some of the others."

"What about the science papers?"

"Oh. We finished those during an air-raid, and I left the question papers behind. But they were quite easy. By the way, sir, I have the key to the science library. What shall I do with it?"

"Keep it and help yourself to any books you like—and any other boys who want them."

"What do you think is going to happen?" said Mr. Chong.

"I don't know. We must all hope for the best and fight our hardest."

"I'm sure it will be all right in the end. Even if the Japanese come to Ipoh we still have the wireless. I know the British will win soon." They were marvellously cheerful.

"Goodbye", I said, "I hope I shall see you again shortly, but at present I've got lots to do."

"Goodbye. And the best of luck to those who are fighting for us."

CHAPTER XII

FIGHTING IN THE F.M.S.

THE Kampar line was tactically a good one. There the Kinta Valley narrowed to about ten miles between the jungle-covered slopes on the East to the 'impenetrable' mangrove on the West. In between was open fairly flat tin-mining country where we could get fixed lines for our machine-guns and suitable observation posts for artillery. This was a rare advantage in Malaya. The Japanese relied entirely on aircraft for forward observation, and the great accuracy of their shell and mortar fire was due to first-class co-operation between ground and air and not to any inherent fineness in the weapons they used. The Japanese, having seized the initiative in the air at the start, took care to keep it. They achieved complete air mastery. Such aircraft as we had were kept on absolutely essential coastal reconnaissance work, and after the Air Force left Ipoh I saw no more of our planes until we reached Singapore a month later.

II Div. did manage to cover very thinly the whole ten mile width of the Kampar line, aided by those features of the country to the North of us which enabled us to some extent to replace man power by fire power. Two companies of Indians were in the hills on our right flank to cover up surprise from that direction. Our chief trouble was, of course, that concealment from the air was impossible. Every day and all day Japanese planes came round and had a good close inspection of the whole front while it was being prepared, machine-gunning, and bombing anything which they did not like the look of. We had the usual Bofors and A. A. Lewis guns but nothing else. These worried the planes a bit sometimes, but did not seriously interfere with their enjoyment of life. I have seen them circling round at two hundred feet, the pilots tilting the planes over to have a better look. The Perak Battalion put machine-gun and rifle platoons into the line, and the Asiatic companies were used as working parties.

We were billeted in a small Chinese School. One of my first duties was to take a Brigade Intelligence Officer over the area. We went off together in my car, which I had persuaded battalion to requisition for my use, to find a Malay Forest Ranger in one of the villages. Aided with well-meant but usually

inaccurate information we chased him from one place to another, and eventually tracked him back to a billiard saloon in Kampar. It then transpired that it was not the area we were interested in which he knew.

The I.O. told me of his experiences in the Jitra showdown in which his company had been cut off completely. They made a two-day march through the jungle and mangrove and arriving at the coast got friendly Chinese fishermen to take them South. They reached Penang after a day and a half sailing in tongkangs just as the island was being evacuated. Again the Chinese came to the rescue, and they were taken to the mainland on the right side of the line. Several of his men, he said, were in hospital with septic sores from leech bites.

It may be interesting to give some details of Japanese methods of fighting as they were practised in Malaya. The enemy had at least paid us the compliment of training very hard in Indo-China for jungle warfare of the type they were going to have in Malaya, and they had some very good ideas on the subject.

Their troops were strong and tough. Our regular troops could rarely distinguish their physical features from those of the Chinese, another great advantage to them. In point of fact they were rather darker than most Chinese and some wore moustaches. There were many instances of Japanese troops passing British soldiers and saying: "O.K. Jock. Me Indian," or something like that. Many of them had been primed with a few words of English.

Their forward troops wore brown sandals, khaki shorts and shirts, and peaked jockey caps. The officers were rather differently dressed, wearing darker coloured uniform with Sam Browne and sword, and helmets. Senior officers were preceded by standard bearers carrying flags. The Japanese flag was found everywhere even in the fiercest battle: their leaders with commendable psychology realised its value in rallying the morale of their men. These forward troops wore no equipment: captured prisoners were found to be carrying a bag of rice and ten grains of atebirin: no water, for streams can be found anywhere in Malaya. The rice was supposed to last them a week. They could find chickens, fish, etc. in the villages as they passed through, and were almost independent of food supplies from their own army.

Their arms were suitable for the country in which they were fighting. They carried automatic rifles and tommy guns, lighter in weight and therefore more serviceable than our own. The calibre was, I believe, about .28. They used high velocity ammunition. These weapons were not as accurate as ours but

they had no need to be. The Japanese Higher Command had quite correctly foreseen that targets would mostly be at point blank range, and had designed weapons which were light and easy to carry. Even snipers used to sit tight in the rubber trees until they got an absolutely sitting bird.

Whether the Japanese admitted their inferiority in marksmanship I do not know but they certainly went in in a big way for things that go bang ; grenades of all sizes, mortars, stick bombs, even large Chinese crackers. They had very neat little two-inch mortars which they could manhandle along the narrowest jungle tracks, quite a good weapon with a range of about eight hundred yards. They had other larger mortars including one heavy mortar, about 4.5 calibre, with a range of nearly three thousand yards and a high rate of fire.

Their methods of attack were interesting. Their forward troops, some on foot others on bicycles or motor-cycles, moved forward to locate our forward defended positions. They had a pretty good idea of these already from aircraft reports. On locating these they would split up at once into small parties. A few of these parties would then attack small pockets of resistance in front of our main position from different directions. I saw groups of four or five men dashing forward in arrowhead, the front man only carrying a tommy gun, the remainder sacks of ammunition over their shoulders. He fired from the hip on the hose-pipe principle. If he was knocked out the next man picked up his gun and carried on. They crawled through growing rice and along drains up to their shoulders in water. They moved through rubber estates with long raking staccato strides from tree to tree diagonally. When compelled they would make short—very short—rushes across open stretches of country. Their object was two-fold ; firstly, to probe for weak spots in our defence through which they could move ; secondly, to compel us to disclose our positions if they were fired on.

They tried to brush aside minor opposition but made no serious attempt to attack frontally against determined defence. Our trouble was always a tendency to open fire too soon thereby giving our positions away to enemy troops massing in rear of these forward parties. The golden rule came out : ' Never fire until you know you can kill '. But this was more easily said than done. If you withheld your fire to gain surprise that surprise might never materialise. You might see small bodies of enemy for a few seconds at a hundred yards range. If you opened fire you might hit one or two of them, meanwhile telling the enemy exactly what they wanted to know. If you

withheld your fire you might never see them again and you had the pleasant prospect of knowing that they were working their way behind you. The Japanese tried all sorts of dodges to make us disclose our positions. They shouted and yelled, waved branches about and let off Chinese crackers imitative of machine-gun fire. They threw their hats into the air—I have seen a pair of boots go up in the air. Ludicrous, yes, if it had not been so effective in drawing our fire. Whenever our fire came down on a Japanese party at long range they would shriek and yell like struck pigs, even though we probably had not hit anyone at all. They used ground very skillfully and were hard to see as they moved forward.

Other parties probed and felt for our flanks. These were never very difficult to locate and once found lightly armed enemy troops poured round them. Meanwhile frontal demonstrations were staged to engage our front once its main defended localities had been found. A full scale assault was never tried although local skirmishes occurred and sufficient pressure was exerted to pin down large sections of our troops. They gave us all they had in the way of shells, mortars and other whizz-bangs, their fire directed by their aircraft. This would go on for some time. We gave as good as we got or better, and we would get the comfortable feeling that we were holding them at last. Then a harassed despatch rider would appear on the scene with a message to say that the enemy were massing in force on the road behind us and were beginning an attack from the rear. Unless, that is, we had withdrawn already.

Now this is where the military theorist gets up and tears his hair in rage. Military clichés of this war like web defence and 'porcupine' strong points tremble on his lips. So I will briefly answer these objections. The Japanese, apparently, were not out to wipe up our army. Not just yet, anyhow. They were out to gain as much ground as they could as quickly as possible, and without fighting for it if they could avoid it. Hence the game was for them to move through us and round us, and collar our lines of communications; then sit on them and wait for us to do something. Our defences were as fluid as possible, although it was essential to provide some sort of cover against bombs and shell-fire. We had all-round defence of pivoted points and in some sort of depth; but, as I have already pointed out, we never had sufficient men to do this without leaving big gaps, in a country where close quarter fighting is the rule and the machine-gun has not the equivalent fire power of a dozen riflemen. Our limited counter-attacks always reached their objectives, sometimes without meeting

a single enemy on the way. They had all moved off elsewhere. We usually caught a few of the enemy napping, but we were not much better off than before. One solution would have been, I agree, to have numbers of independent companies operating within certain areas. But this again involved finding more men than we had. More than this, it involved the provision of ample ammunition, food and other supplies—say in hidden stores in the jungle—to an extent never contemplated by our Higher Command; to say nothing of wireless communication, workshop units, medical aid posts and so forth.

We did have commandos, companies of Australians and other regulars led by planters from F.M.S.V.F., operating far behind the enemy lines and they did very good work. I spoke to one commando leader after he had got back in Kuala Lumpur and his only complaint was that try as they would it was most difficult to locate any enemy to fight! But the troops in the field had to hang on to their supply lines at all costs. It requires the most thorough and detailed preparations to allow white troops to exist, let alone fight, for any length of time cut off from their supply lines in Malaya. Our withdrawals one after the other were rapid enough and often made without firing a shot. But it was not through any lack of fighting spirit in the troops. Most of them had not the foggiest idea of why they were withdrawing. To them it seemed the craziest war ever fought. Many commanders acting with great courage and occasionally in defiance of orders tried to hang on where they were for too long. They found themselves surrounded and partitioned off into small isolated segments which could no longer maintain contact with each other and whose fighting powers were consequently reduced almost to nothing. They could not get to their ammunition supplies, they lost their transport and their guns. Small groups of perhaps twenty men had to fight their way out along the lines of least resistance deeper into the jungle. This happened frequently in Johore. Some got out onto the road and managed to rejoin their units lower down after two or three days marching through the jungle, sometimes with the guidance of friendly natives. Others got away to the coast and were picked up by R.N.V.R. launches sent up from Singapore to look for them. Gurkhas got quite a reputation for swimming across the Straits of Johore after the Causeway had been blown. Quite a number of troops were never heard of again.

The tactics used by the Japanese caused them many casualties. They accepted them. They had plenty of men. Our casualties were light, at all events up to the fighting in Johore. The

Japanese did not do much actual fighting by night : rather they made ground by night and fought it by day. The small parties moving through and round our positions maintained excellent contact with each other in advancing to their pre-arranged rendezvous, which they accomplished by the simple expedient of shouting to each other. At night their voices sounded eerie as they called out all round us in the darkness. On captured prisoners we found maps far more up-to-date than the ones we were using, showing all the jungle tracks and roads through rubber estates, made presumably by industrious Japanese barbers in the days of peace.

The Japanese resorted to all the usual tricks to try and reduce our morale. They scattered leaflets from the air addressed to all nationalities except the British. Those addressed to the Australians were more exuberant than idiomatic. "The Nipponese Armies and the British are now in the warring state. Why do you fight for the British, who think nothing of you and only call you a nation of sheep farmers?" The Malays and Indians were exhorted not to fight for the imperialist white man but to gain their freedom by helping the Nipponese Armies. The Malays were mildly amused, the Australians furiously indignant. Our enemies always described themselves as Nipponese, never as Japanese.

The Japanese did not use poison gas (although they have undoubtedly used it in China). A report that they used it against the Australians in Johore was not substantiated. A counter-attack was said to have been driven off with tear gas, but it was probably sulphur dioxide from cordite fumes.

The Japanese respected the Red Cross wherever they found it on land and on sea, and to give them their due they fought a clean war. Organised brutality and terrorism formed no part of their official policy. You cannot expect a victorious army to move as they did without individual acts of violence and humiliation being committed occasionally against captured prisoners and civilians. Their treatment of captured prisoners, even commandos, was in general humane. They kicked them about a bit and sometimes threatened to shoot them, but I never heard of this being carried out. They did not seem to worry much about care of prisoners and a number escaped to rejoin us in Singapore. I spoke to a gunner officer in Sumatra who had been captured in a Chinese village near Seremban with about a dozen of his men. The Japanese were very aggressive at first and kicked them about to humiliate them in front of the local population. They took them into a small

Chinese shop and sat down with them, becoming almost friendly. They showed the greatest interest in their arms and had the mechanism of their revolvers explained to them. They then amused themselves firing these revolvers in the air. (In Sumatra I saw a Japanese military manual in which it was stated that the white troops were quite useless at close country warfare but were very well armed). The Japanese soldiers knew a few words of English. They asked two questions over and over again. "What is your name?" "How old are you?" The prisoners were left in charge of one sentry and had no difficulty in escaping by night.

We spent Christmas in the Chinese School in Kampar. By then most of the local population had shut up shop and looting had broken out. The actual line was about two miles north of the town, and Military police patrolled all the streets and kept soldiers away from the houses. Along the roads leading East to the villages in the Chenderiang range of hills wound an unending stream of refugees wheeling bicycles and push-carts containing as many personal possessions as they would carry. Small children carried armfuls of tinned food. They were all terrified of the bombing although it had not been severe in the town itself. On their faces that same air of dumb resignation.

The main street was wide and absolutely straight for about half a mile. It was quite tricky driving along it during the frequent raids for enemy planes were fond of machine-gunning lorries up and down it. I opened the roof of my car and made my batman stand up on the passenger seat and keep a sharp all-round look-out. As soon as a plane got into position for shooting up the main street we would dash up a side street, turn round and stop. When the plane had passed we drove out again and up two or three blocks before the next plane started on its run, when we repeated the frightened rabbit tactics *ad nauseam* until we reached the end of the town. The Chinese owner of the biggest general provision store handed over the key of his shop to our headquarters and told us to help ourselves to anything we wanted. We got lamps, oil and other essentials as well as a good Christmas dinner with several bottles of Liebefraumilch. It loses nothing of its flavour drunk out of tin mugs. Captain W. G. Scott, who had only recently returned from leave, was with us as O. C. HQ Coy and kept things going.

The Japanese engineering was a marvel. Our scorched earth policy was good from Taiping downwards. We blew up places where the road passed through narrow cuttings and

defiles and destroyed all bridges, including the large Iskandar Bridge across the Perak River at Kuala Kangsar. It was not possible to cover these demolitions by fire; in two hours the Japanese had infantry with machine-guns across the Perak River, in thirty-six hours they had light tanks across. Their bridging was done with the aid of silk ropes, either suspended between the ends of the bridge or floating on air-tight cylindrical tin pontoons. I saw bits of these silk ropes brought back by commandos. They were light, but very tough and strong, about one and a half inches thick. Across these were placed slats forming a bridge capable of supporting the weight of a light tank.

The battle started on the 29th of December and lasted for four days. From first to last the Kampar line was never broken and our casualties were remarkably light. The Japanese used tanks, I think for the first time in Malaya (though this may be wrong). Seven appeared and all were knocked out in a very short time by our artillery. The Japanese used their infiltration tactics with their usual success. They made no attempt to get through where the opposition was strong. They outflanked us in the hills on our right flank and small parties also got round us through the mangrove on the left. They pressed very hard in the centre. The trickiest time in the forward positions was just at dawn, when Japanese shock troops who had crawled up during the night would attack small posts with tommy-guns from point blank range, sometimes only two or three yards.

The enemy let fly with everything he could find. Headquarters, however well concealed, were dangerous places to be at. The Japanese had an uncanny way of spotting these and pin-pointing them with artillery and mortar fire. He had his unimpeded aerial observation, and he may have got some help, though I think not very much, from fifth column work. Meanwhile enemy bombers strafed our lines of communication. They went for bridges particularly, but seldom did much harm. Presumably their object was to prevent us bringing up reserves, but therein they were one jump ahead of us for we never had any reserves to bring up. Many local counter-attacks were made—one colonel, a real fighter, ordered five in one day—always with the results I have indicated.

The whole position became untenable after the Japanese consolidated landings near Kuala Selangor, on the West Coast a hundred miles to the South. A landing is merely an out-flanking movement carried to its geographical limit, and the Japanese who held undisputed control of the sea lanes on each

side of Malaya could land when and where they liked. I never saw an actual landing so I cannot give details of how they were carried out. But the enemy's tactics were always the same. A small landing—usually two or three hundred men—was first made about ten miles North of a large port. These sacrifice troops moved through the mangrove and harassed our forces, causing as much trouble as they could. They were neutralised and sometimes wiped out. But before this could be accomplished—within forty-eight hours, in fact—another much larger landing was put in at or nearer the port itself. Against this our troops, already distracted elsewhere, could do very little. The landings were always made under cover of an aerial umbrella against which our surface craft was powerless.

Major-General Gordon Bennett has given his opinion that originally Japanese strategy envisaged holding us in the North while they made landings in rear of us on either side of the peninsula. They did not expect that it would prove so ridiculously easy to push our armies down from the North. It is certain that their capture of Penang and the north-west coast made their West coast landings very easy. By this time they had occupied Thailand, which declared war on the United Nations after our first bombing of Bangkok, and had reached Victoria Point on the south-west tip of Burma thereby investing more than five hundred miles of coastline. I remember a copy of enemy leaflets dropped up North showing a map of Malaya with a small circle about on Kuala Lumpur inscribed 'British Armies' and numerous arrows pointing inwards all round the coasts depicting Japanese landings. They were just about right except for the small circle in the middle.

If you want a tail-piece here it is. Penang broadcasting station on December 25th morning: "To all our British listeners we wish a Merry Christmas and an Unhappy New Year."

On completion of duties at Bidor the Perak Battalion was taken out of II Div. and sent down to the Depot Camp at Port Dickson. All military units in the area were organised into a system of beach defence. I have described the coast at Port Dickson, long sandy shores fringed with coconut palms, infinitely beautiful and remote from the strident vulgarity of war. But other considerations now prevailed. Tactically it was one of the few places where a successful landing could be exploited very quickly. There was no belt of protective mangrove to impede the enemy's progress, and a first-class road between Seremban and Malacca ran at times within a few yards of the

shore. There was a full moon and it was more than possible that a landing would be made. We had coast watching patrols all along the eight-mile shore between Port Dickson town and Cape Rachado. This shore was intersected with small bays affording plenty of cover, and if a landing had been made I do not know what sort of a show our skeleton defence would have put up. We had one light battery which fired occasionally on tongkangs of the Chinese fishing fleet from Sumatra when they came too close inshore. The patrols kept us all busy at night but there was little to do during the day. I went up to Seremban once or twice to try and obtain transport from the Transport Officer, for the Camp was practically without vehicles and was in no position for a sudden move if ordered. The Camp was already filled to capacity and our troops overflowed into private houses whose owners had all gone. The patrols occupied a magnificent country house owned by a Chinese millionaire built on a small hill and affording an uninterrupted view of the coastline. The owner had gone but his Chinese boy was still there and did all the cooking for about thirty of our men.

Two good stories went the rounds. The first is not, I believe, an original one, although it really did happen at the Camp. A Tamil private was being enrolled at Depot Headquarters. Now the Tamil does not believe in half measures. To him a vow is a very solemn affair. After he had taken the oath of allegiance he remembered with a sudden pang of conscience that he had a pair of Japanese-made dentures. He promptly removed them and flung them down a drain in disgust. He was taken in to Malacca to get a pair of guaranteed British manufacture.

An integral part of our coast defence was the fast customs launch in the harbour, whose duty it was to put out to sea and examine all vessels which looked suspicious. It was armed with a Lewis gun in the bows. At this time all stocks of whisky were being destroyed before towns were evacuated, and enormous quantities of whisky—some said a thousand cases—were taken down to Port Dickson. Bottles were thrown into the harbour and smashed against the rocks. Then a frantic telephone call came through to the Harbour Master. "Take out your launch and find out what that boat is four miles out to sea." "Very sorry, sir," said the H.M., "I daren't start my engine. There's so much alcohol about in the harbour that the boat would catch fire!"

CHAPTER XIII

FIGHTING IN JOHORE

MEANWHILE the Kampar line had been turned and our forces had withdrawn 'in good order' to Selim River fifty miles further South. At the same time 'confused fighting' was taking place near Port Swettenham where a big landing had been made. The Perak Battalion was not in either of these engagements. My information comes only from the news summaries we received and what I have heard from members of the 2nd (Selangor) Battalion who fought at Batu Tiga. A brief summary is enough.

The Selim River battle was an unfortunate affair. The defensive position was quite a good one, but the Japanese played havoc with tanks which they got down the main road in rear of our position for negligible losses. This was, I think, the first time the enemy had achieved a frontal break-through against us. However, they still used their infiltration tactics and soon had a solid wedge of troops along our lines of communications. II Div. lost a great deal of its transport and units were forced to fight their way back through the jungle.

General Wavell, whose headquarters were then at Sourabaya, had flown to Singapore and up to Kuala Lumpur while these battles were going on. Kuala Lumpur was evacuated on January 11th after all railway bridges, workshops and rolling stock had been destroyed. The scorched earth policy was carried out effectively and those who came through it on the last day said that it was an amazing sight with half the houses in the town burning furiously. The evacuation of Kuala Lumpur was followed forty-eight hours later by the evacuation of Seremban, and no attempt was made to hold the enemy on the Mantin Pass just North of Seremban; but doubtless there were good reasons for this, one being, perhaps, the necessity of drawing off troops to contest landings further South.

On January 11th the Japanese made a small landing at Morib just North of Port Dickson. To conform with this big withdrawal all troops still in Kelantan and Pahang were withdrawn to the North borders of Johore. The 4th (Pahang) Battalion came to Bahau, north-east of Segamat; the other two F.M.S.V.F. battalions joined us at Port Dickson on 11th January and all Volunteer units in the Port Dickson area were

withdrawn the next day and sent right down to Singapore. I remember waiting in the lorry park under rubber trees about two miles South of the Camp for the order to move. George Tacchi and I talked to Major Owen Jones who had arrived from Seremban that morning. He had been in the Batu Tiga fight, and he told us that after the withdrawal he had been up to what had been the forward positions to see if there were any more of our troops still on the wrong side of a bridge which was due to be blown up. On his way back just after sunset he passed a petrol pump where six Japanese armoured cars were filling up. Japanese troops were sitting on the roadside laughing and talking and several officers were chatting together in small groups. He trod on the accelerator and passed through them without being challenged. We asked him the usual question; "Do you know how far down the Japanese have got?" "That's easy," he said, "they're just about right here on the spot." At that moment as if to prove his words a plane swooped down and started to shoot up the road in front of us.

I had not been in Singapore for two and a half years. Transfigured by a scene of bustling activity everywhere it yet looked oddly the same. It had not yet suffered that intense bombing and shelling which was to alter its whole face in the next month, although the docks and parts of the Chinese quarter round Beach Road showed ugly scars on the building; and some of the roads were roped off with piles of rubble in them. Unlike some towns in the North where a whirlwind bombing attack had disrupted all civil defence work in a few days Singapore was being let comparatively gently into the horrors of aerial bombardment. The A.R.P. and other defence organisations were able to get the necessary training in their jobs under actual war conditions before things got beyond them: with the result that they were efficient and calm under the intense assaults which came later. Members of these services, ninety per cent. of whom were Asiatics, did a very fine job of work. They were not overwhelmed right at the start as were, for instance, those of Penang, where a terrific bombing of the Chinese quarter of the town set most of it ablaze, demolished the Fire Station and many of the Aid Posts, and annihilated their efforts even before they could get to work. The local defence services in Singapore were magnificent right up to the end.

Singapore was a town of contrasts. Troop transports full of men clattered through villages with native children playing ball outside the houses. Heavy bull-dozers rumbled past suburban gardens gorgeous with exotic flowers where Tamil labourers scythed the grass with slow, measured sweeps. Red

Cross signs emblazoned the gate-posts of rich towkay's houses. Sentries stood importantly in unlikely places. Hutted camps squatted in parks and rubber estates where every morning Indian tappers unconcernedly collected the latex. Huge gangs of coolies were felling trees making landing strips for aircraft. The streets were thronged with Europeans in different types of uniform, planters and others from up-country who had been conscripted into one of the civil defence services. All able-bodied Europeans were given a job in some part of the war machine. Some got commissions in the regular units fighting in the country, others joined the Volunteers, the R.N.V.R. or the V.A.F. Some already held appointments in the R.A.F. and others joined it as ground staff. All doctors not already in the R.A.M.C. or other parts of the army were needed to organise Medical Auxiliary Services and to cope with the enormous pressure on the hospitals. Those who could do nothing else drove lorries and ambulances. Post Office officials, Municipality workers, clerks in essential government services and members of the big banks carried on with their civilian jobs in the intervals of fire-watching. Everyone did something except a few of the older retired gentlemen.

I have seen criticism of the unprepared state in which Singapore is alleged to have found herself at this time, and of the apathy shown by certain sections of the white population. I would not deny that such people existed but they formed a negligible part of the whole. Members of the Singapore Club were no more typical of the ordinary European than were members of Mr. P. G. Wodehouse's Drones Club typical of the average Englishman in the London blitz. They lived aloof from the mainsprings of national sentiment and if they did little to help the war effort they did equally little to hinder it. It is a pity that writers on the Malayan campaign in appraising the work done and the attitude shown by Europeans in Singapore have held up as a general type such a small and totally unrepresentative section of the community.

The women too did excellent work as nurses and voluntary workers in the overcrowded hospitals. I have related how many women took First Aid and nursing courses in the days before the war in order to qualify themselves to play some part in the war effort if war came to Malaya. Many of these after leaving their homes up country at an hour's notice or less rendered their best services in Singapore. Women voluntary workers ran canteens all over the town. George and I visited one in the Y.M.C.A. next door to Raffles Museum. It was run by an elderly lady down from Kelantan with two assistants,

to one of whom George was engaged. I saw Mrs. Bintley, wife of the Ipoh branch manager of McAllister & Co., running a big canteen in the Central Station almost single-handed. One and all they worked hard and liked it. There was no thought of surrender in their minds, or in the mind of anyone else. Why should there be? The tragedy unfolded itself later when all these women had to be evacuated by ship under the most appalling conditions, leaving their husbands and friends behind. Some had to be forced on board. Others absolutely refused to go, and after the capitulation became internees in Japanese hands. It is easy to say that they should all have been evacuated before war started, which would have made room for the evacuation of some of the older civilians later. As events turned out, of course they should. Whose job was it to foresee such circumstances? Certainly not theirs. We get back to the unprofitable vicious circle which I need not elaborate again.

Singapore adapted itself as best it could to carrying on normally within a framework of war activity. This itself has created much misunderstanding. It was not failure to realise the gravity of the situation which made people carry out their civilian duties as far as possible apparently unworried by the prospect of war in their midst. It was a matter of deliberate policy. Singapore was preparing for a long siege. Everyone who could be of direct value to the war effort was mobilised for service. This included many non-Europeans. I will not pretend that this process was ever complete. But the civil authorities certainly went a long way towards it. Singapore was preparing for the siege of an island of whose inhabitants four out of every five could not read, write, or speak English, or who were too old for any active service. These people could not be of any direct service in the war, but the physical and mental health of this vast majority was of paramount importance. To retain an atmosphere as normal as possible without jeopardising the war effort was the surest way of keeping up their morale. Shops were encouraged to remain open and carry on normal trade. Rice and food shops, in fact, were kept open by law. Mosquito buses and trams continued to operate on a reduced schedule. Motorists gave lifts to passengers. Cars were requisitioned for war service, and unwanted vehicles were cleared off the roads; though there were few of these.

Raffles Institution opened for the first fortnight of the new term, though attendance was poor and it was forced to close when raids became heavy and continuous. Students at King Edward VII College of Medicine completed their final examinations during heavy air raids. My old school, Victoria School,

had been turned into a hospital for civilian casualties. The Cathay Cinema and a few of the smaller Chinese and Indian picture houses carried on for a bit. The New World remained open for a time during the hours of daylight. The Singapore Cricket Club remained open. Most of its members were working on essential services and were able to get meals there instead of wasting time going home. Every day the club was packed at mid-day with bread-and-cheesers snatching a quick tiffin. Some were too busy even to leave their offices; the Club sent meals up to them. Only snorer's corner lacked its usual coterie of noisy sleepers. The Tanglin Club had become a convalescent home for military casualties.

Shortly after our arrival a particularly heavy raid on the docks was accompanied by some indiscriminate bombing of the centre of the town. Four bombs landed near the Singapore Cricket Club. One landed on the cricket field and another just outside the billiard room, smashing in the window and part of the wall and writing off several cars in the car park. Another landed right in the middle of the bowling green, the most hallowed piece of turf in all Singapore. When I passed the Club about an hour later I saw a few wizened old gentlemen from the Singapore Club—a mournful gathering of dyspeptic troglodytes—gazing at the crater in dumb rage. This was the last straw! The fourth bomb, a big one, landed on the muddy shore a few yards from the road. It threw up showers of mud which entered offices on the top floor of Fullerton Building. It also damaged the clock face on the Victoria Memorial Building although the clock carried on: it produced the notice "They can't stop our clock."

Every large shop in the town had its own reinforced shelter in the basement and there was enough shelter accommodation for everyone. Notices in every language informing the population how to protect themselves in an air raid were plastered along every street. I have yet to see anyone caught in the street in a raid carry out these instructions to the letter and throw himself flat on the road when the bombs start dropping. Chinese were inclined to run about too much instead of taking the first available cover when the siren went. There was no panic, but you had the ludicrous spectacle of those on this side of the street running over to take cover in a drain on the other side, and those on the other side running over to a drain on this side. I would never call the morale of the Asiatic excellent during all the raids, but it was certainly good. Chinese shopkeepers displayed notices in Chinese and English saying something like this: "If you think the Japanese might take this island please

go away. We are not interested in the possibility of defeat." Change Alley did a roaring trade amongst members of the fighting services on a few hours leave.

I became attached to a regular British battalion who had arrived as reinforcements in Singapore only the previous day. I joined them at the Naval Base Camp a few hours after they got there. They were a grand crowd, a territorial unit which had been on Coast defence in England until September 1941, when they had been ordered to the Middle East. During their voyage the war in the Pacific had broken out and they had been diverted to Singapore. They had never been out of England before and knew nothing of tropical jungle beyond what they had gathered from the exotic films featuring Dorothy Lamour in a sarong. The colonel, who was a regular, had been in Malaya for a short while many years before when the Malay Regiment was being formed; he told me he remembered very little of the country. The R.S.M. was also a regular and the rest of the men had joined up in England on the outbreak of war. They all came from a few neighbouring towns and villages in England. Their average age was twenty-three; that of the officers was rather higher. There existed between officers and men a spirit of comradeship and mutual trust the like of which I had never seen before. There was an atmosphere of tremendously frank friendship within a pattern of the rigorous discipline of war. I have no doubt that there is nothing exceptional about this in units of the British army at home, but I could not help noticing the astonishing contrast between the officers of this unit and those of the Volunteers of which I was one, though this must not be taken too greatly to the detriment of Volunteer officers. In this battalion there was a similarity of background and interest among all ranks which made everyone genuinely and sincerely anxious to help everyone else; I have shown that amongst Volunteers there was not and never could be. From the moment I joined them they treated me unobtrusively and without question as one of themselves. It was grand to talk to fellows who had so recently been in England. They gave me a most complete picture of life in war-time England, the London blitz, and for the first time I got a good idea of how conditions had changed there since I had left in 1937.

We left Singapore very early the next morning (16th January), crossed the Causeway, went through Johore Bahru and up sixty miles to the cross-roads at Ayer Hitam, arriving two or three hours before daybreak. We were not, as it happens, to come into action for the next two days. We were moved up to the East Coast area for about twenty-four hours, coming

under the A.I.F. Then we were moved back to Ayer Hitam and came into action first between there and Batu Pahat on the West Coast. My duties were to go off with the C.O. and his officers whenever they made an administrative reconnaissance, getting as much help as I could from the local inhabitants and finding suitable places for the battalion to go into harbour. When we arrived in a new area my first job was to go round the perimeter thoroughly turning out all Asiatics in any houses near it and finding out what information I could from them. I found one old Chinese rubber tapper living quite contentedly with his wife and three children in a ramshackle wooden hut. He had a wireless receiving set partially dismantled. It may have been perfectly all right, but I put the whole family on a passing lorry going to Singapore and instructed the driver not to drop them until he got into the middle of the town. The Chinese protested very vigorously but we were taking no chances. I used to contact the nearest ration and P.O.L. supply points, field dressing stations, etc. These were constantly changing their positions without being able to notify units at once, and it was a difficult job to keep track of where everybody was.

I cannot give anything approaching a complete account of the fighting in Johore. I saw only a very small part of it myself. An Australian unit came into action in the Gemas area. It started auspiciously enough. An ambush was laid in a place where the road passed through a cutting with a bridge over a small stream at each end. The banks above the cutting were lined with Australians concealed in the long grass. A detachment of enemy motorcyclists came dashing along the road followed by armoured fighting vehicles and infantry in lorries. The bridge in front of them was blown up just as the front cyclist got to it, and after a decent interval of time to let the enemy pile up the bridge behind them was also blown up. About a thousand enemy were killed in the trap, a very few escaping into the jungle on either side. The Australian casualties were in single figures. They then withdrew to previously prepared positions near Segamat, where they more or less held the enemy until the landings South of them were consolidated and exploited when they were compelled to withdraw.

These landings were on a very large scale at Muar and at Batu Pahat. The Australians were in action against the famous Imperial Guards Division at Parit Sulong Bridge. The fighting was 'bitter and very confused'. The earlier landings were contained but we could not stop the enemy getting the upper

hand with numerous landings later made in force with the great advantage of complete and unchallenged air support. British troops fought like tigers in the Muar and Batu Pahat areas but were always withdrawing or being cut off by the more mobile and numerically larger forces of the enemy. The same story as before only on a larger scale. An Indian infantry brigade got badly mauled in the Muar-Yong Peng road district, where the Japanese were evidently trying to cut off the lines of withdrawal of our forces eighty miles further North. The A.I.F. had to send reinforcements from their positions on the East Coast to bolster up the defences on the other side of the peninsula where it appeared that the main thrust was being put, and had very little left with which to contest subsidiary landings at Endau and Mersing. Our forces were compelled to evacuate Muar and the scene moved further South to the Batu Pahat area where Japanese forward troops were infiltrating through the jungle at an alarming speed making for the main road and presumably the important cross-roads at Ayer Hitam.

Even before Muar had fallen small parties of troops were getting through the jungle. I was at our B Echelon when operational orders came through. Part of the battalion was to move off and wipe out these enemy parties. I remember going forward with one of the company commanders and getting sniped at from trees. I remember lying on the ground with two other officers trying to peer through the gloom of rubber trees while grenades were being hurled at us, from which direction we were quite unable to determine. The nearest landed about eight yards from us but the ground was muddy and we got no casualties. I remember a lot of dark figures moving furtively from tree to tree about two hundred yards from us, like leopards stalking their prey. Rifles were held in the aim and fired whenever a fleeting snap target presented itself. A sudden burst of firing broke out on our right and one platoon went in with tommy guns. The figures got up and ran. Renewed firing broke out, mingling with the noise of bursting grenades. A few enemy fell, but most of them got away out of sight. I remember moving with one platoon down the side of an estate road taking advantage of the cover afforded by silt pits and low bushes. A machine-gun nest opened up on us and we lost eight casualties. I remember going with two Bren gun sections to dislodge the nest. We tried to work our way forward to a flank. Rifle fire broke out from snipers in trees all round us. A grenade burst right in the middle of us, laying out five men. We were pinned down for two or three

hours without being able to move. We pinpointed two snipers in trees not thirty yards away and shot them out of the branches, but there were many more. Low-flying enemy aircraft screamed above us from time to time. They could not see us of course but they were bombing the main road about a quarter of a mile behind. After some time a counter-attack was put in. A few enemy were caught and shot up but most of them got away into the jungle. Firing died down. We sent patrols forward and onto our flanks but they were unable to contact any enemy troops. By dusk everything was quiet again.

I went round the perimeter outposts that night with one of the officers. The men were in good spirits. They had no sort of fear of the little yellow Japanese—had they not run like rabbits when we had counter-attacked that day?—but they were not too keen on the jungle which closed in on them from every side. And who shall blame them? They had seen nothing like it on the rolling downs of the English Coast. They were completely unacclimatized to the steamy, enervating heat that enveloped them like a blanket. Unceasing was the steady screeching of crickets and other insects, the 'strident symphony' of the jungle. One gets so used to it in time that one does not notice it, but to them it must have sounded deafening. Their imagination conjured up tigers, panthers, wild boars lurking just outside the five yard circle of their small world. It is easy to laugh at them until you have been in the jungle alone at night. They wanted to know if fireflies attack you. Sentries got bitten all over by mosquitoes; they hated the powerful smell of bamber oil which they rubbed over their faces and arms. One sentry post was in a bad way. They had seen, or thought they had seen, a large snake; they were too frightened to use their blue torches. It was impossible to convince them that such a thing was most unlikely. I got a torch and a stout stick and beat all round the bushes without finding anything. If they saw anything it was probably a wet branch lying on the ground. The padre asked me that evening if I would come into Singapore with him next morning to collect N.A.A.F.I. stores for the men, as he did not know his way about.

Next morning I woke up with a splitting headache feeling a lot worse than a wet rag. I thought at first it might be the excitement of the previous day's engagement or the smell of cordite or something (Japanese bangs always smelt like nothing on earth), then came to the conclusion that it could not be this. An R.A.M.C. doctor did a rapid blood test and confirmed what I already knew by then—malaria. It may have been a

fresh infection or a relapse of the old trouble. It was agreed that as no new orders had been received the best thing I could do was to go into Singapore with the padre, help him do his jobs there and then report back to my own unit for treatment. I guzzled a lot of quinine and by the afternoon began to feel better. I fixed up the padre with a lorry load of goods for the troops and wondered whether to come back or not. I was still feeling a bit groggy, so I went to see our Medical Officer. He decided the matter. "They don't want any sick passengers in Johore", he said, "take thirty grains of quinine a day for four days and then you should be fit for service again. The war will not be over in four days."

This was reasonable enough. It was the attitude of everybody at the time. I have already sketched the course of the fighting in Johore, of which at the time we knew little or nothing. We all hoped confidently that a line could be held at last. We had got in fresh reinforcements and there were, marvellous to relate, two full divisions in the fighting. Surely we should hold them this time. But as ever things were moving more quickly than anyone suspected. The grand strategy was to hold the enemy at arms' length from Singapore on a line, roughly Muar—Segamat—Mersing. Officially there was no thought of further retirement. But even as the M.O. was speaking Muar was falling and the whole defence of Johore was crumbling. By the time I returned to duty the order to evacuate Johore had been given.

And so we get back to the old story of 'complacency'. 'This time we really shall hold them!' Is that complacency? Is it not rather human nature? Some will say, I know, that complacency is a common manifestation of human nature. But there is a difference between the man who deliberately and intentionally blinds himself to facts which stare him in the face, and the man who in default of accurate information defies rumour and places on the available facts the best construction that he can.

I suppose it was inevitable, but the lack of information and precise facts led to all sorts of the most outrageous rumours. This was not due to any fifth column activity. Newspaper reports and intelligence summaries contained nothing but understatements and wild travesties of the truth. So wild that nobody believed them. And in this atmosphere stories could not help circulating.

I returned to duty on January 30th, the day before the Causeway was blown up. I had been with the British battalion just over a week. I never saw any of its men again.

CHAPTER XIV

PREPARATIONS FOR SIEGE

ON the last of my four days on sick leave I went into the town. I was a bit dopy with quinine but otherwise perfectly fit. Singapore was already beginning to look grimmer. An immense cloud of smoke rose from the oil tanks on the north side of the island in the Naval Base which the Japanese had bombed heavily, rose and billowed out like a gigantic mushroom forming a grand smoke-screen for the Japanese fighter planes which flew through it on their ground-strafting sorties. The R.A.F. had been bombed out of all the four aerodromes on the island. I think most if not all our planes had been evacuated to Sumatra, from which our fighters tried to intercept the Japanese heavy bombers which came over every morning and afternoon in batches of twenty-seven flying very high, over twenty thousand feet, in perfect formation. Large parts of the docks had been smashed to bits, and warehouses and rubber godowns were burning furiously. Two miles out to sea an oil tanker was ablaze from end to end, huge flames licking round the dense black smoke. A never-ending stream of military traffic, lorries, Bren carriers, workshop breakdown vehicles towing battered and disabled transports, poured along Bukit Timah Road and diverged at Newton Circus to their various headquarters. Government House had been bombed. The servants' quarters had been hit, with two or three casualties. Elsewhere in the suburbs roads were blocked with fallen houses. Big craters appeared in the gardens along Scotts Road.

In the centre of the town things were still fairly normal. No more damage had been done there. All the shops were open ; you approached them by side entrances through a tall maze of sandbags. I bought a valise from John Little's to replace one I had lost upcountry. Change Alley was still going full blast, packed with sailors and airmen buying blackout torches. I sent a cable home, the last until I reached Australia six weeks later. In the Post Office I ran into Ray Moulton, a miner from Ipoh who had been in my platoon during the first training embodiment. It seemed ages ago. He had joined the Armoured Car Section, and had been driving a vehicle on forward reconnaissance at the beginning of the Kampar show. They had had to go far beyond their objective in order to turn

and were ambushed on the way back by Japanese armed with stick-bombs. They lost six vehicles and the majority of the crews had been casualties. Ray Moulton had been shot through both arms with anti-tank bullets while he was driving, but had managed to get his car back.

The F.M.S.V.F. Depot had moved out to Teluk Paku in the Changi area on the extreme eastern corner of the island, about fourteen miles from Singapore town. The Depot was a dumping ground for all F.M.S.V.F. personnel for whom no definite job had by that time been found. The numbers were small because by that time most of the rifle platoons had their fixed positions on different parts of the coast or were given counter-attack tasks at semi-deployment camps at big centres round the island. There were a lot of supernumerary officers for a number of our N.C.O.s had been commissioned as officers for liaison work with the reinforcement which had arrived in Singapore during the campaign.

The day after I arrived a new C.O. took over command of the F.M.S.V.F. He was Colonel James who had commanded the 2nd (Selangor) Bn. for many years, and was without doubt the finest of all the Os. C. Battalions in our Brigade. He had the reputation of being hard on his junior officers and the men, but he was hardest of all on himself. A tremendous fighter himself he made a real fighting speech on his arrival in the officers' mess. "Gentlemen", he said, "up to now this unit has had no definite job to do. That has not been our fault. But now all that is changed. We have a definite and an important war role, and from now on everything else will go by the board. Our job is to prepare ourselves to carry out that role properly, and that will need in the next week or two every ounce of energy we possess." Strong words. On paper they sound theatrical. Coming from Colonel James they did not.

The task was beach defence on the left flank of the Manchester Regiment whose barracks we were occupying, from Teluk Paku Point northwest towards the Air Base at Seletar. I was ordered off for special duty with 'Mobcol' a few days later so I did not see much of their work. However, I met the Adjutant, Captain A. W. Frisby, in Sumatra after he had been evacuated with a few engineers and technical personnel two days before the surrender, and he told me about the Depot up to the time he left them. Headquarters moved into part of Changi barracks, and there ensued a week of feverish activity reconnoitring, digging, wiring and manning the section posts overlooking the Straits of Johore. Some idea of our paucity in numbers may be gathered from the fact that one platoon

was holding a front of five hundred yards of broken coastline, with rocks and boulders sticking out into the sea and forming admirable cover for the landing of enemy troops by night. The whole area had to be patrolled constantly at night, and a man was lucky if he got as much as three hours sleep during the twelve hours of darkness. This is nothing to comment on in war, of course, but a whole fortnight of it when there is digging and wiring in the hot sun to be done all day can be fairly tiring. The platoon I have mentioned had rifles and one or two tommy guns. Machine-gunners were very scarce as most of them had gone to Belakan Mati, a fortified island about two miles south of Singapore with big eighteen-inch batteries, to reinforce the garrison there against any attempted landing. There were two machine gun posts covering part of this five hundred yard front, one at each end of the position. The ground was not mangrove swamp as was that on the north-west side of the island manned by the A.I.F. It was rocky and undulating, intersected with small streams, drains and tracks. Many of the Changi garrison officers had lived in big houses at Teluk Paku in the days of peace. These made headquarters for the various units where the commanders could at least keep fairly dry and where troops could rest during their brief periods off duty.

Major Cockman's X company were also in that area. They were now a mixed company of selected Europeans and Asiatics, and had a counter-attack role about half a mile inland. I saw them the evening before I left, and they were getting on well. Sgt. Lee Mun Yui was in fine form and told me a good story. Two officers had been out on reconnaissance and had seen a packing case floating in the sea about fifty yards off Changi Point.

"What's that floating out there?" said one of them.

"Oh. Nothing very much. Just an old wooden packing case. Probably from the warehouses near the Naval Base," said the other.

"How do you know? For all you know there might be a Jap inside it", said the first officer facetiously.

"All right, then. Shoot it."

They fired at it and to their utter surprise a Japanese soldier jumped out into the sea.

Before the Depot left Teluk Paku the Camp was bombed. Penang broadcasting station warned us beforehand. "Hullo. This is Penang calling Singapore. We have a special message for the troops at Changi. You've had a nice, quiet time haven't you? But don't think we've forgotten you. We haven't.

"Tomorrow morning at ten-thirty we shall be paying you a little visit." Sure enough, punctually at ten-thirty next morning a flight of fighter-bombers came over and bombed Teluk Paku Camp. They hit the sentry post on the gate, killing three men. They scored a hit on the largest of the mess huts killing and wounding a whole lot more. Other bombs did little damage. The Camp was right out in the open and the buildings had nice red corrugated iron roofs so they were an easy target. X Company about a quarter of a mile down the road also got bombed although they were well concealed under trees; they sustained, I believe, half a dozen European casualties.

Shortly after this the Japanese landed on Pulau Ubin, an island about half a mile off the Changi coast. This lent colour to the supposition that the Japanese would attempt their invasion on the north-east side of Singapore Island. Tactical considerations made this appear likely. There were two good roads running from the north-east side of the island straight into the heart of Singapore, one from Changi and one from Ponggol. Success at either of these points could be exploited straight to the front, always the easiest thing to do. The north-west side of the island was comparatively undeveloped, being a belt of mangrove swamp and some secondary jungle.

But if the landing on Pulau Ubin, which was undefended, was intended to convey that impression it was a feint. The Japanese never pressed on this front at all until they had consolidated their gains elsewhere and had overrun the Naval Base and the Air Base. The enormous floating dock from the Naval Base was seen being towed out to sea three weeks before the fall. Some people refused to believe the common assertion that it had been sunk in deep water to prevent its falling into enemy hands, and there were rumours that it had reached Sourabaya. When the Singapore perimeter was shortened for a last stand the Changi area was evacuated. The magazine was blown up rather prematurely. Fisby told me that he and Colonel James were just packing up to clear out when there was the most deafening explosion he had ever heard. They had been bombed several times in their headquarters and had grown used to it. This was something different. The magazine was about two hundred yards from them, and an avalanche of bricks, limestone rock, stones and rubble rained down on them from the sky for about three minutes, smashing the iron roofs into fantastic shapes. They were not hit. Fortunately most of the Depot troops were away by this time or there would have been casualties.

It was absolutely uncanny the way the Japanese spotted headquarters, ordnance and workshop units, lorry parks and gun emplacements. Ten minutes after you moved into a new area, under good cover and with troops well dispersed, an enemy reconnaissance plane would come over and circle round lower and lower. After having a good look round it flew off. Twenty minutes later over would come a small flight of bombers bombing and machine-gunning all round the place you were in. They did it up-country and they did it with even greater effect in Singapore. It was little short of a miracle the way they found out your moves immediately you had made them, with the eyes of vultures looking for carrion. It cannot have been due to fifth column activity, for it was all too quick. Even a fifth columnist with a radio set could hardly have given away the necessary information in time for the enemy to take such immediate action. The Japanese were said to be using very powerful field-glasses, and certainly their co-operation between Army and Air Force was absolutely first-class.

The Changi garrison forces did come into action, I was told, on the last two days in the neighbourhood of Paya Lebar Road on the line of their withdrawal to Singapore. But the main fighting took place in other sectors of the island.

'Mobcol' was quite a sound idea. A study of the ration strength aggregate for all troops on the island revealed that there were thousands of troops who while not being first-line troops in the field yet could be used for defence if they were organised, armed, drafted into units and given the necessary commanders to lead them when they were required. There were shore depot personnel and naval ratings, including some fifteen hundred who had got back to Singapore after the sinking of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse*. There were a lot of R.A.F. ground staff left when the Air Force departed. There were gunners and A.A. personnel who had lost their guns upcountry. There were workshop and ordnance units, P.O.L. and ammunitions dump guards, and miscellaneous ancillary units attached to brigades and divisions whose job in life had been lost through circumstances beyond their control. They were in some cases kicking their heels and doing nothing at all, waiting for orders and absorption into other units. It was nobody's fault that they were there. Things, as always, had moved too quickly. The administration could not keep pace with them. Senior officers commanding these men had left for other jobs, and they were in charge of junior commanders who could do nothing with them in default of orders. They were dotted here and there all over the island.

Our job was firstly to find out where they were. For which purpose the island was divided into sectors and sub-sectors. We went round all the camps and into the highways and byways of our sector, asking every unit "Are you interested in our scheme?" We sometimes felt rather like travelling salesmen trying to get customers to buy our particular brand of salvation, but we soon had far more men on our hands than we could possibly deal with. The next job was to find them arms. We had liaison officers who went round all the reinforcement camps and police depots collecting every rifle on which they could lay their hands. The Malay Police had been disarmed before being disbanded upcountry, and their rifles had been brought down in trucks to Singapore. Caches of old but still serviceable rifles were found in all sorts of unlikely places. We supplemented these with pistols, shotguns, and anything else we could find. We supplied them with small arms, ammunition and grenades.

Some had never fired a rifle before. We gave them a certain amount of training in the use of their weapons and told them about the tactics used by the Japanese upcountry and how to counter them. We showed them how to move through rubber trees and secondary jungle. Above all we impressed on them the necessity of not opening fire before they could be certain of a kill. Their task was carefully explained to them. If any enemy troops, *e.g.*, landing parties or parachutists, came into their area they were to go in to the attack straight away without waiting for any orders. It seems ridiculous that this should have to be made clear, but we were dealing mainly with specialised units who had apparently not been told that invariable rule that every member of the fighting forces on active service is a soldier first and a technician afterwards, which applied equally to Navy and R.A.F. personnel. In the event of invasion units were to stand by for orders to move to any threatened area near them.

The idea was a good one on paper and would have been good in practice too if we had had more time to train and organise these units. Mobcol personnel were recruited from members of the F.M.S.V.F., mostly officers and senior N.C.O.s, who had been in action upcountry. It was estimated that by the end of a fortnight we had contacted about ten thousand men on the island, given them arms and ammunition when necessary, and fixed them up sufficiently at any rate for the defence of their own area.

Meanwhile Johore was being evacuated. After the collapse of the front sixty miles north of Singapore no attempt was

made to hold another line round the Johore Bahru. There were no fixed defences round Johore Bahru ; indeed, there is no reason why there should have been. The country is gently undulating with mangrove and rubber estates and does not lend itself to defence. And there was no time to prepare positions. If we had been able to hold some sort of perimeter round the town for a short time it would have given more time for the preparation of defences on the north shores of Singapore, which were shelled out of existence even as they were hastily being constructed. But troops cannot be in two places at once, and every man was needed for the defence of the Island. Convoy after convoy of troops poured southwards over the Causeway. The Australians came over. Their casualties had been light, though they had fought well in Johore.

The last over were the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. They had fought in every engagement of any size the whole way down from the Thai border, and were easily the finest and most outstanding regiment in the peninsula fighting. Two out of every three 'gongs' awarded during the campaign went to the Argylls. They were a fine example to the other regiments, they and the Gurkhas beside whom they had often fought. It is just possible that had every regiment which came into action been up to their standard of warfare we might have held the Japanese in Johore, in spite of our lack of aircraft and all other handicaps. Their C.O. Colonel Stewart has rightly drawn attention to the amount of training they had in jungle warfare, and that was the secret of their success. I forgot the exact figures of their casualties, but it is near enough to say that ten officers and ninety other ranks crossed the Causeway into Singapore. If anything, this overstates their strength. They debussed at the Johore Bahru end and marched across in threes to the tune of bagpipes and drums. Hardly had they reached the other side when the engineers blew the Causeway. The Causeway is not a bridge ; it is a stone breast-work dividing the Straits of Johore in half. It was blown in four places.

One officer I met had a good story of the last few days in Johore. During the evacuation a patrol was sent out with a wireless van to make contact with the enemy's forward positions and report back to Brigade. But in spite of its having the most detailed instructions about its task no messages were received from it. There was complete silence. Later the patrol got back to Brigade in Singapore. It was then found that the van had installed a receiving set, not a transmitter.

For years before war broke out Singapore had been described by those who should know in such extravagant terms as 'impregnable fortress', 'Bastion of the East'. This was not a deliberate bluff. Everyone believed it. Let us therefore examine its features to see what light they throw on its apparent vulnerability.

Years before war came the Japanese had wisely taken the precaution of owning vast acres of land overlooking the Straits of Johore from which they could make a detailed study of the north shore of the Island. The Island is flat except for a small range of hills in the north rising to six hundred feet. South of it is a deep water channel flanked by a number of small islands two of which are important, Belakan Mati and Pulau Berani. These were heavily fortified with eighteen and sixteen inch guns covering all the approaches to Singapore.

There were numerous heavy shore batteries on the Island itself. The whole of the south side of the island was heavily defended. Concrete gun emplacements and pill-boxes studded the beaches, which were wired and mined. I am convinced that any attack along these shores would have failed. Even if the whole of the Japanese Navy had appeared near Singapore the week before the surrender it could have been blown out of the water. It had the sense to do no such thing. Singapore was then impregnable from the south and from the sea. It was immensely stronger than any force which, so far as human intellect could foresee, could ever muster to attack it from the sea. All the defences faced south. The Air Base and the Naval Base with its enormous graving dock, the largest in the world outside Europe, and the floating dock and refitting yards, which had cost millions of pounds to build, were tucked away in a safe place in the north of the island. Huge underground bomb-proof stores were built of concrete and filled with heavy ammunition. Enormous oil tanks were installed on the Naval Base.

Why was this fatal mistake made? Why did nobody think of proper all round defence of the island? The construction of the Singapore Naval Base was begun soon after the last war at a time when the tremendous part that aircraft would play in any future war was only dimly realised and when the conception of all-round defence on a big scale existed more in military manuals than on the actual ground. By our naval treaties with America and Japan we undertook not to fortify against naval action any of our Colonial possessions lying more than a certain number of degrees East. Singapore lay just West of

this demarcation line but in the days when the idea of disarmament was strong, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald maintained that the building of the Base offended the spirit of our obligations with Japan although it was legal according to the letter of the treaties. The old story of non-provocation and we'll-do-the-right-thing-by-them-and-they'll-do-the-right-thing-by-us. Work on the Base was stopped, and was only started again tardily after the slump. It was never completely finished.

Disarmament failed in the thirties and one nation after another started preparing frantically for war. We started last in the big race for armaments and successfully postponed the inevitable for a few years by what we called appeasement. Even then no one saw the feasibility of any enemy attack on the back-door of Singapore *via* the Peninsula. Japan had emerged as a potential enemy, but where would she get the bases for a springboard for such an attack? How would she protect her long lines of communications? We could surely hold her at arm's length in the Peninsula until reinforcements arrived to drive her out. Our navy and land-based aircraft could drive her off before her troops landed.

Then came the war, the collapse of France and the collaboration of Vichy and parts of Colonial France with our enemies. Admiral Decoux handed over parts of Indo-China to Japan to form advance bases for her strike southwards. Could this have been foreseen even a year before? The authorities were not blind to the danger which was looming larger every month. Even before the war an attempt had been made to bolster up the wavering policy of the Siamese in our favour. A military mission from Bangkok had been officially received in Singapore. Its members were shown our defences and the big Naval Base. They left, we hope, greatly impressed. Right up to Japan's move in the south, Thailand declared that she would resist all attempts at aggression. She actually did fight the Japanese for twenty-four hours. Two weeks later she was fighting with them, using our bombing of Bangkok as the excuse. Japan had the springboard she needed.

Now the possibility of something like this happening had probably been realised. What had not been realised was that the time of its happening would be one when the situation in other theatres of war was serious. There was the Libyan front, a drain on men and shipping. Russia had to be reinforced at all costs. The threat of invasion still hung over England. The British Government were in no position to support all

fronts. Better to reinforce actual fronts like Libya and Russia than potential fronts of incalculable magnitude like the Far East. The men, guns and above all planes we needed so badly went elsewhere. The British Government took a chance. It had to. It lost.

This is not an attempt to make an apology for the abject military defeat which followed. Without doubt there was some inefficiency and complacency on the part of the military and civil authorities in Malaya, although I have tried to show that this was not as bad as some people have supposed. They were not blameless. But to my mind the real responsibility for our failure will be found in the same place as for the failure in Norway, France and Greece. It sprang from a ten-year policy of casting hostages to fortune.

The defensive strategy of Singapore demanded that the enemy be kept at a distance, and I have tried to show that it was not *a priori* unreasonable to suppose that this could be done. At close quarters Singapore was not a natural fortress like Gibraltar or Corregidor. It was an artificial fortress, needing above all aircraft for its defence. There was tremendous excitement when fifty Hurricanes arrived to reinforce the Buffalos shortly before the withdrawal into Johore. But they were not enough. They were bombed on the ground. The enemy bombed all the cover round the sides of our four Singapore aerodromes where the aircraft were parked. They played the old game of engaging our machines with fighter-bombers until they were forced down to refuel, then coming in with the heavy bombers. I never saw more than three of our planes in the air at any one time. The old joke became current. "Look. There goes our Air Force." "By Jove, yes. Both of them."

It was quite impossible to switch round the defences of Singapore to face north in two months. It would have taken more like two years. The time had arrived for ingenious makeshift, for any sort of substitute which would improve the solidity of our defences and hinder the enemy's preparations. Guns took up positions commanding the Straits of Johore. Observation posts were sited on the high ground in the north. Infantry dug weapon pits and wired their front. Machine-gun positions were chosen covering as much as possible of the broken coastline. Working parties toiled all day up to their knees in mangrove swamp. Camouflage nets and branches covered every post. There was no shortage of engineering stores or vehicles. Road blocks and anti-tank trenches were sited and prepared. All Asiatics living within the northern perimeter

were cleared out of their houses and sent into the town. Searchlight batteries took up positions overlooking the Straits of Johore. The Straits and beaches were mined.

Everything that could be done in a short space of time was done, and it all went on to an accompaniment of intense strafing from enemy aircraft. They continued to raid the town and docks with large high-flying formations, and they also kept up a relay service of about a dozen flights of fighter-bombers circling round our half-prepared positions all day long, bombing and machine-gunning here and there and above all signalling back our positions to the enemy batteries half a mile away in Johore. The enemy had a grandstand view of everything we did. They knew exactly where all our gun positions were. Our batteries were continually on the move shifting from one place to another to avoid being knocked out, and all our fixed defences were strafed by very accurate shell and mortar fire.

The Australians, reinforced with more A.I.F. from New South Wales, had the north-west coast in the mangrove. They were justifiably disappointed to find that no defences had been prepared for them when they returned from Johore. On their left flank was the Malay Regiment. A British brigade was on their right overlooking the Causeway, and British and Indian troops held the north-east sector.

The Japanese were also making their preparations while they laid down heavy harassing fire on our positions based on aircraft reconnaissance. They had a large gun, someone said it was a nine-inch naval gun mounted on a carriage in a railway siding, which fired for a short while every morning and evening on Newton Circus. It was said that Japanese tanks with their tractors removed were being driven down the railway line, having been especially constructed to be able to do this on our metre-gauge track. Zero fighters were said to be landing and taking off in rapid succession from the wide streets of Johore Bahru, the large buildings affording the necessary protection from our shell fire. The Japanese were making a big headquarters in the courtyard of the Government Offices. We could see them peering at us through glasses.

The Mobcol unit with which I was working was billeted in a house near Holland Village. Every day I went out with the instructors to our centres or with Captain White to find new adherents to the cause. It was a slow job arming and equipping them, like building bricks without straw, but soon we had a fair number of units ready for action. We were dealing, of course, with men who had not been out of Singapore and who had not seen any of the fighting, but even so I was amazed at

their calm self-assurance—I will not call it indifference. Everything was going to be all right now. Upcountry it had been different. We had been outflanked by superior numbers. But now we had masses of troops. Singapore was very strong. It could not be outflanked. The Japanese would be thrown back when they tried a frontal assault. There would be no more withdrawing. I did not know what to say. I suppose I half believed all this myself.

I was talking to an R.A.S.C. Major in Chickaboo Camp, and had dared to contradict him when he suggested that there was plenty of time to teach his men a bit of rifle training in the intervals of loading and unloading lorries. "My dear fellow," he said, "I have to think of my men a bit, you know. Loading vehicles is a very tiring job and they must get a bit of rest sometime. I don't want you to think that I don't realise the seriousness of the situation." I wanted special hours to be allocated for training his men, and suggested that the enemy would probably make an attempt at landing from the sea or by parachute within a week or so. "Don't you believe it", he went on. "Half you people get in such a flap. Think of all the stuff they've got to get down to Johore before they can try anything. Their supply problem must be acute. They've overrun themselves for the moment. They'll need two months or more before they're ready. We shall get hell from the air, of course, but we shan't see any Japs on the island yet awhile." What is a man to do?

Fortunately these sort of men were in the minority. Most of them were glad for what we were trying to do. Commander Gregson, of the Seletar Transit Camp, gave us nearly a thousand men to organise and we made them at least into some sort of fighting unit for an emergency. On my last visit to the Transit Camp two days after the Japanese had landed I met Choy Ah Pak who had left the Volunteers to join the R.A.F. ground-staff. I asked him if he could still shoot a rifle as straight as he could when he was in the Anderson Cadet Corps. He said that if any Japanese came near him he would try. He did not seem unduly depressed about the enemy landing. A counter-attack was going in, and surely they would be driven off. He expected to be evacuated with the remainder, mostly European, of the ground staff.

CHAPTER XV

THE FALL OF SINGAPORE

IN the early morning of Sunday, February 8th, nine days after the Causeway had been blown, the Japanese landed in force in the Australian positions. Some like my R.A.S.C. Major were no doubt surprised and horrified. They had been expecting a long siege, and as I have pointed out Singapore was not unprepared for such a siege. There was ammunition and food in plenty. We had about two and a half divisions of front line troops and though this was not very much it should have been enough if we had had no other handicaps. The enemy had the overwhelming advantage. They held absolutely undisputed control of the land, sea and air for five hundred miles round the island. For the past fortnight or so no reinforcements could have got anywhere near us. We were defending an island whose strategic position had been completely nullified. With the proximity and tremendous superiority of enemy land-based aircraft the value of Singapore as a naval and air base had after the outbreak of war rapidly sunk to nil. We were defending a piece of country, valueless for the time being to us, to prevent it being of value to the enemy.

The barrage on the night of the landing was terrific. From nine o'clock that night until the early hours of the morning there was never a second's pause in the firing, and a veteran of the last war told me that it was more colossal than anything he had ever heard on the Somme. But all our gun positions overlooking the Straits had been pinpointed and annihilated by the enemy. All except one searchlight battery on that section of the coast had been knocked out. We had to rely on artillery from positions further back on the island, firing off the map. All our efforts failed to stop the landings.

We sat up listening to the noise. Nobody mentioned landing or invasion but we all knew what the barrage meant. We did not know whereabouts the landing had been made or was going to be made, and we expected that we might be called out at any time. After a bit we settled down to a game of bridge (the only time I did play bridge during the campaign). My partner and I called and made a little slam in hearts. "I wonder what we should be doing now," said Rodney White, "if there had been time to fix up the defence of this island

really efficiently and properly." "I don't know", said the adjutant. "But I'm damned sure we wouldn't be playing bridge."

The next morning we read the account of the landing in the paper. The Japanese had landed in force at Teluk Murah, a tidal creek on the left side of the Australian position, and at numerous other points in small bays and estuaries of streams in the mangrove. The A.I.F. had 'withdrawn to previously prepared positions'. Later 'we have fully contained the enemy'. (What does 'contain' mean?) We waited confidently for the counter-attack which would drive the enemy back into the sea, at dawn before they had time to consolidate their ground. But it never came. I heard a few details about the landings. The Japanese were using invasion barges reinforced with steel which were proof against small arms and machine-gun fire. During the attack a searchlight came on for a few minutes and showed 'hundreds of vessels' coming across the Straits. It is interesting to note that the Japanese landed on the most difficult part of the coast, mangrove swamp, and not very near any road which they might use to exploit their success; also that they crossed the Straits at a place where they were more than a mile wide, not at the narrowest point. The landings were about eight miles west of our sector.

I cannot give an accurate sketch of the course of the fighting. It was confused, with the Japanese always one or two jumps ahead of the latest information. One Japanese column having landed moved eastwards and seized the approaches to the Singapore side of the Causeway. They moved the whole time under their umbrella of aircraft, formations of nine fighter-bombers each which moved round in circles over the front line. The aerial attacks were often so good that all the enemy had to do was to mop up as it went along. They got into Woodlands, a village on Bukit Timah Road, and by Wednesday, February 11th had repaired the Causeway across which they brought tanks. We were able to bombard the Causeway from the other side of the island by turning round such of our heavy guns as were not on fixed mountings facing some other way, but this was not accurate enough and could not be kept up for ever. By Wednesday too the Japanese were further east along Mandai Road beyond Mandai Village, threatening to cut off the Naval Base.

A force of Chinese guerillas had been hastily trained in mangrove swamp fighting. The force was known as Dalforce, after a Singapore Police Officer Dally who raised and commanded it. The men were of all sorts and kinds. There

were students from Raffles College, shopkeepers and labourers, and Communists. I heard the names of several old Anderson School boys I had known in Ipoh who were studying in Singapore and who joined them. Their strength was about a thousand. They were commanded by European officers and received four days' training before going into action. Two or three companies got into action near the Australian position, but were heavily outnumbered and were badly mauled. I have talked since with a number of their officers who said that they fought like tigers. It is a pity that the Chinese in Malaya were not trained in peace-time as part of the local defence forces. Perhaps there were objections on political grounds, but as a race the Chinese were used to physical hardships and the small number that took part in the fighting acquitted themselves well.

The Japanese repaired the Causeway, got light tanks across onto the island, and with the aid of these proceeded to drive a salient down Bukit Timah Road. They were south of Bukit Timah Village by Thursday. They had overrun the whole of the north side of the Island and were pressing southward converging on the town along the main roads. They were pressing in the centre towards Newton Circus and on the east side of the island they had invested the Air Base at Seletar and were pushing towards Serangoon Village from the direction of Ponggol. I hope some of them got bitten by the hamadryads in Ponggol Zoo. In the west they were fighting for Tengah aerodrome and were held there for a time, but only after they had got several machine-gun positions on the perimeter of the landing ground which proved extremely difficult to dislodge when we counter-attacked. South-west of Tengah aerodrome there was pressure on the Malay Regiment's position near Pasir Panjang Village. Small parties of snipers were getting through all over the place and harassing our support troops and vehicles.

Mobcol units were on duty in the area of Tanglin barracks, Grange Road and the top of Orchard Road near the Botanical Gardens. Streams of stragglers, soldiers who had been cut off and had somehow found their way back, moved slowly along the roads. We picked these up and organised them into hasty defensive positions covering cross-roads, important buildings and other points. We commandeered a lorry full of rifles and ammunition. God knows what they were doing there. The lorry was going back towards Singapore, and the Chinese driver did not speak a word of English or Malay. While he protested feebly we unloaded them and put them in a nearby house. We issued a rifle and twenty rounds to every soldier who came

along and shoved him in a drain under one of our N.C.Os. unless he was on duty carrying a message. I suppose we spoil someone's pet scheme on some other part of the island, but at least we got a bit done where we were. We picked up four men with an anti-tank rifle ; they had orders to ' take up a position somewhere in this area, sir ' so we showed them exactly where.

I was at a cross-roads with Captain Tony Hinton of the K.V.F. on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. A lot of heavy shelling was going on both ways, most of it over our heads. Bombers circled above us at about two thousand feet, treating our anti-aircraft defences with complete contempt. The bombing was not heavy where we were. I suppose we were lucky. The nearest bomb to us during those three days landed about sixty yards away, about midway between us and the Chinese house we were using as a headquarters. The house did not suffer much except that when we got back we found most of the ceiling on the floor. Tony Hinton got slightly wounded in the back. Blast from a big shell threw him against a stationary car. I got a small piece of shell splinter or perhaps a piece of flying debris in the foot, which tore open my boot but left little more than a scratch. My field dressing had gone on someone else so I tied a dirty handkerchief round it and forgot about it, which proved later to be a mistake. An eighteen-pounder battery and a Bofors unit moved into our area on the Thursday.

The most extraordinary thing was the sniping. Rifle and light automatic fire went on all round us. Passing lorry drivers and even European motorists trying to get to their homes north of the town produced some strange stories. They had been fired on some way behind us by men lying in ditches. There were a dozen or more men in that big building over there shooting up the road. They had seen parties of Japanese crossing the park in Government House. One European dressed in civilian clothes stopped his car when he saw me.

" Can I go through ? "

" Where are you going ? "

" Ridley Park. A pal of mine has just rung up my office to say that he is completely cut off by the enemy and is being sniped at from all sides. D'you think I shall be able to get through ? "

" I don't see why you shouldn't. "

There were rumours of small groups of Japanese being seen here, there and everywhere. There was a lot of firing going on and we ascertained quite definitely that it was not by our

troops. Yet the fact remains that in three days not one of them was hit. We sent out patrols into the Botanical Gardens where these snipers were supposed to be particularly active. The patrol moved over the whole area without drawing any fire. Finally they stood up openly on the skyline. The noise of rifle shots still went on, but not one of the men was hit and they said that no bullets came their way. It was not fifth column work. It was suggested that the enemy was using explosive bullets or possibly Chinese crackers to imitate the noise of rifle fire, as was done upcountry.

Brigadier Moir paid a visit to our cross-roads at dusk on Thursday night. He was as usual in grand form. There were about ten of us sitting on the grass circle in the middle of the roundabout. "How are things getting on?" we asked. "Things are a bit easier at the moment," the Brigadier replied, "though their tanks are pushing a bit over there on our right down Bukit Timah Road. We'll hold them." A Salvation Army canteen turned up with a couple of young English-speaking Indians in charge of it. We all sat drinking coffee, and the Brigadier spoke to the two Indians. They were not in the least worried by the noise of shell and mortar fire which was now fairly heavy, but took their job very seriously. "May we have the cups back please, sir, because we've lost half our stock already?"

The civilian population kept remarkably calm. The Police maintained order and although there were spasmodic incidents, as was inevitable, there was no widespread outbreak of looting. The morale of the Chinese was not high. How could it be? But they shut themselves in their houses and the chaos of Alor Star and Penang was not repeated. A.R.P. and M.A.S. personnel carried on with their work. There had been some big raids just before the Japanese made their assault on the island, one of these causing two thousand casualties in the Chinese quarter. I remember standing on a hill above the civil prison one morning early and looking south over the Chinese quarter around South Bridge Road onto the docks. The docks were smouldering in the background with smoke hanging low over them, but below me Chinatown looked comparatively unharmed. Here and there a bare patch filled with rubble, or the shell of a house blackened by fire. The siren sounded, the bombers came over and unloosed their fury on the defenceless Chinese, about half a mile from where I stood. The sickening thud of bursting bombs mingled with the ugly roar of falling buildings, dying away like the roll of distant thunder. A dozen red pinpoints of light appeared,

grew larger and billowed out into raging flames. From where I stood I could hear people shouting and see little children running about in terror. A four-storey building burning furiously crashed into the road onto the heads of men. A thin black fog of smoke spread slowly over the roof-tops, gradually shutting out the hideous details. I think that is the most disgusting sight I have ever seen. Somehow corpses on the battlefield and the havoc wrought by bombs on military targets is not so bad. It is part and parcel of the horror that is modern field warfare. You can do something about it; at least, you do not feel utterly helpless. There is generally too much to do for one to pay much attention to it. But this unprovoked and irresistible attack on people who had not been educated to a real understanding of what was going on—I was heartily sick.

There were crowds of people busy doing duties which were not really essential at this stage. This was not their fault. The administrative machinery ground too slowly. Officers of disbanded defence units hung on to their commissions swearing allegiance to defunct organisations and ordering nobody in particular to do this, that and the other. Upcountry Local Defence Corps had been disbanded in Singapore, although many of their personnel had been retained in units for special jobs, *e.g.*, Causeway police (before it was blown), construction of road blocks, and manning of R.A.F. Observer Posts. After the R.A.F. had been evacuated from the island and these posts were being abandoned one after the other these men, mainly people over military age many of whom had occupied 'key' positions in tin and rubber, were driving lorries, collecting the dead and doing most of the work in connection with their disposal. Some of the members joined other fighting or defence units and did very good work.

That last week in Singapore beggars all description, and there were sights that in my wildest dreams I should never have thought possible. Periods of intense despair alternated with moments of a wild resurgence of hope as rumours flew round. As early as Monday a Government spokesman said in his official capacity to a gathering of his subordinates: "Gentlemen, we are in the hands of God". As late as Friday Reuter's correspondent cabled to England: "To-day the city is buoyant with hope." On Thursday the Singapore Free Press came out with banner headlines in what proved to be its last number: "Singapore Must Be Saved. Singapore Shall Be Saved". By Tuesday orders had been given for the destruction of government papers and certain securities held by offices and Banks.

The evacuation of all European women except a certain number of army and hospital nurses was ordered. A good many European women—perhaps three hundred and fifty—were still in Singapore. They all had jobs and had refused to be evacuated earlier on. Mrs. Moir, the Brigadier's wife, was running the nursing side of the M.A.S. and doing really valuable work. I met men who said they owed their lives to her work. It has been argued that all European women should have been sent out of Malaya as soon as war broke out, thus leaving room later for elderly civilians and perhaps army personnel to get away. But what of Mrs. Moir and many others like her whose work would have been of irreplaceable value in the long siege that everyone had been expecting? What of the many Asiatic and Eurasian women who gave their services? A few of these got out, very few.

On Wednesday a change came over the 'home' front. A counter-attack had gone in. We would drive the enemy back. Surely we would drive the enemy back this time. Rumour spread that we had driven the enemy back. Right back. The Japanese were on the run. Evacuation was stopped, orders for the destruction of property were cancelled. Singapore would carry on. Good old Singapore!

Actually a big counter-attack was prepared and partially got under way. It did make some progress. But it was hastily organised and lacked co-ordination. Some units who should have taken part in it never arrived at the starting-point. It was lacerated by high explosive from the sky before it could achieve much.

On Thursday the wildest rumours were circulating. British and American troops had landed in Penang and Malacca. Stories grew as they passed from mouth to mouth. There had been Allied landings at Port Swettenham and Port Dickson. There was fighting in Ipoh. The Allied armies were attacking strongly in Burma. What happened, I believe, is that a demolition raid was carried out from Sumatra on Malacca. I saw a digest of these rumours in orders published by one brigade in the line. But the wireless news said nothing.

By Wednesday most officials had moved permanently into their offices, armed with camp beds and sacks of tinned food. Kitchens were started in the corridors of buildings. Parties of stragglers, their uniform torn and the fear of God in their eyes, took up their abode in the basements of houses. Some were shell-shocked. All were completely exhausted. General Wavell had flown to Singapore a day or two before and had issued a stirring order of the day. "There is no doubt that

our numbers far exceed those of the enemy on the Island. The enemy must be driven out at all costs. Isolated parties cut-off from their units must battle on by themselves." The morale of our troops was high and remained high right up to the end, but sheer physical exhaustion stopped them from carrying on. Supplies had broken down and many of them had not had food for two or three days. They had been climbing through mangrove and secondary jungle until they could go on no longer without food and rest. I saw some of them dropping in their tracks from fatigue, lying in drains and culverts by the roadside. But their spirit was not broken. The Governor had moved out of Government House on the Wednesday into Fullerton Building. Government House had been heavily bombed again, and there had been about six casualties among the Governor's personal staff.

On Saturday all personnel of the F.M.S.V.F. were ordered back to Headquarters which had been established in Raffles Girls' School in the centre of the town. The School was being shelled at intervals and there were a few bomb craters in the lawn outside. But it was a strong brick building and had not suffered much damage. Singapore was an amazing sight. The centre where we were was comparatively untouched by bombing. Broken lorries lay in ditches and traffic signs were strewn over the streets. Telephone wires and posts lay in tangled heaps. Nobody walked in the streets except small parties of troops, slinking and drooping with exhaustion, on their faces that dreadful, haunted look of men who had been through a nightmare of indescribable horror. It was a city of the dead.

We slept on charpoys turned upside down to get ourselves as near the ground as possible. I met a lot of old friends whom I had not seen since the campaign started, including John Blandy who had been in the Penang evacuation. The next morning the thought that was in everybody's mind could no longer be suppressed. Would there be a surrender? Were we really in as bad a position as all that? When would it come if it really was coming? Was there no eleventh hour chance? The word 'surrender' was whispered, then spoken. I think we all buoyed ourselves up with false optimism. It seemed too dreadful to contemplate a surrender. What would it be like to be a prisoner-of-war in Japanese hands? No. It could not be true. Obviously there would not be a surrender. I fell into conversation with Colonel Windsor, a planter from Negri Sembilan. "Yes", he said, "I don't think there is very much hope for us now. It is too late. But there won't

be a surrender. We shall just carry on, I suppose, until all effective resistance is broken up." I made up my mind then and there that if I was still alive when Singapore capitulated I would not give up without making some attempt to get away. A plan formed itself in my mind. I would try and collar a boat and sail it to Johore, then make my way upcountry to Port Dickson and get a Malay fisherman to take me across to Sumatra—or hide with Asiatic friends. Two other officers had the same idea. We discussed it quietly. If we were alive when the end came.

That morning Lieutenant Longmore and I were ordered to report to 1st S.S.V.F. Headquarters in Scotts Road with a draft of men. This was much better. So the war was carrying on. Good. We moved up Orchard Road and forked right towards Newton Circus. Dead bodies lay about the streets, some covered with white sheets. There had been no time to bury the dead in the last few days. Not a single building had escaped disfigurement from the intense bombardment which had hit Orchard Road. I remember a house in ruins which had received a direct hit. Outside on the gate the owner had stuck a placard: "Owned by a Moslem."

The salient driven by the enemy down Bukit Timah Road had gathered momentum and was threatening to become a major break-through *via* Newton Circus to the town. A new brigade under Brigadier Moir had been thrown in on the left to hold up the enemy's advance. We had a draft of about fifteen men, some of our senior N.C.O.s and a few odd stragglers whom we picked up. We were given an area about fifty yards north-west of the Tangling Club squash courts, in the angle between the end of Orchard Road, Scotts Road and Stevens Road. A lot of shelling and mortaring was going on, all whistling over our heads to somewhere in rear of us. As usual, we got sniped at a bit, but suffered no casualties. Heavy machine-gun fire was going on on our right about a quarter of a mile away, at Newton Circus. Otherwise nothing very much seemed to be happening just where we were. We took up our position in and behind a house in Scotts Road next door to the Dutch Embassy. It was odd to think that I had sent my passport to the Dutch Embassy for a visa a few days before war broke out, and that it was probably somewhere in that house. Shortly before five o'clock that afternoon a gunner captain came past us. He stopped and said: "Have you heard? There's been a surrender." His voice was quite expressionless. "I'm telling you. Take it or leave it," was his tone. He moved on in a hurry. Unwisely he had said

it loud enough for all our men to hear. We did not believe it. We had been willing to admit the possibility that there might be a surrender sometime. But that there had actually been one, Singapore had actually fallen to a lot of little yellow men—no, impossible.

I said to Longmore that I would go along to Headquarters, which was only a hundred yards away, and see if there were any orders. I arrived to find the Adjutant taking down a telephone message. "Well sir, I'm sorry it's come to this", he said and put down the receiver. He tore off the message form and handed it to me without a word. "As from 1700 hours all ranks will cease fire. If fired on by the enemy they will hoist a white flag"; there followed instructions about the destruction of secret documents and the conservation of food and water. I forgot to see where the message came from. Meanwhile a number of officers and men were collecting outside the house. The C.O. appeared "Well", he said, addressing nobody in particular. "That means it's every man for himself then." I went back to our men.

Even then we did not entirely credit it. Perhaps there was some mistake. Fifth column work. We started inventing all sorts of reasons to account for a bogus surrender message. Many of these men had wives and families at home. Suddenly we felt very isolated and alone. I said: "Let's wait where we are and see if the firing dies down." It was then about ten minutes past five. A good deal of shelling was still going on on our right. We made our way into a house. Electricity and water-supplies were still working. We found a refrigerator full of iced water and helped ourselves. None of us spoke for a while. At the back of the house I found two young Chinese. One was sitting on a chair with a shawl round his shoulders. The other was cutting his hair. They seemed completely unconcerned about anything. One of the sergeants became abusive. He was in a bad state of nerves. "It's all your fault," he stormed at the Chinese. "You and your dirty money-grubbing little bastards. You've done nothing to help. You're fifth columnists, all of you." I pulled him off gently. What was the use?

There is not much more worth saying about the capitulation of Singapore. It had been asked for even as Colonel Windsor and I were talking at Raffles Girls' School that morning. General Yamashita received our representatives in the Ford Motor Works in Bukit Timah Village. He asked if we had any Japanese prisoners. No, we had none. The terms were unconditional surrender. They were accepted that afternoon.

I found out these things later. It is just as well that at the time we knew nothing of them.

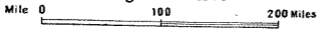
I have given the facts as I saw them. I have placed my own interpretations upon them. You will doubtless disagree with me on many points. You are probably right. I saw really very little of the war. The chorus is not the best place to be in to appreciate a play. Why could we not withdraw, to the streets in the centre of the town, and try to hold it as the Americans held the Bataan Peninsula after the fall of Manila? We had lost almost all our heavy ammunition dumps and many of our weapons in the north of the island. A concentration of troops in a small area could have been bombed to bits in a few hours. I have stressed our weaknesses, beyond question the greatest of which was our lack of aircraft. This was responsible for ninety per cent of our troubles. Lack of suitable arms, equipment and training, and inferiority in numbers also played a part. It was a military defeat, complete and absolute. It is still too early to judge perhaps, how far the people on the spot were to blame for the catastrophe. Would a less cautious Higher Command have saved the situation? Or prolonged it into a glorious defeat? Was it wrong to try and hold Singapore when the whole of the mainland had gone, thereby forfeiting any possibility of staging another Dunkirk? Could the Civil administration have done much better than it did?

One day we may know the whole story.



ESCAPE ROUTE
 Scale 1: 4250,000 (66 $\frac{2}{3}$ Miles to an Inch)

English Miles



CHAPTER XVI

ESCAPE

GRADUALLY the sound of firing died away. Soon after 5-30 p.m. an occasional rifle shot or burst of automatic fire was all we heard. It grew dismally quiet. We gathered together in the front room of the house and held council. I repeated the surrender message. Someone suggested that we send a message to the Quartermaster: "If this order is to be carried out please supply flags, white, hoisting, one," but this was voted out of order. Longmore and I said we intended to try and escape: at any rate we hoped we could get off the island and with luck we might get over to Sumatra. I outlined a plan. It was useless, I urged, to go down to the docks or piers in the centre of the town and hope to pick up any sailing craft. There were known to be no boats of any size there, and any small ones that had not already been destroyed would have been snapped up long ago. We could imagine the sort of flap that would be going on there now, the crowds of people in the streets. The Japanese held a semi-circular line about six miles long from coast to coast round Singapore. It was believed that they would stay more or less where they were that night, and would come into the town at daybreak next morning. There was about four miles of shore, the water-front of the town, not yet invested by the enemy. I suggested that we should move westwards towards the end of the docks and hide up as near the Japanese positions as possible somewhere near the coast. Then when they moved in we would try and remain concealed, get out towards Pasir Panjang Village (where the Malay Regiment got badly mauled after putting up a terrific fight on Friday) and take any vessel we could find—perhaps a native fishing boat or an invasion barge. We could try and sail this either direct to Sumatra or to the Johore coast the next night.

We tried to weigh up the chances of success. We could find plenty of cover in houses and it was unlikely that the Japanese would make a thorough search everywhere as they moved in. It was unlikely, too, judging from what we had heard about their movements behind the lines in the peninsula, that they would leave guards at all points along the coast. We should be able to find a boat somewhere, and if we started early enough

after dark we could be some distance from the island by dawn the next day, perhaps in Johore. Once in Johore we could live with native squatters and move from place to place fairly safely. Against us was the fact that the Japanese were already in possession of the headland this side of Pasir Panjang overlooking all the harbour, and could if they wished shoot up anything that left it. But the night was dark ; there was no moon and they would very likely not be able to see far. We knew the channel was mined and armed patrol boats were said to be operating in the waters round Singapore. We called for volunteers to come with us. Four only were prepared to come. I tried to induce one of our F.M.S.V.F. sergeants, a really fine man to have around if we got into any trouble, but he had a wife and family evacuated to Australia and he was not prepared to risk it. From our point of view, I suppose, the chances of getting away successfully looked very remote. We seemed isolated all round. I do not blame him. I think he was quite right.

I said that the sooner we started the better. We emptied our packs of all our extra clothing and filled them with tinned food we found in the house. I exchanged my rifle for a pistol : we did not want to do any shooting if we could avoid it. We left the house about a quarter past five. It was a fine evening. We kept off roads, walking through the gardens of houses. We did not know exactly where the Japanese were, and we did not want to bump into their outposts by mistake.

As soon as we were on the move our spirits revived. We were doing something. We had an objective in view. We had heard on good authority that there were British troops with the fighting forces in the Dutch East Indies (this proved to be untrue), where, of course, the big stand was going to be made and the Japanese drive halted. The army in the Dutch East Indies was said to be strong and well-prepared. The Dutch were the only colonial power in the East who for years had entertained no illusions about the expansionist aims of Japan. They had not been complacent. They were ready. We would join up in Sumatra or Java and perhaps sooner than we expected we would be back in Malaya again. Longmore and I were Volunteers but they could surely find some job for us when we reported to the military authorities. We began to speak of it as though it was an accomplished fact. Get to Sumatra and the rest would be easy. We became absurdly optimistic. I think we were all a bit light-headed. I never for one moment doubted that I would get out of Singapore. I remember imagining myself addressed in the second person

by my guardian whatever-you-call-it: "Do you think you will succeed in getting out? Wouldn't you like to see yourself twelve hours hence? Twenty-four hours? A week? Don't worry. As a matter of fact you are going to get out. Only just at the moment I'm not telling you how!" Absolutely crazy. But such is the power of suggestion that I never for an instant contemplated failure.

We passed through a large garden with neatly trimmed lawns. A British light battery was taking it easy. Several of the men were playing football in a wired-in tennis court. I spoke to the officer in charge. "I don't know about the war," he said, "my men are playing football." We moved through Ridley Park and down Outram Road, where a hutted camp was burning furiously. We found a patch of ground with thick cover near a burning house and decided to hide up there. It was not very near the sea but it afforded good concealment and gave us a choice of directions in which to move after the Japanese came through. An A.A. battery Captain had told us that the Japanese were about six hundred yards away in several houses the tops of which we could see over the skyline. We could hear them shouting "Banzai!" and in the fading light could distinguish groups of them moving about in a small copse. We waited there until it was quite dark. Then Longmore said "What about going down to the docks just to see if there is anything doing? We can always find our way back here if we want to." "Shall we leave our stuff here?" "No. Better take it with us." We moved on down Alexandra Road towards Keppel Harbour. My bandaged foot was painful and I was beginning to limp.

Night and a thick blanket of smoke blotted out everything except the red glare of fires, now faint now dazzling bright as we passed burning buildings and military installations, the result of our demolition work. The heat from one big oil dump on fire was so intense that we had to make a wide detour from the road to get round it. We reached Keppel Road. "Halt!" said a voice. "Who's that?" said another louder voice. An R.A.S.C. captain appeared flashing a torch. "Why are you wandering round my store at this hour of night? Who are you?" I told him. "Oh, there's been a surrender has there? I'll say there's been a surrender. What a surrender!" "Don't stand there doing nothing, sergeant," he shouted at another man, "they may be spies. Put them under arrest." I produced my Pass and Identity Book. "That tells me nothing", he said. "There's too much nonsense about this whole business." Poor man, he was in a bad way.

Half his store had been bombed to the ground during the heavy raids on the docks, and the rest of it was not up to much from what little I could see of it. His colonel turned up and pacified him. We passed on.

My recollection of the next two hours is very vague. There were quite a lot of people on the roads, though not as many as I had expected. Cars and lorries went to and fro. We got a lift from a fuel lorry driven by a young Ordnance Corporal. He got his wheels tangled up with telephone wires and came to a stop. We pulled off the wire with our hands, and started off again. About a quarter of a mile further on the driver swerved to avoid a burnt out Bren carrier and ran round the lip of a bomb crater. The lorry lurched, righted itself and went on. But we were no longer in it; we were in the crater, a bit bruised and battered.

Eventually we found ourselves at the Singapore Yacht Club. I had never been there before, and to this day have no idea of its geographical relation to the rest of Singapore which I know so well. I spoke to the captain commanding an Indian battery which was in the Club. His men sat or lay on the ground; they were absolutely dead beat. "It's not loss of fighting spirit", he said, almost apologetically, as if wondering whether I was so misguided as to think it was. "These men would be firing their guns now if they had the energy to stand up. You have no conception of what we've been through these last few days." He told me that his orders were not to spike his guns but to fall in his men twenty yards from their arms when the Japanese arrived to take over. It is a pity so many men of his kind were lost in Singapore.

We were standing beside a large boathouse, though I have very little recollection of how we got there. We passed burning buildings and wild scenes of destruction everywhere without noticing them. I think we had seen enough already, and could comprehend no more. We took in details of the present only in so far as they would be concerned with our immediate future. A single line of concertina wire separated us from the sea. A wooden boom rising a foot out of the water stretched out to sea from where we stood. Away on our right was a short jetty. In the dim red glow I could make out figures on it moving about and the white sail of a yacht. The boathouse was empty of boats; masses of sail canvas and tackle lay about the floor. In an outhouse nearby I found a fourteen-foot boat. We none of us knew anything about sailing. I said I would hang on to the boat while Longmore had a look round for sails. There were five other boats of this size lying out on the water-

front. One was fully rigged and shortly after we arrived two civilians appeared with provisions and dumped them in the boat. "I'm sorry," said one of them, "two is all these boats will carry, and we're overloaded with stuff already. But you might give us a hand pushing it down over the wire." We all gave them a hand, shoving the dinghy past the basin formed by the boom and over the wire. "Good luck", we said, as they left the shore. I heard afterwards that they reached Sumatra. A major of the coastal gunners came up to me. "Is this your boat?" he said. "No", I replied, "all these boats belong to the Yacht Club, I think. But I was hoping to get away in it." "Well, I've got Colonel Crawford here. He's G.S.O.1. to Major-General Keith-Simmons of Fortress, you know, and has been ordered to get out if he can."

"You want to use this boat?"

"Yes. I don't know if we can find sails and everything else we want."

"There's masses of stuff in the boathouse. Can you take any more with you?"

"Well, our party is rather large and I think the boat is overloaded already. There are four of us, I believe. But wait here and we'll see. Can you sail a boat?"

"No, sir. I'm with three others and they have gone to look round." (One of the men with us had left after our little fracas with the R.A.S.C. captain). Just then Longmore turned up.

"There's a crowd of chaps over there with a life boat. Plenty of room. What about going in that?"

"Well, there may be room for one or two in this boat. Are you sure the life boat is going to get away?"

"Yes."

"Well, please yourself. If you three want to get off in it, by all means do so. I think I'll take a chance on this."

"O.K. then. Good luck."

"Good luck. See you in Tokyo."

They disappeared. I never saw them again. I saw Colonel Crawford. "Do you know the islands South of here?" he said.

"No, sir. But I can speak Malay and may be of some use to you on the islands and in Sumatra."

"Well, if Major Macleod-Cary thinks there's room."

"O.K.", said Major Macleod-Cary, "but I warn everybody this is not going to be an easy trip. These boats are intended for racing in the Straits of Johore with two on board. We shall be crossing the open sea with the equivalent of six people. We shall be lucky if we reach Sumatra. The only fortunate thing is the wind. At this time of year it should be dead behind us the whole way."

We were joined by Major James and Warrant Officer Wheeler both of Indian Ordnance. We found a mast, sail and rigging, and after much difficulty a rudder and tiller. It will always be a mystery to me how Major Macleod-Cary rigged the boat that night. It was a most intricate job, done in almost total darkness with the aid of a torch, and only a man with a detailed knowledge of sailing could have done it. He had never sailed a fourteen-footer before, although he had often used the larger boats at the Singapore Yacht Club. He and I were the only two who had brought any food, but we had enough to last the whole party for three or four days even if we got nothing from inhabited islands on the way. We filled some empty beer bottles and a petrol can we found with drinking water. Meanwhile other fourteen-footers were being got ready. As each party announced its readiness to move we all downed tools and pushed its boat into the water. We were the last but one away. The last boat was being used by Wallace Little, a member of the Education Department whom I knew and whom I had last seen at headquarters that day. I heard he reached Sumatra and was evacuated from there to Colombo. We pushed the boat over the barbed wire which had been trampled down at one point. I tore part of one leg of my trousers off and we all got cut about a bit. We pulled the boat into deep water and vaulted in. As we got under way I glanced at my watch, the first time for many hours.

We left Singapore at five minutes past two in the early morning of Monday 16th February. Major Macleod-Cary sat at the tiller, Wheeler in the bows. The other three of us trimmed the boat in the middle where we could work the centre-board. Before we had gone very far the bottom of the boat started to fill with water. The boat had been out of water for so long that it was leaking while the wood swelled. Wheeler and I baled out with a couple of saucepans which Major Macleod-Cary's foresight had provided. The boat was not holed or unseaworthy but it was just as well we had the balers for we only just kept pace with the rate of filling for the first two hours after which we got the upperhand.

We had no chart or compass on board. Major Macleod-Cary's idea was to sail South or south-west until we were South of Raffles Light and inside the Dutch part of the Rhio Archipelago. We would skirt this to the West and cross the open sea of the Durian Strait which separated Rhio from the islands off the Sumatran coast at a point where it was about thirty miles wide. The journey to Sumatra this way was, he reckoned, about eighty miles. For the first part of the journey

we were able to set our course from the burning oil installations on Pulau Bukum. These formed a big fuel depot for the Navy at Singapore, and when *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were sunk they were no longer of any value. They had been fired a week before the surrender of Singapore, and were still burning furiously. All that night there lay on our right a thick barrier of smoke hanging over the sea, looking like the trail left by a passing train. It had a well-defined upper and lower edge, and we seemed to be sailing parallel with it about two hundred yards away. Appearances can be very deceptive at night.

When we were about a mile out I looked back at burning Singapore. I counted twenty-two raging fires along the waterfront, as well as the dull red glow of fires inland mirrored fantastically in the sky. I drew the attention of the others to it. I do not think any of us really took it in. We saw it, but it made no very great impression on our minds at the time. I can see that scene as clearly as if it were happening now, but with no particular feelings of horror at the tragedy it was. To the noise of the sail flapping and water lapping round our bows the scene slowly receded into the distance, like some ghastly nightmare fading into the inner recesses of our consciousness. It was no longer part of us. It seemed now as though it never had been. It was unreal. I did not think of all those men I knew, left behind in this inferno. We felt absurdly elated.

We had a very good run that night. We must have passed near Belakan Mati about three o'clock; I heard afterwards that the Japanese were on it between four and five o'clock. We passed Pulau Bukum ablaze shortly after four. Once we saw a boatload of men rowing a large sampan about a hundred yards away. When dawn broke we found ourselves sailing down a channel with islands dotted all round. Far to the North of us was Raffles Light. We were in the Dutch islands, and, we hoped, out of the immediate danger zone. We had covered twenty miles in the six hours of darkness. Later we admitted to each other that we never expected so easy a journey the first night. Each one of us thought of something different. Major Macleod-Cary, who alone knew what we might expect before we were through, wondered if we should lose our way in the islands and get picked up and taken back to Singapore, or possibly shot, it being rumoured that the Japanese would shoot any officers caught trying to escape. Major James wondered if the boat was going to sink. Wheeler wondered if we should strike a mine; we kept the centre-board as high as possible and hoped to ride over the minefields. I wondered if we should

get shot up from the shore or by a Japanese patrol boat. There had been a fair amount of firing going on from the direction of the Pasir Panjang headland while we were working at the Yacht Club and as we were leaving the shore, but none of it seemed to be coming our way; though I did hear later of a boat which left the Club that night and claimed to have been shot at and hit by machine-gun fire.

Major Macleod-Cary examined the rigging by daylight and decided to put in shore to improve it before we went on much further. We sailed up a narrow creek in one of the islands and found ourselves in a small Malay fishing village. The inhabitants were of Buginese descent and seemed to be completely bilingual, speaking alternately amongst themselves in Malay and in Buginese of which I did not understand a word. It is quite unlike Malay. However, this was no time for the study of language problems. They killed chickens and made a curry for us, supplementing it with coffee, tea and fruits. I talked to an old man in the village. "Tuan," he said, "times are hard now. We have had no fresh supplies of rice here for two months, and our stocks are almost finished. With the war on the Chinese fishermen do not dare to put to sea. But never mind, we can live on the fish we catch. Even now all the young men are out in their boats catching fish." I told him that he would soon be getting rice again. "Ah", he said, "so Singapore has fallen. I thought it would." He was quite unconcerned. A few men were busy making fish-traps out of palm leaves. They were all very friendly with us and pressed all kinds of fruit on us. We accepted some mangoes and jack-fruit and put them in the boat.

A small boy led us by a path to another creek where we saw a large Chinese tongkang. A European dressed in Chinese clothes appeared to be in charge, and he asked us what we wanted. "Where are you going?" I asked.

"Oh, we're hoping to get to Sumatra. Why do you want to know?"

"There are five of us here. Will you take us with you? We doubt whether we will get there in our small fourteen-footer."

"No. I can't possibly take any more."

We started off again that afternoon, but when we got outside the creek we found ourselves landlocked all round. The tide had gone down and coral bars prevented us getting out. We could not risk sailing at night and possibly holing the boat on a coral reef, and had to sail back again and spend the night in village. Our old Malay friend fixed us up with rattan sleeping-

mats and pillows and we were very comfortable underneath his house. We made an early start the next morning, a Malay fisherman showing us a way out through the reefs, poling his sampan ahead of our boat for the first half-mile. When we got into the open sea again the first thing we saw was the tongkang. We passed it about fifty yards away while watchful eyes studied us. Perhaps they thought we were going to make a last minute effort to board their boat by force.

There was not much wind. This was worse for the tongkang than for us and after an hour or two we lost sight of it behind us. The sea was calm. There was a dull haze and it was very hot. We were glad of the sarongs and neckerchiefs which I had got from the Malay villagers for camouflage purposes. We soaked these in the sea and bound them round our heads. Aeroplanes, usually in groups of two or three, droned overhead continually flying South at about five thousand feet. They left us alone. Even if they saw us we were too small fry to be worth bothering about. We rationed drinking water and cigarettes on the basis of a three-day supply, at the end of which time we hoped to have reached some village in Sumatra. Once we saw a large vessel moving fast through the water six miles to the North of us. Through our field-glasses it looked like a motor launch, possibly a Japanese patrol boat. But it did not come our way. Once in the distance ahead of us we saw a huge column of water rise out of the sea and fall again, perhaps a mine sprung by a large fish. By doing a Boy Scout act with our watches and the sun we were able to ascertain that we were travelling roughly South-west. Or so we thought. Actually we found later that we were travelling almost due West. We were just starting the crossing of the Durian Strait at ten o'clock in the morning, and owing to this miscalculation we actually crossed it at its widest point where it was forty miles across. In the afternoon we could see ahead of us what we took to be a group of islands off the Sumatran coast, small grey objects on the horizon.

During the afternoon a following breeze got up and we began to make better progress. By five o'clock it had freshened up and the sea began to be choppy. We began pitching and tossing about, and we reefed down the sail. We carried on like this for a bit the wind getting up every minute. Towards sunset we ran into a rough bit of sea where the current was running against the wind. We started bumping about like a cork and shipping a lot of water. We took the sail right down and Wheeler sitting in the bows held out a small triangle of sail with his arms as a jib to keep some way on the boat. Major

James and I baled furiously with the two saucepans. It did not look too good. The sun was setting and darkness was blotting out all sight of the two islands ahead of us, which looked to be about six miles away. Major Macleod-Cary was sitting against the stern of the boat working the tiller for all he was worth to turn the boat to meet the oncoming waves which splashed across the bows. In 1933 when I was at Oxford Charles Chenevix-Trench and I had done a rather silly stunt in a thirteen-foot hydroplane with an outboard motor which we had taken from London to Cologne and back via France, Belgium and Holland. We had had it quite choppy in the Channel and in the estuary of the Scheldt. That was my only experience of small boats in a lively sea. But then we had been able to choose our own time, and it was nothing like this. It began to look a bit doubtful whether we should make land. If a big wave breaks over a boat broadside on and half fills it with water it loses way and becomes heavy, and the next big wave may swamp it. However, even if it did swamp we could probably hang on to it until we got near land. The chief trouble was the possibility of the boat getting broken up on coral reefs which surrounded all the islands and of our not being much better off if we did reach land unless we were in a position to choose our landing spot, since most of it was uninhabited mangrove swamp. There was some chance of a few sharks being about, too, though I need not be extravagant and call the sea shark-infested. One just would not swim in it for pleasure. It was important to keep the boat afloat, though, because it was the only means of getting away from anywhere we got to. A wave burst over us and Major James and I redoubled our vigour with the balers. "Come on", said Major Macleod-Cary, "lighten this boat. Throw everything you can overboard." Colonel Crawford seized my pack containing almost all the food we had and flung it over the side. This started the ball rolling. Packs, tins, bottles went overboard.

The storm went on and on without decreasing. I do not know how Major Macleod-Cary kept that boat afloat. He sat pulling the tiller from side to side, his face an absolute mask. The boat answered the helm well and although it was very low in the water the bows kept well up riding the waves and never once going nose under. The helmsman's skill prevented us getting a broadside which might have capsized us. We tried a little mild suggestion.

"I really think the sea's beginning to get a little less rough now, don't you?" said Major James.

"Yes, now you mention it, I think it is", I agreed.

"Doesn't seem much change to me," said Major Macleod-Cary. He had abandoned all attempts to steer a course. He just kept the bows head-on to the waves and hoped we should get somewhere soon.

It must have been round about eleven o'clock when a black silhouette, blacker than the sea and sky, began to loom up out of the darkness. At first it was a vague blur on the horizon. As it grew larger it took more definite shape. We were getting near an island. We could hear one moment indistinctly and the next moment quite clearly the sound of waves crashing onto the coral. We could see a white line of foam. Major Macleod-Cary got the boat round off the lee shore and manoeuvred for a visible break in the coral barrier. "Pull up the centre-board." The next moment we grounded. We all jumped out and held the boat from smashing itself against the breakers. We splashed and waded and fell about in the water, cutting our feet and legs on sharp bits of coral. My foot was bad enough already and a few more scratches could not do much harm. The tide was coming in and we managed after a bit to manhandle the boat over the coral and onto the mud flats underneath some low mangrove trees. It got knocked about and probably holed in a few places, and the rudder was smashed to bits. We turned the bows to face the incoming tide and lashed bows and stern firmly to the mangrove branches with rope. We clambered back into the boat. Colonel Crawford was exhausted. He had been a sick man before we left Singapore and had borne his suffering very stoically. We put him full length on a seat down one side of the boat and draped the wet sail over him. The rest of us packed in. Major Macleod-Cary and I sat at the back in a foot of water, one on each side of the tiller. I had four packets of cigarettes and a box of matches wrapped up in an oilskin pouch in my shirt pocket, the only things that were not soaking wet and covered in dirt and oil. "Never mind the rationing," he said, "let's smoke as much as we want." We puffed away for a bit in silence. "Our luck's held so far", he said presently, "let's hope it continues."

"Did you really expect to get through?"

"No. Frankly, I didn't. I expected the boat to swamp any minute. But we could have held on probably until we drifted somewhere. We were never very far from land. Funny thing, you don't usually get storms at this time of year. It must have been a local squall." I think we dozed off for an hour or so.

The next morning we had a good look round as dawn broke. We appeared to be on a small island, presumably uninhabited facing north-west. West of us were two or three other islands about half a mile off shore. In the distance to the North we could see a big island about four miles away. I could see only miles and miles of black muddy shores fringed with mangrove trees. There were no signs of human habitation. Then I noticed some poles sticking vertically out of the water off one of the islands. "Those poles look to me like Malay fishing stakes", I said, "someone may be along this way in a boat before long." We made a brief examination of the fourteen-footer. It did not seem badly damaged except for the rudder which was useless. "We could steer the boat with an oar if it will float but there's still a bit of sea running. We'll wait a bit and see if anything turns up." "The battering we got last night didn't do the boat much good and I doubt if she's seaworthy now", said Major Macleod-Cary.

In the bottom of the boat we found one tin of bully beef and some mangoes beginning to turn bad. There was also a bottle of water, but we did not seem to have saved anything else; it had all gone overboard during last night's storm. We opened and ate the bully beef. The sun came up and it grew appallingly hot. The sandflies were a nuisance. Our legs had been rather badly cut about on the coral the night before. Major Macleod-Cary was the worst of us—long deep cuts and scratches which were already beginning to turn septic. The tide was out and the boat was resting on the mud flats. It was impossible to move about much. Every time we put a foot out of the boat onto the mud we sank in half-way up to our knees. I do not know how many hours we sat there. My foot was getting very painful. I hobbled about two hundred yards along the shore to see if there was anything round the corner of the island, but I could see nothing of much interest to us just at the moment. Some time later Wheeler went out to have another look-see, picking his way over the coral from rock to rock.

We both saw it at the same moment—a thirty-foot tongkang about a quarter of a mile off shore. We shouted as loudly as we could and waved our handkerchiefs. The tongkang turned in to the shore and we climbed over the coral reef towards the sea. I saw that there were two Chinese in the boat. "Take us somewhere," I called out.

"Where do you want to go, Tuan?"

"Anywhere you're going."

"We're going to Tanjong Balai."

We climbed over the side on board and picked up the other three officers. The Chinese became very friendly and gave us food, some very sweet cakes made of roasted malt sugar. One of them noticed our condition.

"Tanjong Balai is a big place," he said, "there is an orang puteh (white man), the Dutch controller, who will give you whatever you want." This was good news, especially for Colonel Crawford who was badly in need of some medical attention.

"Is there a doctor at Tanjong Balai?"

"Yes, Tuan."

I told them we wanted to get to Sumatra. "There will be boats at Tanjong Balai."

We rounded the corner between a group of small islands and could see ahead of us an island which looked inhabited. I thought I could make out large white buildings on the shore. East of us on the horizon a grey pall of smoke hung without definite shape or form, the shadow of Singapore. I asked the Chinese how often they came past the island where they had picked us up. "We do not often come that way, Tuan. It is outside our main fishing areas. Perhaps two or three times a month."

We reached Tanjong Balai after two hours sailing. It was a large fishing town, Chinese preponderating over Malays. It was on the south-west tip of the island of Karimun, an island half the size of Singapore and the largest of a group of islands West of the Durian Strait off Sumatra. Tanjong Balai is about twenty miles from the nearest point on the Sumatra coast, though much further from the nearest village of any size. The current was strong and the two fishermen had a job to manœuvre their lumbering craft towards the wooden jetty, on which we could see figures standing. We wondered whether the Japanese had arrived in the town already. But there did not seem to be any large motor boats along the wharves, and there was plenty of native activity. We could see people moving to and fro on a road running past some high concrete buildings. We were taking no chances, and lay low in the boat until we reached the shore. Major Macleod-Cary and I jumped ashore, accosted the first man we saw who happened to be a Eurasian Customs Inspector, and asked where we could find the Comptroller. We were taken to his office followed by a crowd of natives curious at the unusual sight of five British officers limping along in tattered and bedraggled uniforms.

The Comptroller was a young Dutchman who spoke good English. We sat down. He had a map spread over his desk,

on which we were able to trace the course we had taken. We realised for the first time that we were at the top of the Durian Strait instead of near the South end of it. We had come from Singapore in a left-hand circle, covering about seventy miles. He said: "I have just received news that the Japanese have made a landing on the other side of the island, and are moving down the road towards Tanjong Balai. We are not opposing them and I have orders to stay here and ask what their intentions are when they arrive. If required to do so I shall hand over my administration to them. But I must stay here. We have destroyed nearly all our boats, but there may be a few left in a village to which I will have you taken shortly. If not, I will send you off in my launch and have you put down in a village on an island South of here which is out of the immediate danger zone. From there you can cross to Sumatra quite easily." Poor man. He cannot have been pleased to have us barging in on him at this of all times, but he was absolutely calm and unruffled as he gave orders to his various subordinates. He called a doctor, a Javanese who knew his job very well, who attended to Colonel Crawford and then applied bandages to our feet. He gave us food and drink, baths and a change of clothing in his house.

We got into an old twelve-seater bus, the only vehicle on the island which had not been immobilised, and were taken to a small village ten miles along the coast. The Comptroller wished us good luck in the friendliest manner and handed us a chart for our journey. The villagers were perfectly orderly, behaving as if nothing had happened, although by that time the news of the coming of the Japanese must have passed round. Though part of the Dutch East Indies Tanjong Balai is tied commercially to Singapore and we were able to buy some provisions with our Straits currency in the town. We passed through rubber estates and coconut plantations. The driver of the bus was an old Javanes. "Tuan", he said, "I hope the Japanese will not take my bus from me. It is the last one I have got. My other three are all lying in the sea by orders of the Comptroller." We gave him twenty dollars.

The next thing was to find a boat and someone willing to take us. Knowing the capacity of the Chinese for prevarication and the endless delay in bargaining even at the best of times I expected to be in for a tough job. I was. There was one old petrol launch, whose owner could not be found, without petrol. There were two or three tongkangs. I chased up the owners of the tongkangs who were found after much shouting and delay on the part of the villagers. Would one of them take us

to Selat Panjang, a large place a short way up one of the rivers in Sumatra which the Comptroller had indicated to us as the place to make for? No, Tuan. We would give them fifty dollars. No, Tuan, two hundred dollars. There followed a lot of argument; we could not risk too much delay. I shouted loudly in Malay and the Javanese bus driver backed me up against the Chinese. At last we compromised at a hundred dollars. Just when I thought everything was settled, two planes flew overhead. Argument broke out anew. No, they could not risk taking us. If we would go and sit in the petrol launch they would try and find the owner. They were terrified of the Japanese arriving any moment and finding them talking with British officers, which they thought (probably quite rightly) would be bad for business. This would be a good way of getting rid of us. The owner of the launch was probably well away from Karimun, they knew. As long as they could get rid of us they could disclaim all knowledge when the Japanese found us. If only the tuans would adopt their suggestion all would be well. They were pathetically anxious to get us out of sight on that launch. But I refused to be put off quite so easily and began to get very angry. All this argument was taking place at the door of an opium saloon where several cadaverous-looking Chinese were smoking noisily, and the smell was getting me down. A Chinese boatman came to the water's edge to take us thirty yards out to the launch.

Finally Major Macleod-Cary said: "This isn't getting us anywhere. Let's take a tongkang and sail it ourselves. We shall never get the launch away." We got on the boatman's sampan and he paddled us out from the shore. "Go over to that boat over there", we said, pointing to one of the tongkangs. "Which boat, Tuan?"

"That boat." We all pointed hard.

"That boat?"

"Yes. That boat."

"Oh no, Tuan. Not that boat." I was past further argument. I took the paddle from him and we reached the tongkang. Renewed arguments broke out on shore on the new turn events were taking. We got on board the tongkang and pulled up the sail. By all pulling as hard as we could we got it three-quarters of the way up the forty foot mast, which was good enough. We started moving out slowly. We tried to fix the rudder, an enormous great wooden thing six feet high, in the stern; got it in, but fouled the chain of another boat lying at anchor. But by this time the Chinese standing on the shore could see that we really did intend to sail it. Faced

with the choice of a hundred dollars or losing their boat they gave in, as I had expected they would. "All right, Tuan", two of them said, "stay where you are. We'll take you to Selat Panjang". There was about half an hour's delay while they went off to the village to buy food—maddening delay in which we were expecting Japanese soldiers to appear any minute. The two Chinese came on board and announced that the tide was not right for sailing and that we would have to wait for three hours. They entreated us to take cover in the hold, which was about eight feet square by five feet high, and erected an atap awning over the top to prevent us being seen from aircraft which were flying over at regular intervals. I stood on the deck arguing with them about tides, currents, and things they knew much more about than either Major Macleod-Cary or I did. "Oh, Tuan. Please go below and don't stand on deck where you may be seen. It is all right. We will leave 'sikit jam'. ('sikit jam' is one of those delightfully vague expressions of time of which natives in the East are so fond. It may mean anything from a few minutes to several hours). I utterly refused to leave the deck until they started. There was some further argument. They started.

We spent one night on board. There was just room for six comfortably lying across the hold and we had the best night's sleep any of us had had for several nights. We supplemented our clothing with what we had been given at Tanjong Balai. The two Chinese once they got over their fear of our being found with them became very friendly. Everything, they said, must be 'bagi dua'. All of us must share our food with one another. Acting on this they produced a stove on which they boiled rice and tea for us all. We gave them some tinned milk and tinned fruit, also a tin of cigarettes. Just at sunset we passed a big fishing fleet. We counted more than eighty tongkangs, their enormous sails silhouetted against the sky as the light faded slowly behind them. It was a magnificent sight, like some picture in a photograph exhibition.

We reached Selat Panjang at about midday the next day. We spent a night in the Rest House and joined up with some troops who had already got there from Singapore. The Comptroller told us that the Japanese had invaded southern Sumatra and had overrun Palembang. We were some four hundred miles North of Palembang and there was no immediate danger where we were. We amalgamated forces and with the Comptroller's help commandeered a motor launch with two Javanese crew. This took us the next day to Bengkalis, another large town on the West coast of an island off the Sumatran

coast. It lies in the narrowest part of the Straits of Malacca and used to be the centre for smuggling uncouponed rubber between Cape Rachado on the Malayan coast and Sumatra. It was also the place to which Frank Vanrenan got after his escape from the Japanese in Kuala Lumpur. We heard about Frank's activities from the Comptroller who invited us round for drinks in his house.

I got the Malay boy at the Rest House to put up a big meal for us. The Comptroller assured me that they had large food stocks, and the party of troops who were with us were even more in need of a good meal than we were. Large plates of bread, butter and cheese were produced, and we settled down to the first decent feed we had had since some days before we had left Singapore. I have very pleasant recollections of Bengkalis and the Rest House there. A European rubber planter came in and talked to us while we were having our meal that evening. He was a Belgian. He had come out to Sumatra while he was still a child and had not been back to Europe for thirty years. He had a Javanese wife and had gone completely native. He was perfectly happy, he said, and never wanted to leave Bengkalis: and certainly he was cheerful enough. He produced a bottle of whisky and poured out drinks for all. Under the influence of five or six sa-tengahs he became reminiscent. It was a mistake, he said, to think that white and black can never live together. His mode of life was his own choosing, and he never wanted any other. He got a monthly remittance from Belgium, but that had ceased since the war started. He managed to keep going by selling rubber to the Chinese who shipped it off and sold it at a profit to exporters in Medan. He had three children. If you have read Somerset Maugham's short stories you will know the sort of man he was. Whatever the Japanese did he was going to remain in Bengkalis. I often wonder if he is still there now. It was obvious that he was no friend of the Comptroller and that the Malay boys in the Rest House looked down on him.

The next morning we left in the launch up the Siak River and a two-day journey brought us to Pekan Baharu where there was a road and railhead over the mountains to the other side of Sumatra. There was nothing much to do all day. Colonel Crawford was in some considerable pain by this time, although he had managed to get some medical attention in Bengkalis. We got a stretcher from the hospital at Bengkalis and he lay on it in the covered-in compartment. The rest of the party sat on benches round the side or on the roof. Major Macleod-Gary, Major James, Wheeler and I sat round the tiller on it in

the launch's stern. The scenery was utterly monotonous, a thick belt of mangrove growing to thirty or forty feet with here and there a Malay house built on piles by the river's edge. We talked and smoked. Major Macleod-Cary told us about his battery at the time of the surrender. They had spiked their guns, and he and his men had been in the line with rifles for the last thirty-six hours. Colonel Crawford who had been on the staff at Fort Canning told us that on the Friday before the surrender a telegram had arrived from General Wavell to say that if surrender was inevitable opportunity to get out should be given to those who wished to take the chance. Some attempt had been made to get out a certain number of officers and men from all units on a quota basis, but orders had not had time to get round and in any case there were no large boats left. But he thought that a certain number of military personnel had been evacuated on the Friday and Saturday before Singapore fell. I wondered whether any of the F.M.S. V.F. would be out.

We got to Pekan Baharu at two o'clock in the afternoon. We had been told that there was a Dutch military headquarters on an aerodrome there, so Major Macleod-Cary and I went off to contact it. Enquiries in the village produced a military car and we ran the O.C. aerodrome troops and his staff to earth in a large marquee underneath some rubber trees about a mile from the landing ground. We were told that there were no British units with the forces in Sumatra and were recommended to go on to Padang on the West coast. They were preparing to evacuate the aerodrome, which had been very heavily bombed in the past few days, and an advance party was leaving for Padang the next day. They would send us with it. They found accommodation for us in the aerodrome barracks that night and gave us rations. I borrowed Major James' razor and removed eight days growth of beard, had a bath and began to feel much better. The Dutch officers invited us to their Mess for the evening and in one way and another life started to improve, principally because we had solved our main difficulty which was how to get the one hundred and eighty miles over the mountains to Padang.

We reached Padang the next evening after driving all day in a convoy with sundry Dutch troops. The driver of our lorry seemed obsessed with the idea of getting there as quickly as possible, and we had one or two narrow shaves when the vehicle ran off the side of the road round the hairpin bends in the mountains. We went through the passes at about five thousand feet. The scenery was magnificent, as fine as anything

I have seen in the East. But the road presented a severe test of driving skill with its twists and turns and numerous narrow bridges over gorges, and we were more concerned with getting there alive than with admiring the view. In the plains on the other side we passed through village after village all with their terraced ricefields and neat wooden houses with thatched roofs sloping in towards the middle. The rice harvest had just been gathered and thin wisps of blue smoke rose from bonfires of chaff burning in the fields. The Dutch East Indies have an exportable surplus of rice on which Malaya depended. If a progressive policy had been inaugurated ten years ago Malaya would now be self-supporting in rice, the one essential commodity of native food.

On arriving in Padang I had two surprises in quick succession. The first was a British evacuation camp with about five hundred men in it. The officers and men were mostly those who had been evacuated after Wavell's message had arrived or who for one reason or another had not been in Singapore at the time of the surrender. There were about a hundred and fifty troops, I was told, who had been cut off from II Div. upcountry and had made their way out to the West coast of Malaya where they had got boats over to Bengkalis or some other point on the East coast of Sumatra. They were the ones who had not been picked up by the R.N.V.R. and had been unable to get back to Singapore. I'm glad they got out. It was not their fault they were not in Singapore and they did not miss much. Some of them, I think, were commandos who had deliberately been left behind for harassing the enemy's lines of communication when we evacuated Johore. We were absorbed into this camp, which had organised very efficient machinery for evacuating troops to India and Australia. By this time the whole of the Dutch East Indies was falling into enemy hands, although we did not know it then, and all British subjects were being evacuated on whatever ships were going together with a few Dutch civilians.

I gave particulars to an officer, my name, unit, etc. He looked up. "I think we know each other," he said. "We were at school and college together, weren't we?" It was Angus Macdonald who had been with me at Winchester and Oxford. I had not seen him since our university days although I had been told that he was in Singapore. During the Malayan war he was Brigade Major of the Indian Infantry Brigade (ex-Argylls) and he had taken out an evacuation party on a launch the day before Singapore fell.

The camp also contained a few escapees like ourselves who had had no orders but had cleared out after the surrender.

Not many had come by our route via Bengkalis and the River Siak. The official route, in so far as there was one, was further to the South up the Jambi or the Indragiri Rivers. Dutch military authorities there had been warned to send on all military parties ex-Singapore by definite routes all of which converged on Padang. I suppose we were rather lucky to have got there. At Bengkalis we had considered going further North to Medan, where I thought we should be able to get a ship to India. But as events turned out, that would have been hopeless. It was only the fact that the journey up the Siak River presented fewer navigational difficulties than a longer journey up the coast that made us go on the island route which took us in three days to Padang.

At Padang we were housed in a local school to await our turn at evacuation. Our identity as a small party of escapees was at an end, as we were merged into a larger evacuation body and our success in getting away from here depended on circumstances beyond our control. We had covered a little over four hundred miles in nine days. The first hundred miles from Singapore to Selat Pangjang had been rather tricky, we had been a little ahead of the Japanese the whole way. The remaining three hundred miles had been fairly easy.

My second surprise came after I had been in the school for about an hour when I ran into Lieutenant Barney Walton and Captain Frisby, both of the F.M.S.V.F., whom I had been with from time to time during the fighting. 'Friz' told me he had twenty-five other ranks, all Volunteers, and they had come out under the orders of Colonel James with Major Macdonald. They were supposed to have been part of a larger evacuation party of about a thousand men ordered out on the last Friday. But there had been no large boats and as far as he knew only about seventy had actually left Singapore. All of these had reached Padang. He suggested that I should join up with his party who were leaving that night for Java; thence, he thought, to Australia. Colonel Crawford had already gone to hospital, so I asked Major Macleod-Cary whether he minded my joining up with my own unit. "Not a bit", he said. "The party's over now. That's much the best plan."

"Goodbye", I said, "We certainly owe our success to you, sir."

"Oh, I don't know about that. Providence, more likely. It's been a tough journey, though. But our luck held right up to the end."

"I think your skill in handling a boat had something to do with it."

"You did a bit, too, chivying up those confounded Malays and Chinese."

"Goodbye, sir, and good luck."

"Good luck."

He gave me his home address in the Isle of Wight. I met Mrs. Macleod-Cary a few months later in Melbourne. She told me he had got safely to Colombo and was now Lieutenant-Colonel commanding Fortress troops there.

How many people got out of Singapore? It is difficult to give an accurate answer. All the women got out except about a hundred and twenty, mainly nursing sisters attached to military hospitals. A number of women who were evacuated on the last Friday were killed when their ship was bombed at the entrance to the Banka Strait. It carried about six hundred passengers, men and women, and sank in five minutes after receiving a direct hit which set it on fire. About four hundred passengers escaped to islands nearby, were picked up and later reached safety. A number of men, civilians over military age who could be spared and had the Governor's permission to leave early, got away; but the majority of the Europeans of any age in Singapore were doing work of national importance and could not leave. They became internees. Military personnel who fought in the campaign and managed to avoid being captured fall into three groups:—(1) men who got out off in the fighting upcountry or on Singapore island and made their way in native boats to Sumatra; I would not care to give an estimate of their numbers, at the outside perhaps two hundred. (2) men who were evacuated under Wavell's order very shortly before the surrender or in a few cases (*e.g.* Colonel Crawford's) after it. As I have said, these represent only a small part of those who would have got out if there had been vessels available for them to travel in, perhaps three hundred men including some civilians. (3) those who made their own way out as best they could after the surrender, of whom perhaps sixty ultimately reached places of safety: perhaps nearly a hundred including civilian escapees of whom there were a few. It was reliably believed that there were no boats left, or practically none, at the waterfront on the Sunday night in Singapore, and that very few men were able to attempt an escape. I doubt that. There were numerous small craft up Singapore River and elsewhere belonging to Chinese and all these cannot have been destroyed. Opposite Palau Bukum we saw a boatload of men rowing. They cannot have got far unless they were picked up by a bigger boat and taken on. It is now known that of those escapees who got out under their

own steam after the surrender of Singapore only a fraction were lucky enough, like ourselves, to get to places of permanent safety.

We left the harbour at Padang that night with about two hundred passengers aboard a small coaling steamer for Tjillatjap, the only port in Java known still to be open. The few cabins were crowded out with Dutch women and a few husbands. We were not allowed to sleep on deck and we all crowded into the small dining saloon lying on the tables and on the floor. We hugged the coast and for a maddening thirty-six hours we stopped and cruised up and down slowly in front of a shore signalling station near Bencoolen before we got the signal to go on. We reached Tjillatjap on March 1st. There was a British A.A. unit defending the harbour ; the fellows on the guns told me that as far as they knew they were the only British troops in Java. They had orders to evacuate the next day.

At Tjillatjap we transferred to a much larger Dutch passenger steamer. There was some doubt whether we could be taken as the captain of the ship said he was full up already and had no more lifebelts. But in the end we were taken on board, largely I think because while our spokesman had been arguing at the top of the gangway a large number of Australian troops had climbed out of our lighter up a rope and into a large porthole in the ship. The skipper realised he would never get them off the ship again and agreed to take us all. We dashed out of port that night, ran the gauntlet of the Japanese submarines lying outside and reached Australia in six days. How close a shave we had had we only learnt when we disembarked at Perth, when we heard that the destroyer which had escorted us for the first fifteen miles out of Tjillatjap had been sunk on her journey back, and that our coaling steamer had been torpedoed on her way out the next morning. The Japanese had carried out a devastating raid on Tjillatjap the morning after we left and had sunk practically everything left in the harbour.

We leaned over the side as the ship was coming into Fremantle harbour. It looked strange to see wide open stretches of country sparsely covered with gum-trees after the jungles of Malaya. The calm deliberation with which white labour loaded cargoes seemed a contrast after noisy gangs of Chinese coolies. There were no placards in Chinese characters outside the shops. The climate was hot, but dry and invigorating. We felt grand.

We were taken to a big military transit camp at Claremont Showgrounds. The Commandant was kindness itself and fixed us up with clothing (I was still wearing the khaki slacks

which I had torn crossing the barbed wire at the Singapore Yacht Club), and everything else we wanted. He gave us the free run of the camp and the Officers' Mess. I spent a few days in the military hospital there where my septic foot was able to get the attention it needed. We spent six weeks at the camp. Barney Walton and I got invitations out to private houses for the day and had a good time in Perth. The Colonial Office paid us all arrears of salary and informed us that we would remain on full pay and would receive notice transferring us to some other Colony. In due course Barney received instructions to proceed to Sierra Leone and I to Kenya.

When the British Details in Perth were dispersed I flew over to Sydney to meet Mr. E. C. Hicks, with whom I got in touch by letter as soon as I reached Australia. He had received notice of transfer to Nigeria and we were together for two months in Sydney while waiting for a passage to Capetown.

It was good to be in Australia.

CHAPTER XVII

EPILOGUE

RETURN TO MALAYA

It is over two years since the Japanese forces capitulated and Malaya was liberated in a bloodless coup precipitated by the atomic bomb and the virtual annihilation of their fleet. We had not envisaged so sudden and spectacular a collapse only three months after the fall of Germany and in 1943 the first plans for a fighting liberation of the country had been outlined. In that year a special unit of the Civil Affairs Branch of the Army was set up under the War Office in London. The Malayan Planning Unit, which had its headquarters in Hyde Park Gate, lacked anything like the number of experienced officers it could profitably have used. But exhaustive lists of all ex-Malayans who had somehow or other escaped internment in 1942 had been prepared, and these men were recalled to England in stages, given a short training course in Civil Affairs and absorbed into the Army, on temporary release by the Colonial Office in the case of Government servants. The majority of them had been carrying on their civilian jobs since the fall of Malaya on secondment to other colonies, but many had remained with the fighting services and had seen action in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands or Burma.

The detailed planning for the invasion is now a matter of history. Lord Louis Mountbatten has said that on September 9th, 1945 we were going to land the largest combined operations force the Far East ever saw, nearly a quarter of a million men. Five divisions and an armoured brigade as well as airborne and commando units were going in at Port Swettenham, Morib and Port Dickson, and after investing Kuala Lumpur would at once thrust south towards Singapore. It is now known that there were rather more than one hundred thousand Japanese troops in Malaya, and although our progress down the Peninsula would have been fairly easy and success certain the reduction of Singapore might have entailed severe fighting with great loss of civilian life.

In early 1945 the centre of gravity of Civil Affairs, Malaya, shifted from London to South East Asia Command in Ceylon. C.A. operational detachments, small units of a dozen men—administrative, police, medical, supplies officers and so on—were

formed up in Madras to await sailing orders to be "phased in", that beloved military cliché of the army. These officers were mainly young men transferred from other units, with a leavening of ex-Malayans. I had been with a technical planning organization in Ceylon and New Delhi since March, and arrived at Madras in July to find the air thick with rumours of a Japanese capitulation impending after the fall of Iwojima and the American fleet action off the Japanese mainland. Rumours grew into definite news, and I became adjutant of a detachment on six hours' notice to move. There is no doubt that the sudden surrender caught us on the wrong foot. Much of our transport and heavy equipment had not yet arrived, and the speed-up threw an almost intolerable strain on the administrative staff. It was decided that landings should take place operationally as planned. Early in August my C.O. and I went to see a very overworked Movement Control officer whose powers of coherent thought after six years of war flourished only in a medium of military terminology. "Operation Tide-race" he said "is merely an administrative acceleration of Operation Zipper."

We reached Singapore at last on September 6th. There was a maddening delay of several hours when, after having picked our way in slow procession through the narrow mineswept channel south of Belakan Mati, we stood in the roads awaiting our turn to dock. One's visual impressions on occasions like these, trivial, inconsequential and clouded with feeling, are hard to recapture; harder still to put on paper. Collyer Quay and the tall buildings along the waterfront seemed undamaged. Fullerton Building stood out and in front of it was a large crowd of pedestrians and cyclists watching the shipping. Away to the north-east the coastline fitted in with my hazy memory of it—Raffles Hotel, the Clyde fish market with Chinese sampans drawn up on the shore, the Malay mosque and the shipbuilding yards at Tanjong Rhu. The Union Jack and the three-star Chinese flag fluttered side by side on a flagstaff near the Cathedral. On the side of a building was a large advertisement for GENASPRIN. I tried to make out the escape route I had followed three and a half years ago. Even our starting point at the Singapore Yacht Club seemed to have been obliterated by American bombing, which had been widespread in the harbour area. The Dutch Islands, concealing the Buginese-speaking village in which we had found sanctuary the day after Singapore capitulated, were an ill-defined blur on the horizon.

We came alongside the docks the next morning. A young Chinese driving a lorry came up and talked to us while we waited

for transport to take us into the town. "You have no idea how relieved we are to see you back again" he said, "But why have you been so long getting here? It is more than two weeks since the Japanese in this place surrendered." And in fact this was the general impression we obtained everywhere. It would be extravagant and misleading to describe our reception as wildly enthusiastic. True, in the next few weeks we were to be cheered and our vehicles mobbed by children in the Johore villages through which we passed. But the prevailing feeling was one of immense, inexpressibly great, relief for freedom from the physical and mental torment of the past. The villagers showed little concern for the future, even the immediate future. Sufficient for the day that they were no longer oppressed by the depredations and refined cruelty of Japanese sentries; that the dreaded Kempeitai, into whose rapacious hands many of their friends had disappeared on whispered suspicion, no longer existed. Our Chinese friend was smartly dressed. "Do you know", he said, "Yesterday was the first time for years that I have dared this tie, watch and fountain pen."

We passed through Singapore up Bukit Timah Road, apparently little the worse for lack of maintenance, and crossed the Causeway into Johore the same evening, the first Civil Affairs detachment to reach the mainland. The situation, though not chaotic, was Gilbertian. We had been preceded into Johore Bahru by fighting service units who occupied the police barracks and garrisoned the town within a well-defined area laid down on the map. Outside these limits the Japanese Commander was responsible for law and order until we could take over. The Japanese disarmed themselves and became 'surrendered personnel' as quickly as possible, handing over to us all the transport above the minimum they needed to prosecute our orders. The vehicles were allocated to units on a priority basis, but in the meantime a general free-for-all had developed in which I secured quite a serviceable Ford V-8 by negotiation, if I may so term it, with a Japanese officer whom I stopped on the road. A samurai sword was thrown in for good measure. However, all such vehicles were pooled within our detachment so that no very great violence was done to international law.

The late war has aptly illustrated man's essential toughness, his will to live and his capacity for survival in the face of fearful odds. London air raids severe though they were produced only a fraction of the casualties expected. It has been said that modern warfare produces fewer in proportion to the numbers of men taking part than it did in the days of bows and

arrows ; that indeed, physical subjugation of the enemy's forces is no longer necessary since his will to resist can be broken by the threat of unimaginable horrors. Psychological warfare, in fact, carried to the limit. Yet how often in this war has the spirit of man overcome the most insidious attacks made upon it. The prophets who gloomily predicted that the next war would see the end of civilization as we know it are confounded by the tenacity of mankind, its instinct for corporate survival. It is as though this instinct is a primitive, unreasoning thing, a part of our emotional heritage transcending all fear. The Japanese bungled their work of subduing the country because they understood nothing of the complex factors which motivate the behaviour of its peoples. On the slightest pretext they slapped in public the faces of Indians whose compatriots have cheerfully endured the hardships of a passive resistance campaign in India ; of Malays whose grandfathers were pirates and guerrillas in the civil wars of the last century ; of Chinese whose loyalty to their country has withstood the most barbaric acts of oppression. As a means of intimidation it failed completely where a more enlightened policy might have won over important sections of the public and seriously embarrassed the British administration after its return. It would be idle to pretend that no damage at all was done. The Japanese had their own informers and puppets in Malaya even before the war, and these rallied others to their side in the short heyday of their ascendancy to power. Cross currents of popular feeling spread this way and that over the country dividing community from community, house from house. *Divide et impera*, a thief to catch a thief, were the methods of the Japanese overlords. Japanese schools were started all over the country where children were intensively taught the Japanese language and culture to become, in the words of Mr. Cheeseman, " hewers of wood and drawers of water " ; a propaganda-fed population regimented by methods familiar to us in Europe. Gambling farms were opened in all the large towns. Justice, or protection from it, was always to be purchased for a consideration. Venal in all their dealings with the public the Japanese encouraged venality in others, their partners in commercial enterprises which flourished in the black market as prices rose and more cheap money was churned out on their field printing-presses. Young people went about with bundles of notes totalling hundreds and thousands of dollars with which to buy a few moment's excitement or sensual gratification. The evil effects of all this rapacity are by no means yet stamped out. Their eradication is the duty of everyone, and particularly the province of my own Department.

Materially the damage done was less severe. Bomb damage throughout the country had been small and was easily repaired. Roads, bridges, railways and public utilities were given no proper maintenance for lack of supplies and we have been left a legacy of blocked channels and worn-out machinery. It is worthy of comment that after the first wave of enthusiasm had passed the Japanese do not seem to have planned for a long occupation. Their repairs to our demolitions on the 1941 retreat southward took the form of ingenious makeshift, the Heath Robinson contrivance which will hang together for a few years, although at the time they had the materials for more thorough work. Very soon after 1945 they would have been compelled to put their currency on a proper basis to check further inflation.

We found public health to be in much better shape than might have been expected. The Medical and Health Departments were supervised fairly well and carried on as best they could with dwindling supplies. There were no serious epidemic outbreaks either during or immediately after the Japanese occupation. We left my invalid friend Mr. Chong, you may remember, in Ipoh in 1941 and one of his sons with a chronically poisoned leg from a football accident at school. Both had been dependent on regular medical attention, and in the intervening years I had often wondered what had become of them. I was very pleased to find them alive and well. Siew Ying is back at Anderson School as a prefect, taking a leading part in all school activities, and his father is able to move about more than before. His two older children are both back at the Medical College in Singapore.

Although there was not much increase in specific disease cases of under-nutrition were all too common among school-children. Pahang, to which I was appointed as Inspector of Schools at the beginning of 1946, was a particularly bad region. I managed to get a supply of free milk for all school children under twelve, a pint a day, and though we can never compensate entirely for the semi-starvation diet on which they were forced to subsist for three years the food situation has greatly improved and one no longer sees so many bony skeletons sitting in class. I am told by a dietician that tapioca, on which they kept alive for so long in the absence of rice, has the same nutritive value as rice. But they detested it and blamed all their illnesses, real or imaginary, on it.

The worst cases of gross under-nutrition were to be found among the European internees in Sime Road Camp, Singapore. I visited it to see old friends about a week after our arrival. I

realized for the first time something of what they had all been through, and I found it a most unnerving experience. The determination with which they faced an uncertain future, daily growing worse under more and more humiliating conditions until breaking-point was almost reached, commands the admiration of all men. Two things struck me most forcibly. The lack of any great animosity against the Japanese. The camp internees were a cosmopolitan crowd varying from senior officers to the riff-raff of pre-war Singapore, some of whom had made large sums of money out of black market operations in the camp with the full connivance of the Japanese commandant. But if friction between opposing factions in the camp seemed to have been too strong for the growth of any feelings of corporate solidarity against the common enemy, it must be remembered that every feeling was finally subordinated to "intra-gastric tension." Long suffering chills feeling, and starvation blunts physical aggressiveness. The relief on capitulation was such that there was no desire for vengeance. And the almost pathetic attempts the internees made to appear ordinary, to hide beneath a cloak of normality the hideous degradation of which no man can speak. I sought out an old senior officer of mine, since retired, and took him out to lunch. I told him about the Allied operations in Europe while he ate. "Hill" he said, "Don't worry about us. We're all right. You see us after a month of good food." (This meant about two tobacco tinfuls of rice a day instead of a table spoonful). "But" he added, "It's just as well you came when you did. We should none of us have been here in six months' time."

By and large, then, the masses of the people grew sick and tired of the chaos and the never-ending uncertainty of life under the Japanese. They welcomed the liberation as offering prospects not of plenty but at least of sufficient supplies equitably distributed according to the laws of an ordered government.

It is too soon yet to appraise the work of the British Military Administration of Malaya during its six months regime before it gave way to civil government. Their Highnesses the Sultans recognized the need for a strong centralized control by the army to restore confidence, to organize supplies and to put the essential services back into operation; and strong enough to back its orders by force if necessary. They voluntarily surrendered the powers they had held under the pre-war treaties as a temporary expedient. Even with this handicap the Sultan of Perak may be credited with having done more, by his counsels and in unofficial arbitration, than any B.M.A. official to put a stop to agitation and rioting in the State.

But the new treaties which Sir Harold McMichael, G.C.M.G., D.S.O. persuaded the Sultans to sign in October 1945 were another matter. Drafted by officers of the Colonial Office and the Malayan Planning Unit they contained provisions for a new permanent constitution. That these men were actuated by the highest motives cannot for a moment be doubted, and attempts to question the good faith of the British government have been entirely discredited. The treaties proposed to abolish the clumsy arrangement of eleven separate legislatures and to substitute for it a strong central government in Kuala Lumpur as a first step towards political unity and self-government. State Councils were to have reduced powers, and the Sultans some vestiges of their former authority. A form of Malayan Union citizenship, the qualifications for which led to much controversy later on, was to be introduced. But the manner in which these treaties were presented individually to the Sultans, on the flood-tide of optimism following our return to the country, is thought to have been unintentionally ill-chosen. Certain of the Sultans are alleged to have signed with some reluctance, the Sultan of Kedah only because "he saw no alternative." In response to popular clamour the whole matter was thrashed again *de novo*.

It would be premature to offer comment upon the new constitution which will probably be in force before the words appear in print. But it may be as well to dispel one popular illusion—that the Japanese regime and its aftermath awakened for the first time a political consciousness among the Malay people. They certainly developed it, lending it solidarity and direction. But the period which I have sketched briefly in Chapter IX, of the Malays as a bucolic group caring little for the future and having no sense of political unity, was rapidly drawing to a close even before the war. Organizations like the Kaum Muda were finding a common interest in secular matters linking the people more closely than did the loose ties of the Mahomedan faith. Post-war Malaya has seen the rise of a moderate party of Malays, the United Malay Nationalist Organization, under the leadership of a strong personality, Dato Onn bin Jaafar, the present Mantri Besar of Johore. Rallying to the defence of the Sultan's powers in face of attempts to whittle them away he enjoys the confidence of the great majority of Malays. His powerful party stands between government and the sort of political extremism going on in the Dutch East Indies now, a creed which raises so feeble an echo in Malaya that there need be no fear of it as long as the ruling power continues to give sympathetic recognition to

U.M.N.O. Whatever happens politics in Malaya has come to stay, and no reasonable person can fail to welcome this stage in the cultural adolescence of the country.

Subversive activity directed against itself was one of the first problems with which B.M.A. had to contend. In its most blatant form it led to strike picketing and riots; more insidiously, to intimidation and extortion. The problem was not a new one. We are familiar with the disillusioned partisan, the resistance man who has valiantly helped his country's cause against the enemy occupying it. In defying the forces of occupation and weakening their capacity for waging war he has accepted great hardships and taken heavy risks. Unfortunately the common enemy is usually about all that he and his ultimate liberators have in common, and when the enemy has been defeated his resentment of the new regime, which refuses him the place of honour in the new scheme of things which he considers should be his, often turns into open disaffection. France whose Maquis liberated their own capital without direct assistance from the Allied armies is facing this problem, which is found at its worst in Greece.

The Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army was recruited mainly from young Chinese who in peace time would have been starting to learn their father's trade. Operating in the jungle behind a screen of agents in every village they were well organized and hard fighters. Force 136 officers were parachuted in to them for liaison with S.E.A.C., which also supplied arms and equipment. When the Japanese capitulated M.P.A.J.A. immediately descended into the towns and villages, occupied the police stations, set up Communist anti-Kuomintang committees and proceeded to take over the reins of local government. They got in two or three weeks ahead of B.M.A. and made the most of their opportunity to pay off old scores. Members of the Kempeitai and their local informers, the rich tauke and the chettiar who had risked nothing in their cause, many were liquidated in that short period. Nowhere was there open defiance of B.M.A. for more than a very short time. But a ruthless programme of abductions, murders and shooting affrays, with active fomentation of discontent, went on under the noses of the police who were spread too thinly over the ground for effective intervention. But gradually wiser counsels prevailed. The M.P.A.J.A. garrison at Tapah police station gave my corporal driver and me a cordial welcome in a coffee shop where we stopped on our way up to Ipoh. "Frankly, it will be so much easier if the British leave it to us to police the country instead of trying to round us up like criminals,"

said a young Chinese section leader to me, "You must realize that it was we who liberated the country." I suggested that the Allied occupation of Burma, the Philippines, Borneo and the islands off Japan had some bearing on the liberation of Malaya. Eventually most of the M.P.A.J.A. forces were persuaded to hand in their arms and were honourably discharged in December 1945 after a big parade before the Supreme Commander in Singapore. My old pupil, Lo Guan Seng, came into my office one morning shortly after I reached Ipoh; he carried a Sten and a pistol and looked, I told him, like a Mexican bandit in Hollywood. He and a number of educated Chinese like him had joined the resistance. He told me of night raids on Japanese sentry posts near Taiping but the most valuable job these men did was after the liberation in restraining the political exuberances of the younger, less enlightened rank and file. Guan Seng is back at the Technical College, Kuala Lumpur, as a Public Works Department apprentice.

To describe B.M.A. as a polyglot body of men is to do it less than justice. There was in some regions a sharp cleavage between the senior Army officers seconded to B.M.A. from the battlefields of Burma and Europe and the 'old hands,' Colonial Service officials who had donned khaki only for the emergency. The former, many of whom were regular officers with long records of service, prided themselves on their lack of preconceived ideas—the clean-sweep attitude of mind—and looked askance at advice offered by "banana" colonels whose notorious incompetence, they supposed, had led to the downfall of Malaya in the first place. They found themselves in control of large areas of the country. For the first two or three months when the pressing need was for internal security they did a most valuable job. If, later, looking on the future only as a projection of the present some of them failed to understand the more complex problems of social reconstruction in an atmosphere of peace, there were certainly others who succeeded: who learnt to speak the language, moved about among all sorts and conditions of men and discovered something of their cultural background. The old hand tended to look upon the B.M.A. period as transitory, a preparation for the civil government that was to follow. Once I had some difficulty in explaining tactfully to a senior officer that he would get better results by not shouting at his Malay driver in English. One morning another ex-pupil of mine, an intelligent lad who in pre-war days used to write fulsome letters to me about his choice of a career, came to see me. In a short chat we avoided politics and talked of the school; most of the old staff were back again now and the

school was crowded out with new admissions. Later I was taken to task for embarrassing the administration by talking to the local Communist chief. "Such conversations will take place only at the highest level." I had not connected my precocious ex-pupil with the pseudonym under which he was known to the public.

Sudden strikes would occur when least expected, followed by negotiations between B.M.A. and representatives of the strikers in which after much polite debate absolutely no progress would be made. Just as suddenly the strike would end with mutual protestations of goodwill. The old hands were inclined to say, somewhat maliciously, that they knew why!

But it is all a question of point of view, and I would not like to give a distorted picture or be charged with prejudice. Undoubtedly the old hands, those newly transferred from other colonies no less than Malaysians themselves, had much to learn and benefited from minor jolts to their complacency. B.M.A. was a united team and everybody in it had far too much to do to prosecute personal jealousies.

Predicting the future of Malaya is a matter for abler pens than mine. To judge from the amount of money being spent on reconstruction and the social services, government at least sees no cause for alarm. The planter and the merchant seem less convinced. Let us never forget one of the great lessons of this century. It is not the rubber in the trees or the tin in the ground which determines the prosperity of a country. It is the quality of its labour, from the banker who finances the work to the coolie who scrapes for the raw material. For the first time in the history of mankind the world is facing a shortage of labour. Quality must replace quantity and sweeping social changes may be needed to organize and direct effectively the energies of man. On the understanding of this truth depends much of the future happiness of the peoples of Malaya.

GLOSSARY

Baju, *a coat*

Bilal, *a mosque official*

Bubu, *a small fish trap*

Chandu, *opium*

Changkul, *an agricultural implement*

Chettier, *an Indian man of means*

Imam, *a mosque official*

Jaga, *a watchman*

Jala, *a circular fishing net*

Kati, *a measure of weight, equal to 1½ lbs.*

Kempeitai, *Japanese secret police*

Khatib, *a mosque official*

Kongsi, *a Chinese firm or society*

Parang, *a large knife or chopper*

Ronggeng, *a dance of Javanese origin*

Sepak raga, *a popular Malay ball game*

Tongkang, *a large fishing vessel*

Towkay, taukei, *a Chinese man of means*



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