The Young Traveller in

MALAYA

AND

THE CHINA SEA

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THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN

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IN PREPARATION

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Denmark
Mexico
South America

A street market in Singapore's 'Chinatown'. Simon and Jennie discovered that there is a 'Chinatown' in most Eastern cities.

Dorothy Luxon
1956

THE YOUNG TRAVELLER IN

MALAYA
and
THE CHINA SEA

DONALD MOORE

WITH A MAP
23 PHOTOGRAPHS
AND FRONTISPIECE

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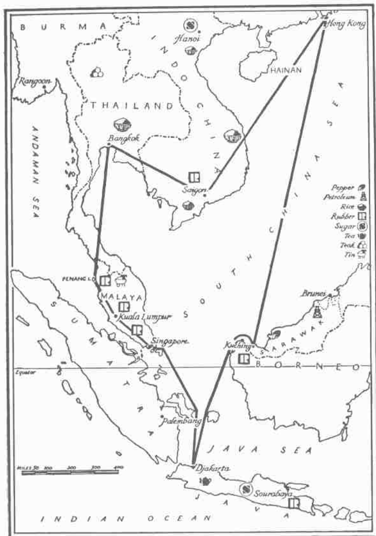
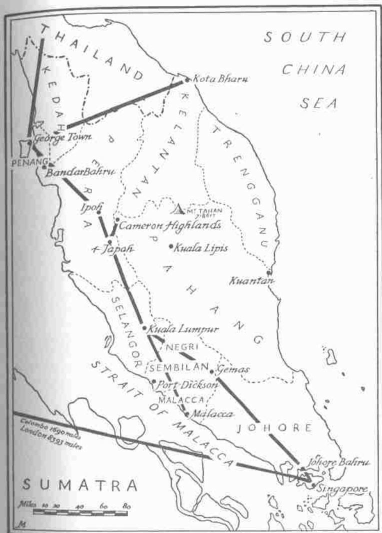


The thick black line shows, in the left-hand map, how Simon and Jennie, starting and ending in Singapore, visited many



countries and twice crossed the Equator. In the right-hand map, it shows their travels through the states of Malaya.

CHAPTER ONE

THE TROPICAL ISLAND CITY

THE silver Constellation swept low over the Singapore waterfront. Its wings flashed in the sunlight and the noise of its four great engines echoed and ricocheted among the walls of the skyscrapers below. As it moved out to sea, over the little ships and the ocean-going liners, over the warships, the tiny sampans and junks, and all the hundreds of vessels in the harbour, it banked steeply and its pilot began the descent to the main runway at Kallang airport.

Sitting well forward in the aircraft, their faces touching the window, through which they watched entranced this strange, new, Eastern world opening before them, sat Simon and Jennie Scott. For two days and nights they had travelled over half of the world, from England, where they went to school. Their parents lived in Singapore and the purpose of their long journey was to spend their summer holidays with them. It was three years since they had seen their father, and their mother had joined him in Singapore nearly a year ago. Although Simon and Jennie looked forward immensely to seeing their parents again they could not help feeling a little sad now that their exciting journey was over; leaving their trusty Constellation, which had been their home and, indeed, their world for what seemed such a long time, would be like parting from a very old friend.

But all sense of regret left them when the wheels bumped and then bumped again and they were down at last in Singapore; ancient Singapura, Singapura, the Lion City, crossroads of the East and West, one of the biggest and busiest ports in the world. All before them was new. All behind them was old. No Columbus ever found his New World with a greater thrill than that which Simon and Jennie experienced upon their first arrival in Singapore.

The Constellation trundled towards the airport buildings and came to rest. Simon and Jennie pressed their noses to the window and saw their mother and father waiting for them and waving.

'Come on', shouted Simon to his sister. 'We're here!'

'Wait for me', called Jennie, for by that time Simon was already halfway down the gangway to the door that was just opening onto a world where everything was new and fresh and tremendously exciting.

Simon and Jennie were not able to meet their parents until they had passed through the Immigration and Customs control. While their passports, health certificates, and luggage were being examined their mother and father waited impatiently for them at the far end of the reception hall. As soon, however, as all the formalities were completed the children ran down the hall and immediately became engulfed in the greetings of their parents. When Mrs Scott had finished telling Jennie how well she looked and Simon how much he had grown, Mr Scott said:

'Give me the bags and follow me.'

They all walked out into the fierce sunlight and into the car park.

'Is it always as hot as this?' asked Jennie.

'Usually', answered her mother. 'The temperature changes very little all the year round.'

'Look!' said Mr Scott, pointing to a row of cars.

'Is that ours?' asked Simon, his voice full of wonder.

'Yes, we've just got it. It isn't properly run in yet.'

Simon ran on ahead to examine more closely the gleaming Mark 7 Jaguar. It was a beautiful machine, more beautiful, almost, than any other car it was possible to buy from England. Mr Scott had bought it only a week ago, and his wife was convinced that the visit of the children to Singapore was the real excuse for his embarking at last upon an extravagance which for so long he had only dreamed about.

'Can I sit in the front?' asked Simon.

'You may', answered his father. 'But don't talk so much. Give your sister a chance to say something.'

All four of them climbed into the car, Mrs Scott and Jennie in the back, and with the slightest purr the big car slid gracefully out of the park. Soon they were rolling down Kallang Road in a continuous stream of heavy traffic.

'But I thought Singapore was a tropical island', said Jennie.

'So it is', answered her father.

'But my idea of a tropical island is palms and beaches and surfs breaking in blue lagoons. This is a city almost as busy as London.'

Her father laughed: 'You must have had a very curious idea of our life here, Jennie! Our days consist of very much more than lying on beaches all day and listening to the music of the waves. Perhaps, hundreds of years ago, Singapore island was something like the place you describe. But today it is a great city with over a million people living in it. And as you can see, quite a lot of them are rich enough to own motor-cars. Our streets are by far the busiest in the East. On the other hand, of course—and you must not forget this—many of the people who live here are very poor.'

The car turned off Kallang Road into the beginning of Beach Road. On their left was a veritable forest of masts each with a little red triangular flag flying at its head.

'Just look at all those ships', cried Jennie.

There seemed to be hundreds of them, all lying alongside the wharf which formed the left-hand edge of Beach Road.

Mrs Scott told the children that they were in no way different from the junks the Chinese built hundreds of years ago—strong, heavy, and durable boats, at first sight ungainly, but under sail things of incredible beauty; and that they carried all manner of goods to the big merchant ships which lay in the roads, and that some of them traded with the nearby islands.

'They do not look very big', she said, 'but these are the ships in which the early Chinese in Malaya and Singapore crossed the wide China Sea from their homeland. The journey was one of great hardship. Some were attacked by pirates. Others were afflicted with diseases like typhoid and dysentery so that all the passengers and crew died before they reached harbour. In those days coming to Singapore was a very different matter from flying here in a comfortable Constellation.'

As they travelled down Beach Road they passed a number of boat-building yards where they were building the smaller kind of boat known as the sampan.

'Look there', said Simon. 'They're painting an eye on either side of the bow of that boat.'

'The Chinese have always painted eyes on the bows of their

ships', said his mother. 'They say that the eyes are to enable the boat to see any unfriendly devils and frighten them away.

'But I once asked a Chinese boatman what the eyes on his boat were for', she added. 'He said, "him no have eyes, him no can see where he go".'

Suddenly Mr Scott slammed the brakes on hard and pressed the hooter. Only by a fraction of an inch did they escape collision with a Chinese pedalling what the children would have called a tricycle.

'I wish these trisha drivers would learn a bit of road sense', muttered Mr Scott. 'It's a wonder to me that they are not all killed.'

'Was that a trisha?' asked Jennie.

'Yes', replied her father, 'that was a trisha. Very pleasant to ride in, too—when the driver is paying attention to what he is doing. As you can see, they're really three-wheeled cycles with a comfortable seat wide enough for two people—rather like the side-car of a motor cycle. Many people use them instead of taxis.'

'Nearly everyone looks Chinese', said Simon.

'Most of the people in Singapore are Chinese', said his mother. 'Almost nine out of every ten people came originally from China. Some came out many years ago; some have been here since they were children; some are descended from Chinese who came here even before Raffles.'

'Who was Raffles?' asked Simon.

'Oh my goodness', said his mother. 'Don't let anyone hear you say that while you are in Singapore. What on earth do they teach you at school? Raffles, Sir Stamford Raffles, was the man who founded Singapore in 1819, and it has been a British colony ever since.'

'Oh!' said Simon, lapsing into momentary silence.

'We'll tell you more about Raffles later on', said his father. 'Meanwhile, we are passing Raffles Hotel and Raffles Institution, just to remind you that a man called Raffles once had something to do with Singapore.'

The car turned into Bras Basah Road, then on past the skyscraper Cathay Building, which, until recently, was the highest building in Singapore and was built by a Chinese who first

came from China to Singapore as a poor man, and then they turned into Orchard Road.

'This is one of the main roads leading out of the city', said Mr Scott. 'And when we get to the end of it we shall be almost home.'

There was less traffic on Orchard Road, and in a few moments the car was in an area of large houses standing among long and sweeping lawns.

'Which house is ours, Mummie?' asked Jennie, being as interested in houses as her brother was in cars.

'Oh! Ours is not quite so grand as this. We have a much smaller, but modern, bungalow—not one of these large houses that look as though they were built to contain a regiment of troops. You will see it in a moment, just round this corner.'

Mr Scott eased the silent Jaguar round the bend and there on the right was one of the most delightful houses that Jennie had ever seen.

'It's lovely, Mummie.'

'We thought you would like it. Living in a house like this is almost like living in the open air. We can open the whole front of it and we have those very large windows at the back so that a cool breeze always blows right through.'

Mr Scott brought the car to halt in front of the garage and Simon and Jennie jumped out ahead of their parents. Jennie's first words were:

'What lovely furniture, Mummie.'

'It's made of rattan', answered her mother, coming into the house. 'That's a kind of bamboo that can be bent into any shape to make chairs, tables, bookcases, and almost any kind of furniture. Much of it comes from the jungles of Malaya, where the people of the country collect it. Some of the rattan is exported to other countries, where it is made up into furniture like this. But tell me more about your journey. Did you enjoy it?'

'It was wonderful', answered Jennie. 'We wish we'd seen more of the cities we went to, but we weren't allowed to go away from the airports. I *should* have liked to have seen Rome, but perhaps we shall be able to see more of it on the way home.'

'And we had plenty to eat', added Simon. 'The food was jolly good, and the hostess kept giving us sweets.'

Just then a Chinese came into the room. He looked very kind and was about 50 years old. He was dressed in white trousers and a white open-necked shirt, and his head was completely shaven. He was grinning broadly, so that the children could see his teeth were gold. Behind him came a smiling Chinese woman about the same age wearing black silk trousers and a snow-white tunic fastened high round her neck.

'Good evening, Ah Han and Ah Eng', said Mrs Scott. She turned to the children. 'This is Ah Han, our cook, and this is Ah Eng, who helps him. She is his wife, and if you are polite to them they will be very kind to you.'

Both Simon and Jennie said 'Good evening', and knew at once that they would be very good friends with Ah Han and Ah Eng.

Ah Eng said: 'How old you, Simon?'

'I'm 13', said Simon, 'and my sister is 12.'

'You stay long?' asked Ah Han.

'For six weeks', said Jennie, 'and then we have to go back to school in England.'

'Singapore very nice place', said Ah Eng smiling, 'you like it.'

'I am sure we shall', said Simon.

'Well, children', said Mrs Scott, 'I think you'd better have your baths now and then we'll have dinner. We're going out tonight and we have several surprises for you.'

She turned to Ah Han and Ah Eng who were still standing there smiling. 'We will have dinner in half an hour, Ah Han, and then we shall be going out for the rest of the evening.'

'Very good, Mem', Ah Han answered.

'Come along then, Simon and Jennie, I will show you your room', called Mrs Scott. 'We shall have to hurry because we have to leave the house at a quarter to eight.'

'Off you go, you two', said Mr Scott. 'And over dinner I will tell you about the wonderful journey that we all begin tomorrow.'

'Journey?' asked Simon breathlessly. 'Where are we going to?'

'It's a surprise! I will tell you all about it when you have had your bath! Meanwhile, go and get yourselves clean and presentable.'

In Singapore's splendid harbour the young travellers saw ships of every shape and size from all over the world—huge liners and cargo tramps, carrying goods from East to West and West to East—to Siam and Burma, Hongkong and India.

In the Chinese theatre the actors wore gorgeous costumes and the stage had a most elaborately painted backdrop. Here is a scene from Lady Precious Stream.

CHAPTER TWO

A VISIT TO THE 'HAPPY WORLD'

OVER dinner that evening Mr Scott told the children of the journey they were to begin the following morning.

'Each year I have to visit various countries in South-East Asia to see how our branch offices are getting along. My company has offices in most of the countries of the Far East and those in South-East Asia are controlled from Singapore. So, you see, I have to go and make sure that they are all doing their work properly.'

'Are you taking us with you, then?' asked Simon.

'Yes, that's the plan. Your mother has not been on any of these trips with me before, and we thought it would be a good idea to combine business with a holiday. So we are all going.'

'Wizard!' exclaimed Simon.

'Where do we go to first?' asked Jennie.

'Early tomorrow morning', her father answered, 'we set out for Malaya and go to several towns, such as Malacca, Kuala Lumpur, and Penang. Then we go on to Bangkok, in Siam. From there we go by air to Saigon, in what remains of Indo-China, and then to Hongkong. Then we return to Singapore via Kuching in Sarawak and Djarkata, capital of Indonesia.'

Simon's eyes shone with anticipation. Both he and his sister could scarcely wait until the next morning. It was an adventurous journey such as few people ever make in their lives, let alone when they are as young as Simon and Jennie. Mrs Scott felt that the children would sleep very little that night with the excitement of the journey in front of them.

'How long will it take, Daddy?' asked Jennie.

'About a month or perhaps five weeks. At any rate, it will almost be time for you to go back to school in England when we return to Singapore.'

'Well', said Mrs Scott. 'Isn't it time we went out?—if Simon and Jennie are not too tired, that is.'

'Oh, I could stay up all night', announced Simon. 'I'm not tired at all.'

'Nor me', added Jennie.

Under normal circumstances both Simon and Jennie would have been dropping with fatigue. Had they been at school in England, with nothing before them the next day but another round of lessons, they would not have been able to keep their eyes open, especially if they had just spent two days and nights in an aeroplane sleeping only fitfully in their seats. Now, on the evening of their arrival in Singapore, they were ready to go out again. But there was no doubt about the truth of Simon's statement. Both of the children could have stayed awake all night without any difficulty at all.

'Let's go, then', said Mr Scott.

Mr and Mrs Scott and the two children went outside to the car and set off on a tour of the city by night.

'We're passing the Botanic Gardens on the left', said Mrs Scott. 'It's a pity it's so dark because they really are very lovely. When we get back to Singapore we must go there one day before you go back to England.'

'The Botanic Gardens', said Mr Scott, 'were founded by the gentleman called Raffles of whom you have already heard—Sir Stamford Raffles. Raffles was a great man and we shall tell you more about him later on. He was a man with a great many interests. In fact, he was interested in everything that could possibly concern the colony he founded at Singapore. When other people were making money and building up their private businesses, Raffles had time to stop and think that Singapore, when it became a great city, would be the poorer if it didn't have fine gardens to which the people could go when they were not working. Also, he thought, the gardens could be used for research, where men could learn to grow plants in Malaya and Singapore which had not grown here before.'

He went on to tell them about some of these plants, about rubber trees in particular.

In the 1870's (long after Raffles was dead), several rubber plants were sent to the Botanic Gardens in Singapore. Before this, rubber plants were only known to grow in the great forests of Brazil in South America. Britain sent an Englishman named Cross to Brazil to obtain some of the seeds of these rubber trees. He succeeded, but it was only with great difficulty that he was able to get them out of the country, for the people

of Brazil did not want their valuable trees to be grown anywhere else. He eventually reached England with his seeds and they were planted at Kew Gardens, in London. It was from Kew Gardens that the plants first came to Singapore. The Botanic Gardens raised the plants with great care and attention and later sent them to Malaya.

'Today', said Mr Scott, 'the whole prosperity of Malaya depends upon rubber, and Malaya is the largest producer of rubber in the world.'

'Of course', added Mrs Scott, 'when they first planted these rubber plants in Malaya there was not a very great demand for rubber. It was only when the motor-car was invented that millions and millions of tons of rubber were required.'

'In fact', said Mr Scott, 'the prosperity of Malaya came to depend on how fast the rest of the world was wearing out motor-car tyres!'

By the time Simon and Jennie had received and digested this little lesson on rubber and its importance to the country in which they found themselves, they had left the Botanic Gardens far behind, and the Jaguar was running along the water front.

'Oh! Just look at all those ships', said Jennie. 'Don't they look lovely with all their lights shining.'

Mrs Scott asked her husband to stop the car, so that the children would have time to look at one of the most exciting sights in Singapore. On their right stood the Supreme Court and the City Hall, floodlit in red and white. These magnificent white buildings look out across a great expanse of well-kept grass which the people of Singapore call the Padang. 'Padang' is a Malay word meaning an open space. Whenever there is a parade or a national day to celebrate, it is always on the Padang that the people gather in their thousands. Between the grass and the sea runs the road on which the Scotts' car was parked, and hundreds of people were walking about on the promenade, some of them going to the open-air restaurant at the far end.

'I've never seen so many ships', said Simon. 'Just count the lights. There must be hundreds.'

'Yes, Simon, there are', said Mr Scott. 'And they come from all over the world. We'll drive on now to Collyer Quay, where we shall have a better view.'

A few moments later the car pulled up again by Clifford Pier. Before them lay the great island-locked harbour of Singapore. The sea was smooth like a black mirror and in the darkness they could see the looming shadows of ships of every shape and size. There was a flashing light on the end of the mole which separates the inner harbour from the outer roads.

'Inside the mole you can see all the little ships', said Mr Scott. 'They are the tramp cargo ships of the East. They travel up the coasts of Malaya, and to Siam and Burma. They steam East to Hongkong and West to India. They ply among the countless islands to the south.'

'What do they carry?' asked Simon.

'Everything', replied his father. 'Everything under the sun. The important thing to remember is that Singapore is like an enormous clearing-station for goods. Shiploads of the manufactured goods of the West are brought to Singapore. Shiploads of the natural products of the East such as rubber and tin and timber and rice are taken out of Singapore to the West. It is from Singapore that the goods of the countries of the West are distributed among all the countries of the East, and it is Singapore that collects the produce of the East and ships it to the West.'

'I know', cried Jennie. 'We learnt about this at school. It is called an *entrepôt* trade.'

'That's right, Jennie', said her mother. 'It seems that they do teach you something at school after all!'

'Well', said their father, 'let's be on our way.'

They all climbed into the car again and drove towards High Street.

'We're going next to one of the famous amusement parks in Singapore, which are called "Worlds". But look, there's Raffles' statue, by the Government offices there.'

He brought the car to a halt again.

'Raffles', he said, 'should be an example to all young boys in Britain. His parents were very poor, and when his father died his mother could scarcely afford to send him to school. She used to worry even over the expense of allowing him a single candle to study by in the evenings.

'When he finished school he obtained a post with the East

India Company. In those days the East India Company, established by Royal Charter, had a monopoly of British trade with the East. The British Empire in India, and also in Singapore and Malaya, was first created by this giant trading company. The young Raffles became a clerk, and worked for years in the Company's dingy London office doing nothing more exciting than copying out what other people had written.

'Then a chance came for him to go to the new Company station at Penang in Northern Malaya. Unlike many young men in England today, who, it seems, would rather stay at home than go abroad, Raffles jumped at the chance. You must remember that coming to the East in those days was very different from coming to the East today. Doctors knew very little about tropical diseases. Hundreds of Englishmen who came to Malaya and other tropical countries of the East, died of malaria and other unknown fevers. In Malaya now there is hardly any malaria, and you can live here all your life and be just as healthy as if you were in England.

'Raffles very soon learnt Malay, the language of the Malays of Malaya, and his senior officers soon saw that he was one of the most valuable men they had. He held a number of posts in the service of the Company in Malaya, and at one time was Governor of Java, after Java had been taken by the British from the Dutch. Later, perhaps misguidedly, we returned Java to the Dutch, and Raffles, who feared nothing so much as Dutch rivalry in the East, became determined to found a trading-station for the British which would be the equal of Batavia, the Dutch city in Java. And that was how he came to found Singapore. Out of a swampy, almost uninhabited island, he created a great city. He knew that Singapore was necessary to the British, although many people in England at that time thought that he was a mere adventurer. But Raffles, like all great men, could see ahead very much more clearly than ordinary people, and, although he went to his grave very much out of favour, unhonoured, and unsung, we know today that he was, indeed, a great man.'

'It's like being back at school, isn't it?' said Mrs Scott, jokingly. 'Now let's get on to the Happy World or we shall never get to bed tonight.'

The car drove on through the busy streets of the town until they came to a brightly-lit gateway.

'Is this what you call the Happy World?' asked Jennie.

'Yes', answered her mother, 'there are three "Worlds"—the Happy World, the New World, and the Great World—and all of them are very much the same. In them are all kinds of amusements: cinemas, Chinese theatres, open-air cafés, cabarets, shops, restaurants, and dance halls.'

'Are we going to see all these things, Mummie?' asked Jennie.

'No, it will take too long. Anyway, I don't think you are old enough for dance halls yet. We're going to take you to see the Chinese theatre.'

When they had parked the car, they pushed their way through the crowds that were passing in and out of the gates of the Happy World. There were thousands of people inside, all walking about among the brightly-lit little shops: Chinese, Indians, Malays, and people from every country of the East, who come to live and work in Singapore. They all meet in the Worlds, where something is provided for everybody, whatever his tastes.

'Here we are', said Mrs Scott. 'This is the Chinese theatre.'

The children found themselves standing outside a rickety hall, the sides of which were made of canvas. From within came the deafening noise of drums and gongs and cymbals. The noise was so great that Simon had to put his hands to his ears.

'We have come at a very exciting point in the play', said his father, leading the way into the rear of the theatre.

Inside they found a very large Chinese audience sitting on rows of rattan seats. They were a very noisy audience, since they were all talking loudly among themselves the whole time. Boys from nearby coffee shops were selling cups of coffee and lemonade to those in need of refreshment.

'They have all seen it before', whispered Mrs Scott, 'so they have little need to listen carefully.'

The stage was magnificent. Painted backdrops, brilliantly lit, depicted a Royal Palace. Before this scene of splendour strutted actors and actresses in beautifully embroidered Chinese gowns.

One of the actors was dressed even more brilliantly than the others.

'I think he must be the King', said Simon.

He wore a green and scarlet gown, reaching to his ankles. Every inch of the gown was covered with jewels which sparkled with every move. On his feet he wore tall, black boots into which were tucked his red trousers. A decorated crown of incredible complexity was balanced on his head. He came to the front of the stage and began in a high-pitched voice a most lengthy speech. What he said was evidently very funny, for all the people laughed, even though they were listening with only half an ear.

Simon and Jennie could just see, at the side of the stage, the Chinese orchestra which played continuously. It consisted of a one-stringed Chinese fiddle and gongs of every shape and size. The gongs were beaten repeatedly, and whenever the actor reached a climax in his speech the gongs were beaten harder than ever until the whole building echoed to their clamour.

Another gaudily dressed actor rushed into view. It was clear that he was ready to fight the man who was speaking. The two of them mimed a desperate struggle and in the process jumped all over the stage, cutting and thrusting at each other with imaginary weapons. The other actors fell back and watched the contest with horror on their grotesque, highly-painted faces. The gongs and clappers reached a new peak of deafening noise and all the people in the theatre cheered. Even Simon and Jennie, who could not understand a single word of what was being said, were excited too. Then the actor who had been speaking when the newcomer arrived ran headlong from the stage and Simon and Jennie could only assume that he had run away, much to the delight of the audience, who clapped and shouted and stamped their feet on the floor. The victorious king ran round the stage three times to the tumultuous clamour of the gongs, and in such a way that all the Chinese people there knew that he had mounted his horse and was riding away to rescue the beautiful Princess who was still imprisoned in the Bad King's Palace.

That was the end of the scene, and a man who had been

sitting nonchalantly at the rear of the stage throughout the performance, dressed in a pair of trousers and a vest with holes in it, got up and began to change the scenery. No curtains came down to hide what he was doing and the audience paid him no attention.

Mr Scott explained: 'The Chinese do not bother about a curtain in front, and the man who is changing the scenery now, and who is called the property man, can wander on and off the stage at will, even while the play is going on, to make whatever adjustments are necessary to the setting. When an actor wishes to sit down the property man will run onto the stage with a stool, and when the actor gets up he will run on again to take the stool away. If the actor needs a sword the property man will bring him one, and when he has killed his adversary the property man will doubtless appear to carry the dead man away.'

'It was wonderful', sighed Jennie, full of contentment.

'I think it is time we went home now', said Mrs Scott. 'We have to be up very early in the morning.'

They all filed out of the theatre, back into the noisy streams of people still walking in every direction among the shops and sideshows of the World. Both Simon and Jennie were at last beginning to feel a little tired, and both of them fell asleep in the car before they reached home.

When they were in bed Simon sleepily asked:

'What time do we leave in the morning?'

'At about 7 o'clock', said his mother. 'Now go to sleep, both of you.'

But this last admonition was unnecessary, for by the time she had reached the door and turned out the light they were both fast asleep. The white moon shone in a black and cloudless sky and millions of cicadas in millions of trees, all over Singapore and Malaya, sang their strident song, which would not cease until the sun reappeared in the morning.

CHAPTER THREE

BY TRAIN ACROSS THE STRAITS

THE whole Scott family were up the following morning just as dawn was breaking in the eastern sky. Ah Han and his wife were bustling about the house before six o'clock, opening the great windows at the front of the house, and preparing the early breakfast. When Simon and Jennie awoke they found that the morning air was chilly, very different from the night before when it had seemed to be so very hot. When their mother came into their room she had no need to urge them out of bed. It did not take them long to wash and dress in the few clothes that people need to wear in the tropics; Simon wore a pair of shorts and a blue sports shirt and his sister a simple cotton dress. When they came into the dining-room for breakfast the sun was already rising above the casuarina trees at the bottom of the garden. Its hot rays fell in pools on the dining-room floor, heralding the heat that would come later in the day.

'Does it rain very much in Singapore?' asked Simon.

'It rains almost every day from October to March', his father told him. 'Rain falls all the year round, of course, but when the north-east monsoon is blowing, during the months you call winter in England, it rains more than usual. In some places in Malaya it has been known to rain so hard and for so long that up to twelve inches of rain have fallen in twenty-four hours. Now get on with your breakfast or we shall miss the train. It leaves at eight o'clock.'

When breakfast was over and the last-minute packing completed, Simon helped his father and Ah Han to load into the car the many pieces of luggage they needed on their long journey. Then, after many good-byes to Ah Han and Ah Eng, they drove into Singapore and out towards the docks where the railway station is situated. They reached the enormous painted hall of the Singapore station at ten minutes to eight and found that most of the travellers who were going north by the same train had already arrived.

'Where does this railway go to?' asked Jennie.

'You can go on this train all the way to the border of Siam', answered her father. 'The single track runs right through Malaya; through Seremban, Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, and Penang, and then onwards to the Siamese border. When you arrive at the border you have to change into a Siamese State Railways train which takes you on to Bangkok, and beyond to Cheng Mei.'

'How long does it take to get to Penang?' asked Simon.

'Twenty-four hours', his father told him. 'I'm afraid that our railways do not run very fast by English standards, but they get there none the less. Penang is five hundred miles away and Kuala Lumpur, the capital of the Federation of Malaya, stands halfway between Singapore and Penang.'

The Scott family walked alongside the train until they came to a first-class carriage which still had a number of vacant seats.

'Let's get in here', said Mr Scott.

They found themselves in a carriage with tables down either side, and arranged themselves round one next to a window looking out onto the platform.

Simon was astonished at the number of different races of people moving about on the platform. Some had come to catch the train; others to see their friends onto the train; and yet others simply to watch it. There were Chinese of every type: *Towkays* (rich Chinese business men), with fat, smooth faces, dressed in immaculate white suits, and poorer people who were perhaps labourers or small farmers from up-country. There were many Chinese who looked as though they were clerks or shop assistants, all of them dressed in western clothes. Simon had always thought that all Chinese looked alike and that he would never be able to tell the difference between them. Yet, as he looked out of the window, he saw that each of them was just as different from his fellows as any other race of people in the world.

Then there were Indians; Indians with dark skins, and Indians with light skins; Indians wearing white dhotis, or loin-cloths, and Indians again in smart western clothes. Among them were a number of tall, black-bearded Sikhs, most imposing in their coloured turbans. Again, the Indians seemed to be of every class, from rich textile merchants to the Tamil labourers

from the rubber estates, who had perhaps been down to Singapore to see their friends.

Then there were Malays too. Jennie was particularly struck with the Malay women and girls, who wore bright-coloured sarongs, and who walked as though they were carrying pitchers of water on their heads. Some of the Malay men wore smart white suits and others wore their traditional sarong which is, after all, still one of the most sensible forms of dress for a hot country known to man. Jennie thought the Malays were very good-looking people; so many of the men were handsome and so many of the women beautiful.

Simon's father pointed out to the children even more races of people; the Filipinos with dark and curly hair who come to Singapore often to earn a living as musicians. He also drew their attention to three Siamese, who at first sight seemed to Simon to be Chinese but who were, he saw, more like a mixture of Chinese and Malay. Then there were numerous Sinhalese with smooth dark faces and sparkling white teeth.

Simon and Jennie found it very difficult at first to distinguish between all these different races who lived and worked in Singapore and Malaya. And their confusion was made even worse when their father explained that the three great races of Malaya and Singapore, the Chinese, the Indians, and the Malays, are again divided into all manner of subdivisions. Sometimes the people of these subdivisions speak different languages and look quite different from the others. The Chinese, for example, are divided into Cantonese, Hokkiens, Teochews, and Hakkas, and so on according to the part of China from which they originally came. Each division speaks a different dialect of the Chinese language. Each Chinese dialect is so different from another that people speaking one cannot understand those who speak another. They all, of course, use the same written language and so, if they cannot speak to one another, they can at least write down what they wish to say so as to be understood.

'Many of the Chinese in Singapore', said Mrs Scott, 'are now learning to speak what is called Mandarin, which it is hoped will become the common Chinese language in Singapore and Malaya. If they could all speak the same language, it would be a very great step forward towards their unity in Malaya.'

Mr Scott also explained that the Malays were of dozens of different types:

'There are Malays in the north of Malaya who are barely distinguishable from the Siamese. There are Malays who have lived in Malaya all their lives and yet others who have come recently from Indonesia and are therefore Indonesians. The Indonesians are again divided; some come from Sumatra and some from Java. Then there are the Bugis of the Celebes, and even the Balinese are now technically Indonesian. There are many other groups, too. So you see, you have to live in Malaya for a very long time before you are able to understand and recognize all the infinite divisions of people who together make up the citizens of Malaya.'

The guard blew a piercing note on his whistle and the train began to move. Slowly the long column of carriages pulled out of the station, and they were on their way to Malaya. Singapore island is only about fifteen miles from north to south, and although the train travels slowly, it does not take long to reach Johore Bahru, situated on the southern tip of Malaya. The train moved first through collections of suburban houses and flats. Then it travelled alongside the main north–south road in Singapore, the Bukit Timah Road, along which industrialization is steadily increasing.

Mr Scott pointed to some of the factories on the Bukit Timah Road and said:

'In ten years' time Singapore will be making all kinds of things for itself. Previously it has been content to import all its requirements from overseas, but now there are so many people in Singapore for whom work must be found that it is realized that we must set about the business of making things ourselves. Industrialization will therefore increase in Singapore as it has already done in Hongkong. Industrialization must always, however, be secondary to our business of importing and exporting, for if the time should come when Singapore is no longer needed as an import and export station of Eastern and Western goods, Singapore will cease to have any real reason to exist at all.'

'Here's the sea again!' exclaimed Jennie.

The train was now moving through a low and swampy area towards a gleaming stretch of still water.

'We are just coming to the famous causeway', said Mrs Scott. 'Singapore is separated from Malaya by a narrow stretch of water, the water you can now see, called the Straits of Johore. It is about a mile wide. A bridge has never been built over it but, instead, a causeway through the water was laid down. It carries the road and the railway and the water pipe line that brings to Singapore much of the water that it needs from reservoirs in Johore.'

When the train was halfway across the low causeway, with the flat and oily sea stretching out on either side, Mr Scott pointed out of the window on the right.

'Those white buildings you see there are part of the naval base', he said. 'Singapore, as well as being a great trading station, is also a fortress. There are many soldiers here and squadrons of the R.A.F., and the naval base is one of the biggest and finest in the world.'

By now the train was slowing down and drawing into the railway station at Johore Bahru, capital of Johore, the most southerly state of the Federation of Malaya.

'We shall have to stay in our carriage for the moment', said Mrs Scott, 'since the customs officers will want to see our luggage.'

'Are there customs duties between Singapore and Malaya?' asked Jennie. 'I thought they were more or less the same country.'

'Oh, no, not a bit of it', answered her father. 'They are quite different. Singapore is a Crown Colony under a Governor. Malaya, or the Federation of Malaya, as it is called, is a British Protected Territory under a High Commissioner. Singapore is a free port. This means that goods can come in and out of Singapore without any duties being charged upon them. Most goods coming into Malaya have duties charged upon them so that the Government can raise the money it needs to govern the country. If there were duties on goods coming in and out of Singapore the merchants would tend to go away and start their business elsewhere. But Malaya does not earn its living in this way but rather from producing primary products like rubber and tin and pineapples and selling them to other countries.'

'Anything to declare?' asked a voice.

The Malay customs officer, dressed in a smart khaki uniform, was standing beside them, but the look on his face did not suggest that he thought that the Scotts were hiding dutiable goods or guns or opium in their suitcases.

'No, nothing to declare', said Mr Scott.

The customs officer thought, however, that he had better look into one of their cases. He accomplished this task with great speed and then chalked his initials on their suitcases before going on to the next table.

'Well', said Mrs Scott, 'now that is over we can go for a walk on the platform. It will be about ten minutes before the train starts again.'

As they walked by the side of the brown and yellow coaches Mrs Scott pointed to a large building on the hill behind Johore Bahru which looked like a cross between a skyscraper and the Taj Mahal. It was a wonderful building, combining all the best qualities of Eastern and Western architecture, and therefore especially suitable for Johore.

'Those are the Johore State Offices', she said, 'where the government of the State of Johore is carried out. They are very grand, don't you think? Perhaps a bit too grand! There's a story told about that building. The Chinese are sometimes very superstitious and before they lay the foundations of a new building they will often consult a man who claims to be able, by means of magic, to tell them the best site for it, within the limits of the ground they have chosen. He will tell them which way it should face and on which side of the hill, if any, it should be built. He bases his calculations on all kinds of mystical formulae. One of these men examined the hill on which the State Offices now stand, but after they had been erected! He decided the hill represented a tortoise. He measured the land and consulted the stars and examined his magician's compass and came to the conclusion that the building had been erected right on the top of the tortoise's head. He said the tortoise would not like this at all and that sooner or later there would be trouble. If, for example, the tortoise became restless, the building might conceivably fall down quite suddenly. But we shall have to wait and see whether or not he was right.'

They walked slowly back to their carriage and no sooner were they in their seats once more than the train started again; on through the rolling green country of Johore. In every direction stretched rubber estates, long, neat rows of trees, each with a little cup attached to its trunk below a number of cuts made by a knife in its bark. Every morning the bark is cut afresh and more of the white, liquid rubber runs out of the tree into the little cup. And every morning it is collected by the estate workers. Eventually the white liquid, or latex, as it is called, is turned into motor-car tyres and bicycle pedals, and rubber boots, and every other kind of manufactured rubber product.

As the train trundled towards Gemas, where they were to stay with their friend John Sterling, who managed a rubber estate there, Mr Scott told the children something about the Malay States which together form the Federation of Malaya.

'The Federation of Malaya is made up of nine states: Johore, Negri Sembilan, Pahang, Selangor, Kelantan, Trengganu, Perak, Kedah, and Perlis. Each is ruled over by a Malay Sultan helped by a British Advisor. The Sultan of each state has always had the last word in matters of Malay religion and customs, but the states have, for the most part, through District Officers, been administered by the British.

'The Sultan of Johore used to be called Maharajah, and the old Maharajah of Johore, in the last century, made many visits to England and was a great friend of Queen Victoria. When the title of Maharajah was exchanged for that of Sultan, Johore also accepted British protection, and the old Maharajah, who became known as Sultan Abubakar, was instrumental in bringing this about.

'Sultan Abubakar saw from the beginning that the prosperity and development of his state depended upon the immigration of workers from other parts of the East. He also saw that his state could not develop until it had better roads. So the Chinese came to Johore. They grew coffee and pepper and cut down the jungle and worked in the sawmills and made roads. They also grew vegetables, which they found they could sell to the growing city of Singapore, and in this way Johore developed into the wealthy state it is today. But none of it would have been

possible without the help of the British, who maintained law and order.'

Still the carriage jogged on through the jungle and the rubber. The land they passed through undulated gently, and each depression in the rolling countryside was very much like the other. The conversation among the Scott family slowly began to flag, and Mrs Scott eventually dropped off to sleep. As time wore on the heat became greater and the sun climbed higher until it was almost overhead. From time to time the train stopped at small wayside stations, but still the monotonous aspect of the countryside did not change. At midday they ordered drinks from the waiter and ate a few sandwiches which they had brought with them. Mrs Scott also produced a pomelo, a delicious fruit, larger than a grapefruit, which is grown in Malaya and resembles a cross between a grapefruit and an orange. It was food and drink—the juice ran in streams from Simon's fingers—and infinitely refreshing. Then, at almost two o'clock, the train drew into Gemas station.

'Here we are children! Bring your baggage and follow me', said Mr Scott.

'And there's John Sterling', cried Mrs Scott, 'waiting for us. Now our holiday has really begun.'

The rubber gatherer shaves another strip of bark below the previous cuts and the milk-white latex drips slowly into the cup fastened to the trunk. In two or three hours the cup will be full.

After it has been chopped into sheets the rubber is hung on a drying rack, and this is then pushed into a drying room. After that it is smoked for about five days.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FACTORY IN THE JUNGLE

WHEN all the introductions were complete the heavily laden party trooped out of the station to John Sterling's car.

It was a Ford V8 painted black. It looked exceedingly sinister, standing outside the now almost deserted railway station. All the glass of the window had been removed and replaced by black armour plating. A plate of metal covered the windscreen and only two small apertures were left so that the driver and his companion could see where they were going. This plate was hinged at the top, so that by means of a stout wire passing over a pulley it could be raised in less dangerous areas. The rear window was also covered by armour plating, and as they climbed into the car Simon saw that there was also armour protection below the dashboard. Except for the small apertures left for vision the occupants were completely protected by the car's armour. The armour in the side windows could, of course, be wound down in the same way as glass windows.

'You'll find it a little hot, I'm afraid', said their host, 'but it only takes half an hour to the estate.'

Mrs Scott leaned back on the seat and fanned herself with a newspaper.

'I'm simply dying for a bath', she said.

John Sterling sat in the front seat with Ahmad, the Malay driver, and the Malay Special Constable, whose name was Kassim. Kassim carried a rifle, and a belt of ammunition was slung over his shoulder. The four Scotts occupied the rear seat. Ahmad put the heavy car into motion and slid through the almost empty main street of Gemas and headed north.

'It is difficult to drive fast', Mr Sterling told the Scotts, 'with all the armour and such a load. The car alone weighs five tons!'

After they had driven for perhaps ten minutes, the car turned off to the right onto a secondary road, surfaced in the usual way but very narrow, with the thick jungle overhanging it on either side.

'How would you like to live in there, Jennie?' Mr Sterling

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asked, pointing to the jungle. 'That is the real Malayan jungle—thick, wet, and sometimes terrifying.'

'What kind of animals do you find in the jungle?' Jennie asked after a moment's pause. As she asked the question she was wondering how anything could possibly live in vegetation so matted and dense, where giant creepers hung in festoons from each tree and twined themselves round everything they encountered.

'Many things', he answered. 'In Malaya we have a great variety of animals. There are elephants, you know, in Malaya, and seladang, an animal something like a bison, and tigers and bears, leopards and panthers, rhinoceroses, eagles, and cobras and pythons. . . .'

'Oh, for goodness sake, shut up, John', said Mrs Scott. 'You're giving me the creeps.'

'Golly', exclaimed Simon. 'Are there really tigers in there?'

'There are indeed', said their host. 'But don't worry—we don't often see them.'

Again the car turned off, this time onto an unsurfaced road consisting of hard, red earth. The jungle had been cut back on either side.

'This road leads directly into the estate', Mr Sterling informed his passengers.

Just then the surrounding country was transformed and the unruly jungle gave way to the orderly rows of trees of the rubber estate. Compared with the giant trees of the jungle, rubber trees are small and, since they all grow to roughly the same size, a rubber estate always gives an impression of great neatness.

The heavy, armoured car bumped down a steep incline, through a narrow ravine and then up a small hill on the other side. As it reached the top the whole vast estate spread out before them. In every direction straight rows of rubber trees stretched almost to the horizon.

'Do you see the bungalow now?' asked Mr Sterling, pointing ahead.

Jennie saw it first, atop the next rise, nestling among the trees so that only its roof was visible.

'What a wonderful place for a house', she sighed. 'I wish we were going to stay here longer.'

'You can't expect to go on tours of South-East Asia every time you come out to Malaya for your summer holidays', said her father. 'So if you behave yourselves properly this time, perhaps Mr Sterling will ask you both to stay with him next year.'

Before the children could express their approval of this excellent idea the car came to rest before the front door of the bungalow.

It was an enormous square house, built on four-foot-high concrete stilts, with a deep veranda running round all four sides. Malay servants came down the steps to the car and took the luggage, and the Scotts went into the wonderfully cool interior. As they crossed the threshold they seemed to leave the tiring heat of the tropics behind them. It was as though they had plunged into a cool and refreshing lake.

'First', said John Sterling, 'you must all have a bath. Then we'll have tea and do nothing for the rest of the day but simply sit and talk. Tomorrow Tom and I will get down to a little concentrated work while you children are shown round the estate. O.K.?'

'Splendid', said Mrs Scott. 'The thought of doing nothing delights me. Come on, children!'

The rest of the day passed slowly and peacefully. They all sat out on the deep veranda, and while the adults talked the children were endlessly amused by the antics of Mr Sterling's pet monkey which had the run of the house. After an early supper the children crawled into their mosquito nets and fell asleep almost at once. Before they went to bed, however, they were told that they would be awakened at the unthinkably early hour of five o'clock the next morning to see a modern rubber estate in operation.

It was still dark when Simon felt something gently shaking his arm. He stirred and glanced at the luminous dial of his wrist watch. Five o'clock! Then his eyes closed again. Once more he felt his arm being shaken, insistently. This time he pulled aside the mosquito net which hung around his bed. Before him, in the gloom, he could just make out the presence of a boy about his own height.

'Time to get up', the dark shape said softly and precisely.

'Oh', said Simon, still half asleep. He stumbled over to the door and hunted about for the electric switch. After some time he found it and the room was flooded with light. He blinked and crossed to the boy who had wakened him.

'My name is Krishna', said the boy. 'And yours, I suppose, is Simon. And that is your sister, Jennie, in that bed there, still asleep.'

'Yes, yes, that's true. But how do you know?' asked Simon.

'My father told me', Krishna answered. 'He is the chief conductor on this estate and I was told to come and wake you and take you to see the estate.'

'I say, thanks very much', said Simon. 'I'd better tell my sister.'

When both the children were up and dressed and had splashed cold water on their faces, they were ready for anything. Krishna, they saw, was neatly dressed in blue shorts and a shirt but wore neither shoes nor socks. His skin was almost black so that his teeth appeared dazzling white when he smiled. Krishna was a Tamil, and his people came originally from southern India to work on the rubber estates of Malaya.

'Ready?' asked Krishna.

'Ready!' answered Simon.

The three of them walked quietly out of the house and, with Krishna leading, set off down the hill that led away from the bungalow. Before very long they came to a large and level clearing. At one end stood a great number of little houses, where the estate workers lived. Many of these workers were already gathering on the clearing and the children, even in the faint light of the early dawn, could see that all of them were Indians. Simon looked at his watch again. It was twenty minutes past five.

'This is the Padang', said Krishna. 'At half past five all the workers muster here and my father calls the roll and gives each man his work for the morning.'

'How many people work here?' asked Jennie.

'Altogether about four hundred people—the estate is nearly three thousand acres and the tens of thousands of trees need many people to look after them.'

Still the workers came to the Padang. Then a voice called in Tamil and all the men paid attention to what he had to say.

'That is my father', said Krishna proudly. Krishna's father had a notebook in his hand which he could just see to read in the grey light.

'He is giving each man his task', explained Krishna. 'You can see that every worker has a satchel and two buckets. He also has a tapping knife which you cannot see from here.'

'Will we be able to see what they do?' asked Jennie.

'Oh yes', replied Krishna. 'We will follow them when they go. Each man will have a task of so many trees—perhaps two hundred. When the roll call is finished he will go to those trees and tap them. There! They're off now. Some, you see, whose tasks are far away, are going in lorries. Follow me!'

The men began to disperse, all walking away in different directions. Krishna set off across the Padang, Simon and Jennie following, and the workers who passed them all spoke to Krishna, who seemed to be very well known and popular.

They crossed the clearing and entered another broad track. The children could see that many of the tappers were walking down the same track and every now and again one of them would turn off and disappear into the gloom of the trees.

'Let us watch here', said Krishna.

They all turned off the track and plunged into the soft controlled undergrowth beneath the trees.

'Are there any snakes here?' asked Jennie.

'Plenty', said Krishna. 'But usually they are frightened and run away from people.'

The man ahead of them quickly came to what appeared to be his task. He took his knife and approached the first tree. There were many marks on the bark of the trees as, indeed, there were on every tree, where his knife had cut before to allow the latex, or raw rubber, to flow out into the little porcelain cup that was attached to the tree below the last incision. With his fingers he carefully removed from yesterday's cut the latex which had coagulated before it could drip into the cup, and put it into his satchel.

'That is what is called scrap rubber', explained Krishna.

Then, with his knife, he shaved a further strip of bark from the trunk of the tree, immediately below the previous cut.

'Watch that cut', said Krishna to the children. 'You will see the milk-white latex appear and drip slowly into the cup. In two or three hours the tapper will return and empty the contents of the cup into his buckets. Every day a new cut has to be made to let the latex, which is like the sap of the tree, run out.'

Meanwhile the tapper had gone on to the next tree and was repeating the process.

At each tree he cut away the scrap rubber and placed it in his satchel, made a new incision in the bark, and then passed on to the next tree, leaving the latex to drip into the little white cup.

After a while Krishna and the children sat down on an old tree stump. It was now quite light and they could see the sun rising through the tracery of the trees. As each minute passed they could feel the air becoming warmer as the sun drove away the chill of the night.

'I think we ought to go home for breakfast now', said Krishna, 'then we can come back later and watch them collecting the latex.'

The three children trooped back onto the track and then across the Padang and up the hill again to the bungalow.

John Sterling met them at the door.

'Hello', he called. 'What did you see?'

Jennie told him what they had been doing and added:

'I never knew that rubber was white before. I always thought it was black.'

Mr Sterling invited Krishna to stay and have some breakfast with them, but they noticed that he did not eat very much. Perhaps he is not very fond of English food, thought Simon. When they had finished eating they spent some time with the monkey again—and suddenly it was half past nine.

'The tappers ought to be bringing the rubber in by now', announced Krishna. 'Should we go?'

So off the three children went again.

'First we will go to a collecting station.'

'What's a collecting station?' asked Simon, as they padded along the rough earthen track that led through the trees.

'Well', said Krishna, 'as this estate is such a big place many of the tappers have to tap trees too far away from the central

factory. They could not carry two heavy buckets of latex all the way from the outskirts of the estate to the factory. It would take them too long. So they take their latex to one of about six collecting points and from there it is transported by lorry to the factory.'

Just then the track came to an end and they found themselves in a small clearing. In the centre a large metal tank stood on a wooden platform, so that it was, perhaps, ten feet from the ground. Leading up to the tank was a set of wooden steps, and tappers with their buckets of latex were already climbing up the steps and emptying their morning's harvest into the tank.

'When is the latex collected from here?' asked Jennie.

'Oh, very soon. If we wait a few minutes the lorry will come.' Five minutes later they heard the sound of the 'tanker' bumping over the uneven road. When it came in sight, they saw that it was just like a small petrol tanker. It pulled up under the tank and the attendant jumped out and turned a cock, so that the rubber in the overhead tank poured down into the tanker.

'Well', said Krishna, 'should we be getting back?'

'Yes', replied Simon. 'But before we go, what does that man on the steps do—the man with the book?'

'He is one of the conductors who works under my father. As each tapper comes in, the amount of his rubber is entered by the conductor in the tally book. He also has a little instrument which tells him the dry content of the latex. Otherwise, a tapper might get the idea that he could mix water with his latex so that everyone would think that he had worked hard when he had scarcely worked at all.'

The children set off again along yet another track. They walked, perhaps, for fifteen minutes before they came to another clearing, very close to the Padang and the bungalow. There were a number of buildings in the clearing and as they approached Krishna began to explain their purpose:

'This is a very modern estate, and the buildings are so arranged that the latex goes in at one end and comes out at the other ready for shipment in bales. Now, in here are the bulking tanks. As you can see, the lorries that have collected the latex from the collecting stations are now arriving here and transferring their latex into the bulking tanks. Inside each tank

is a mechanical device that stirs the latex and causes it to be mixed with acetic acid. This process is going on now. The acetic acid causes the rubber to coagulate, so that it ceases to be a liquid and becomes a solid. As soon as the latex is properly mixed with the acid it is drained off into the coagulating tanks which are just beyond. Come! I will show you.'

'Are there factories like this all over Malaya?' asked Jennie.

'There are some', answered Krishna. 'But you must remember that this is a very big estate and a very modern one. Not a great many estates in Malaya are as up to date as this. And, of course, much of Malaya's rubber is grown by smallholders—small farmers who have just a few trees and make just enough money to live. Now, here is a coagulating tank.'

This tank was of a different shape, about fifteen feet by twelve feet and perhaps three feet deep. Above it was a hoist from which was suspended a framework of aluminium sheets.

'This tank is full of latex mixed with acid. Watch what happens.'

The hoist lowered the aluminium sheets so that they entered the latex at right angles. Each sheet was about an inch from the next so that the latex was divided into strips of approximately one inch thick.

'The latex will soon solidify', said Krishna. 'Then what do you think the result will be?'

'When it sets', said Simon—using the wrong term but everyone, nevertheless, knew what he meant—'it will set in slabs.'

'That's it', agreed Krishna. 'Let's go back to the house now and come back later this morning. Then we'll be able to see something of all the other operations which are necessary before the rubber is ready for shipment.'

When they returned they found that the coagulum, as the rubber is called when it is taken from the coagulating tanks, was being lifted out in great, heavy strips. As they were removed they were placed in a sloping channel at the end of which was a set of revolving rollers. As each slab passed through these rollers, and the moisture squeezed out, it became much thinner.

'Now watch again', said Krishna.

The children moved on, following the rubber as it passed

on its journey. As it came out of the first rollers it passed through a second set with a ribbed, diamond pattern imprinted on it. The pattern was thus transmitted to the rubber sheets.

'That is to help stop the sheets sticking together and becoming solid later on', explained Krishna.

When the rubber came out of this second set of rollers it was chopped by a guillotine into shorter sheets, each about thirty inches long. Each smaller sheet was then placed on a tiered drying rack mounted on wheels which ran on rails. Once the rack was filled with rubber sheets the entire structure was pushed on its rails into the drying room.

'There is now not much more to tell', said Krishna. 'The rubber will stay in the drying room for a day. It is rather hot in there. Then it will be pushed on to the next building, which is the smoke house. There are fires below the floor of that building and it is always full of clouds of smoke which billow around the rubber still on the racks. It stays in there for much longer, perhaps five days. After five days in the smoke it is no longer white but brown and all of the moisture has been removed. Then it goes to the packing room, where the rubber is sorted into different grades, and the impurities, if any, clipped out, and then it is packed into bales of about two hundred and fifty pounds each. Then off it goes to be made into motor-car tyres.'

The children walked slowly back to the bungalow. What they had seen had made them realize for the first time the tremendous amount of effort that goes into the production of the most ordinary things that they, in England, had taken for granted. When they had ridden in a motor-car they had never paused to think of the rubber estates that produced the rubber for the tyres, or of the miners who found the iron ore and the miners who found the coal with which to smelt the ore to make the steel to make the body. Everything comes originally from raw materials and many of the world's raw materials are only won by man through hard work, planning, and a willingness to face danger where necessary. The children reflected on this as they walked up the hill, and were silent. When they reached the top Krishna held out his hand.

'I must go now', he said, his white teeth flashing in his dark

face. 'I have enjoyed showing you the estate. Now I must go and get on with my lessons. I go to an English school nearby.'

'Oh dear', said Jennie, 'must you really?'

'Thank you very much, Krishna', said Simon, shaking Krishna's hand. 'Next year we hope to come and stay for a few days. Then perhaps we can help you with your lessons!'

'Good-bye', said Krishna.

'Good-bye', called the children.

They watched him for a while as he trotted down the hill until he was lost among the trees.

'Now I must go and write in my diary', announced Jennie. 'I shall call today: "A factory in the jungle".'

CHAPTER FIVE

AMBUSH!

AFTER an early lunch the Scotts made ready to leave the rubber estate. John Sterling was going to drive them to the station in the Ford so that they could catch the same train as had brought them up from Singapore the previous day. Shortly after one o'clock they were ready to be off, and the children said good-bye to their friend the monkey, who, from the expression on his face, seemed to be genuinely sorry to see them go.

Ahmad was driving the car and Kassim, as usual, accompanied them with his rifle, sitting on the front seat next to John, who this time, Simon noticed, wore a revolver slung from his waist. As his car moved away from the house and bumped down the main drive, the children caught a glimpse of Krishna standing by the trees and waving. Simon and Jennie crowded to the window, leaned out and shouted:

'Good-bye, Krishna, see you next year!'

The armoured Ford approached the ravine between the two hills, through which they had passed the day before on the way to the bungalow. At the bottom of the ravine the car had to slow down to cross a narrow bridge made of stout planks. There was nothing below the planks, except a very small stream which, except immediately after heavy rain, was almost dry. The front springs of the Ford took the shock as the wheels mounted the planks which stood at a slightly higher level than the road. Just as the back wheels were eased onto the planks there was a noise like the ending of the world. John Sterling yelled:

'Put up the windows. It's an ambush.'

Luckily the Scott's nearside window was closed, and this was the side from which the fire seemed to be coming. John Sterling closed the front window on the same side. Mr Scott closed the window on his right and Ahmad closed his. It was sheer luck that the bandits had not been deployed on that side of the car as well. Perhaps the Ford had reached the ravine earlier than they had expected and they had simply not been ready.

But now, at any rate, the car was a sealed unit and Simon and Jennie were suddenly conscious of the heat once all the armour was in position.

'Are the tyres O.K., Ahmad?' asked Mr Sterling.

'Yes sir, I think so.'

'Go like hell, then. Our only hope is to try to burst out.'

They were clear of the bridge now and Ahmad accelerated. As he did so another fusillade of bullets hit the car's armour. The wheels spun wildly as one of the front tyres was shot away, and the subsequent bump told them that they had run off the road and were lying helplessly half in and half out of the ditch.

'We shall have to fight it out', said John Sterling grimly. 'Are you O.K., Mrs Scott?'

'Yes, I'm all right, John', but the tone of her voice told of the fear that she felt.

John then cocked his revolver. He said to Kassim:

'You take the right-hand side and I'll take this.'

He carefully slid away a portion of the armour plating that formed the front windshield, revealing a small slot through which aim could be taken, while Kassim pushed his rifle through a similar slot on his side which the driver had used to see where he was driving.

'I can see one of them', said Mr Sterling. 'Cover your ears.'

As he said this he fired, and then again. He did not speak. He took aim and fired a third time. His revolver roared just as Kassim pulled his trigger. The noise was deafening.

'Got him', yelled John Sterling, closing the firing position. Kassim brought his rifle in again and closed his position. There was a broad grin all over his nut-brown face.

'I got one, too', he said.

'That accounts for two of them', said Mr Sterling. 'There's probably at least another dozen of them. These chaps don't like to be outnumbered.'

As he spoke there was another roar of fire from outside.

'They have an automatic gun', yelled Simon.

The noise was appalling as the stream of bullets from the machine-gun lammed into the armour. And as each bullet hit the plating a minute portion of armour inside the car was dislodged and sent flying about. These pieces were so small

they could scarcely be seen, but they were extremely painful as they penetrated the skin.

'Keep your faces covered if you can', shouted Mr Scott.

The bullets raked backwards and forwards along the length of the car, searching out the weak spots, trying to find the joins in the armour, particularly where the armour joined the roof.

'I'm going to have another look', said Mr Sterling as the firing eased off. 'Keep down everyone.'

Carefully he slid away the protective armour over the slot and without being told Kassim did the same. At first they moved the sliding portion only a tiny distance, just sufficient to allow them to see out without revealing to the bandits the fact that they were looking at all. Then suddenly John pushed it wide open, brought the gun up in a flash and fired. Kassim, with the cumbersome rifle, could not act so quickly, but as he saw John close his slot he followed suit.

Kassim looked at Mr Sterling. He did not say anything but his look meant:

'Did you get him?'

'I think so, but only wounded.'

The bandit fire became intermittent. They had wasted a great amount of ammunition without achieving much. Again Mr Sterling and Kassim opened their firing positions and fired, but made no further hits.

'What are we going to do?' asked Jennie.

'That is what one might term the sixty-four-dollar question, Jennie', replied John. 'For the moment we must hold them off. Firing cannot go on here without its being heard at the bungalow. The moment it is heard at the bungalow two things will happen. The armoured jeep will come to our aid with the remaining Special Constables, and the incident will be reported by radio to police headquarters. The police will have to come from Gemas, and it will take them perhaps fifteen minutes if they hurry. The armoured jeep should be here in a couple of minutes' time. It will be the duty of the Specials to spread out and hold the enemy fire, so as to engage them until the police arrive. With luck we'll be all right. But we shall need a lot of luck.'

'How shall we know when the Specials have arrived?' asked Simon.

'We'll hear their fire.'

Then Mr Sterling saw that Simon was holding in his hand a wicked-looking bowie knife.

'Where did you get that from?' he asked.

'I carry it wherever I go. You never know when it might come in useful.'

Mr Sterling laughed. 'Good man', he said.

There was a tremendous explosion just by the off-side rear door, low down.

'They're using hand-grenades to get us out', said John Sterling.

He opened the firing slot in the driver's window a fraction of an inch. Again he repeated the firing process as he leaned right across Kassim. He brought his gun up like lightning, fired, and then withdrew it. As he did so he closed the position.

'There are three men in the undergrowth, just on the right here. If they stay there I shall get them.'

He began to open the position again. Almost at once, however, there was another shattering explosion that sounded like a bomb going off. It was right by the rear-door again, but higher up and the occupants of the car watched with horrified expressions as the damaged door, its lock blasted away, swung open. Simon's father saved the day, and probably the lives of everyone in the car, although, had the bandits been able to fire more quickly, he would quite certainly have been killed.

He was sitting next to the door, and as it swung open, he shot out his hand to hold it. As he did so a tall Chinese bandit, dressed in a khaki uniform and a peaked cap, threw himself out of the undergrowth by the car and grasped the door. Evidently it was his purpose to hold it open long enough for his companion to lob a hand-grenade inside. As soon as Mr Scott saw him he snatched the knife from Simon's hand and brought it down in a terrible slashing stroke which almost removed all the bandit's fingers. There was a howl of pain and the bandit was forced to let go. At the same time the hand-grenade hit Mr Scott in the middle of the stomach. Simon saw it coming and as it hit the floor of the car he kicked it outside again, while his father pulled the heavy door shut. The moment it slammed to, with Simon and his father hanging on to it like grim death, the grenade went off. Its fury rocked the car. Then

the bandits evidently got their machine-gun operating again, for the car was raked viciously from end to end, time and time again. Then, as suddenly, the firing ceased.

'They *must* go now. These fellows know exactly how long they've got, and the Specials from the estates should just be arriving. Yes, here they are', Mr Sterling shouted.

Firing broke out from the rear of the car and almost at the same time a whistle was heard near by.

'That is their signal to break off the engagement', explained John Sterling.

The firing from the rear became heavier and then nearer but, since there was no firing position in the rear window, they were unable to see exactly what was happening. Mr Sterling opened the firing position in the driver's door, and after re-loading his revolver joined in the battle.

'They're on the run all right—with the Specials after them.'

In a few moments the firing died away altogether and John Sterling cautiously opened the door. He looked round, his revolver held at the ready.

'Follow me, everybody', he yelled.

Ahmad, Kassim, and the four Scotts piled out of the car and ran pell mell after him. He jumped into the dried-up bed of the stream and ran a few yards to where it almost turned back on itself. A great deal of sand was piled up on the corner, deposited by the stream when in full spate after the rains. They threw themselves down behind the sand. No one for the moment spoke, for all were far too busy regaining their breath.

'It is no use being foolish about things', said Mr Sterling after a while. 'We could stay in the car or start walking home. Perhaps we should be all right. But I should prefer to stay here until the police arrive. You can never tell whether the bandits have left behind a wounded man who can still use a gun or whether they have, in fact, left behind a rear-guard party. Now then, I will cover the stream back to the bridge and the slopes on either side. You, Kassim, cover the stream in the opposite direction. For the moment it is the best we can do. We cannot go up the hillside looking for trouble while we have women and children with us—and only two guns.'

'Look out!' screamed Jennie. 'Up the hill!'

Only a few yards away from them, and above them on the slope, a bandit was rising to his feet. His face was contorted with pain and blood was still pouring from a wound in his head and dripping on to his uniform. In an unsteady hand he held a revolver and he was just raising it to take aim, although at that range—even in his condition—he could scarcely miss, when Jennie shouted. John Sterling's revolver and Kassim's rifle fired simultaneously, and the bandit crumpled where he stood and rolled a few feet down the slope before he was stopped by the undergrowth.

'Second point to you, Jennie', said Mr Sterling.

Just then they heard the sound of an engine, and a truck carrying perhaps twenty police slithered to a halt on the bridge. The policemen knew just what to do. They jumped down from the truck, fanned out and immediately took cover by the side of the road, each rifle at the ready.

'Hello, Roger', John Sterling shouted. 'Come on, everybody, we're safe now.'

The bedraggled little party ran along the bed of the stream towards Inspector Roger Baines of the Federation Police Force.

'Is anyone hurt?' he asked.

'No one is hurt at all—except for a few armour splinters', answered John Sterling. He looked at the children. 'Anyone would think you'd been fighting bandits since you could walk. Nice work, you two!'

Simon and Jennie's embarrassment at this compliment increased when their mother, who could bear the strain no longer, bent down and hugged them both.

Inspector Baines gave a number of rapid orders in Malay. Then he turned to the Scotts and said, 'I'm leaving a couple of chaps here to look after the car, and another two to see you safely back to the bungalow in the police truck here. The rest of us are going after the bandits while the trail is still fresh. The army will be here in a few minutes and they will join us. Good luck.'

'Good luck to you, Roger', answered Mr Sterling.

The police truck engine was started and the driver edged it slowly round the derelict Ford V8, while the remainder of the Malay police, with Inspector Baines, made off into the rubber.

Leading up the hill to the Batu Caves was a huge flight of steps. The caves were formed millions of years ago, when Malaya was under the sea, by the shells of dead sea creatures, which were then thrown up by volcanic eruptions. The main cave was as big as a cathedral.

Bullocks are used for many tasks all over Malaya. ABOVE. *Ploughing a rice-field, which is planted when it is flooded.* BELOW. *Drawing a cart in Malacca. The thatched roof of distinctive Malacca design is to keep off the sun and the frequent heavy rain.*

The little party that had set off to catch the afternoon train soon reached the bungalow again. The first person to meet them, a most anxious expression on his normally happy face, was Krishna. He was desperately pleased to see them, and the Scotts later discovered that when the firing first broke out his father had had to restrain him from running to their rescue.

After a change of clothes and a wonderful cup of tea they all felt better and none the worse for their adventure. But not one of them would easily forget his terrible experience at the hands of the Malayan Communist Party.

At six o'clock the telephone rang. Mr Sterling answered it. He listened for a long time and then said:

'Thank you very much indeed. It was extremely kind of you to ring.'

He came back to the Scotts.

'That was the police. Apparently we were attacked by no less than thirty bandits. Roger's men got after them at very high speed, but they got only one of them—a wounded straggler. The rest ran for their lives and there is little hope of catching up with them tonight. The army will search the entire area tomorrow. We got four of them.'

'And that is the way the Emergency goes', said Mr Scott. 'It is next to impossible to wipe out an enemy that in the first place only attacks helpless civilians, and then runs away into the jungle as soon as any force is brought to bear on them.'

There was a moment's silence.

'How long do you think this war will go on, John?' asked Mrs Scott.

'How long?' he replied. 'I don't know. Sometimes I think it will go on for ever. This same war is being fought all over the world. It is being fought in Indo-China and Formosa. It was fought in Korea and in the skies above Berlin. It will go on just so long as people become Communists and just so long as Communism can attract to its cause the kind of brutes we met with this afternoon.'

'I think I must go to bed', said Mrs Scott wearily. 'And it is time you children were in bed, too.'

'Goodnight', said Mr Sterling. 'And thanks for the help, Simon and Jennie.'

CHAPTER SIX

THE GIRL OF THE BELLS

THE following day, the Scotts made a second, and this time successful, attempt to leave the estate. Since the Ford had been taken away for considerable repairs, they travelled in the armoured jeep which had come to their rescue the day before. All the passengers noticed a curious, prickling sensation in their backs as they crossed the bridge where they had been ambushed, and the driver lost no time in getting over it. But nothing disturbed the quiet sunshine of the afternoon, and very soon they were back again at Gemas station. Since there was so little room in the jeep, John Sterling had not come to the station to see them off. Once, therefore, the jeep had deposited them in Gemas, it returned immediately to the estate. The train was on time, and their interrupted journey was continued.

Their next stop was Kuala Lumpur, the Federal Capital of the Federation of Malaya. Gemas, very roughly, is half-way between Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, and so the journey was of almost equal duration to that from Singapore to Gemas. But, instead of taking place, at least in part, in the cool of the morning, it began in the heat of the afternoon. The carriage was stifling. In point of fact, the usual temperature in both Malaya and Singapore is never very much in excess of eighty-five degrees; it is even occasionally hotter on a summer's day in England, and often much hotter in India and the Middle East. But the heat in Malaya seems always to be greater than it is because of the great humidity. None of the land in Malaya is very far from wide stretches of sea, and moreover, rain falls regularly all the year round, so that the air always contains a very high degree of moisture. Simon and Jennie learned all about humidity when they ran about working off their surplus energy. They soon found that their clothes were soaked in perspiration, and saw the wisdom of walking slowly—as all people who live in the tropics sooner or later learn to do.

The land they passed through was much the same as that which they had seen on their way to Gemas—rubber and more rubber, interspersed with market gardens and jungle. On their

right the backbone of Malaya, the mountain chain that runs right down the centre to peter out in the plains of Johore in the south, grew more pronounced, and in the distance they began to see the tree-covered peaks sailing majestically upwards almost to the clouds.

They had tea on the train, and shortly afterwards the sun began to set—a period in Malaya when it seems to be hotter almost than at any other time of the day, for the sun's rays run almost parallel to earth and shine directly into windows and doorways, instead of being partially deflected by roofs and overhanging eaves. Then, when the last red rays of the sun had disappeared behind the trees, night fell swiftly. There was no long period of twilight, as there is in England, and, although the night did not follow the day quite so suddenly as the adventure stories which Simon read would have him believe, it followed quickly enough for him to be taken almost by surprise. Shortly after dark the long train of carriages rumbled into the ornate railway station of Kuala Lumpur.

The first thing that Simon noticed was the number of soldiers on the platform—English soldiers, Malay soldiers, Gurkha soldiers, and Fijians. Had he been old enough to remember wartime England he would have been reminded of the days when trains were packed with soldiers, and when the majority of passengers waiting on any platform were bound to be servicemen.

As they came out into the main hall of the station they found the Stewarts, who were to be their hosts, waiting for them—Mr and Mrs Stewart and Paul Stewart, their 12-year-old son. By the time their journey was over and they were back in Singapore again, Simon and Jennie were to be accustomed to new faces and new friends every other day or so. But now the sensation was still new to them and they made their way to the Stewarts' car in almost complete silence. But when they had travelled some distance through the streets of Kuala Lumpur Simon said to Paul:

'Do you go to school here?'

'Yes, or rather, I did. But I am going to school in England when the summer holidays are over.'

After more questioning Simon discovered that Paul was

going to the same school that he, Simon, was attending, and that they would be travelling back to England on the same aircraft. From that moment a bond of friendship was made between them which caused Jennie to feel a little left out in the cold.

Their car seemed to be climbing up a winding hill, and the children could see that new houses lined both sides of the road.

'This is our new suburbia', said Mrs Stewart jokingly, 'But we have quite a nice house and the view is magnificent.'

Just then the car drew up at a brightly-lit house, and once more they had to help sort out their luggage and carry it indoors.

'I think the first thing is to persuade these children to go to bed', said Mrs Scott.

'Oh, but Mummy', protested Jennie, 'we've only just arrived.'

'You will have all day tomorrow to see Kuala Lumpur', her mother replied. 'Now, upstairs and have your baths.'

When they came down for their supper they found that the Chans had arrived. Mr and Mrs Chan were old Chinese friends of both the Stewarts and the Scotts. Mr Chan was a man of about 50 years of age. He was also rather fat. His face was round and jovial and he seldom seemed to stop smiling. He had lived in Malaya all his life as had his father before him. His wife was as thin as he was fat and wore a Chinese dress. Heavy jade and gold rings adorned her fingers. She was much quieter than her husband and reserved her comments for domestic subjects, while her husband was prepared to talk about anything under the sun.

'These are my two children', said Mr Scott. 'Simon and Jennie, this is Mr and Mrs Chan.'

'How do you do?' said Simon and Jennie.

They stood for a moment, wondering what to say next. Then Mr Chan solved the problem for them.

'Do you know any Chinese stories?' he asked.

'No, we don't', answered Jennie.

'Well, I tell you one', he said.

'Once upon a time', he began, 'a very, very long time ago, in China, the Emperor's favourite daughter died while still a young and beautiful woman. All the best doctors in the king-

dom had attended her bedside, but none had been able to save her. The Emperor was heartbroken. When the funeral was over he went back to his great palace and, although he was surrounded by hundreds of servants, and secretaries and ministers, he found that he was very lonely. He missed his daughter greatly. He missed her happy face, he missed her merry chatter, but most of all he missed her tinkling laughter. For several weeks he moped miserably about his palace and in the end sent for his Chief Minister:

'"Let Your Majesty command", said the Chief Minister in his piping voice.

'"Chief Minister", roared the Emperor, "I miss my daughter, Mei Mei. Most of all I miss her tinkling laugh. Send out an edict into the land that whosoever can make a bell whose ring is like the tinkling laughter of my Mei Mei will be made rich beyond his wildest dreams. But if he brings a bell that does not sound like the tinkling laughter of my daughter he shall be put to death."

'"To hear is to obey, Your Majesty", said the Chief Minister, who crept out from the royal presence, backwards, on his hands and knees.

'The Emperor decided that if he could obtain the bell he wanted he would place it in the tower of his palace and have it rung each morning and evening to remind him of his favourite and beautiful daughter.

'The Chief Minister sent the edict throughout the length and breadth of China. All the bell-makers were soon at work, making the perfect bell, hoping that theirs would be accepted and so bring them untold wealth. At last one of the most famous bell-makers in China finished his bell and transported it to the Emperor's Palace on a cart drawn by six white horses. The Emperor came out to see it. He walked all round it. He touched it and looked inside it. Then he said to the maker:

'"Strike it!"

'The bell-maker struck it with a small mallet and its dulcet tones floated up to the evening sky. The Emperor listened and for a long time he was silent. Then he said:

'"It is a very wonderful bell and its tone surpasses the finest

I have ever heard. But it does not resemble the tinkling laugh of my daughter Mei Mei. Guards! Seize him and put him to death."

'The Emperor, you see, like most Emperors in those days, was a very cruel man.

'Then came the second bell-maker. Again the bell was struck so that its tones rang out into the skies of China, and again the Emperor listened, and again he was dissatisfied. So the second bell-maker was put to death. Soon the third bell-maker came with his bell, and then the fourth and the fifth and the sixth. And although they had all of them made wonderful bells they were each one put to death because the ringing of their bells did not resemble the laughter of the Emperor's favourite and beautiful daughter, Mei Mei. Soon, as might have been expected, China began to run out of bell-makers. Either they had been put to death by the Emperor or, seeing what had happened to their colleagues, they had quickly taken to other trades.

'Again the Emperor sent for his Chief Minister.

' "Chief Minister", he shouted, "where are all the bell-makers of this land?"

' "Either they have been put to death by Your Majesty, Your Majesty, or Your Majesty has frightened them into adopting some other trade", jibbered the Chief Minister.

' "You incompetent fool", roared the Emperor. "Send out our soldiers to scour the land for bell-makers, both past and present, and force them to make the bell I require, or your silly head will be forfeit."

' "To hear is to obey, Your Majesty."

'The soldiers scoured the whole of China. They went to the north and to the east and to the west. At last they came to a little town in the south of China where an old man named Ah Loy had, for many many moons, made wonderful bells. He lived so far away from the capital of China, and in so small a town, that he had not heard of the Emperor's edict, and when the soldiers came he agreed at once to make the bell. But only when he had agreed did they tell him of the consequences of failure. Ah Loy was then very afraid and he spoke that night to his wife:

' "Wife", he said, "I have agreed to make a bell for the Emperor that shall sound like the tinkling laughter of his favourite and beautiful daughter, Mei Mei, but when I had agreed the soldiers who came to my workshop told me that if I fail I shall be put to death by the Emperor. What shall I do?"

' "There is nothing you can do, my poor husband, except try to make the bell", answered his wife.

'So the poor bell-maker set to work to make his bell. He lighted his furnace and began to melt the metal he would need in a huge cauldron. He worked night and day on what was to be his finest bell.

'Now it so happened that the bell-maker also had a daughter called Mei Mei. She was not his real daughter, but he had found her as a baby, left by her mother near his workshop. He had heard her crying and he had brought her inside to the warmth and she had stayed and lived with them ever since. Now she was a beautiful young woman who loved the bell-maker and his wife as her mother and her father. When she heard about Ah Loy's task she was very worried. She made inquiries of her friends in the town and discovered from them, who had learned it from the soldiers, that hundreds of bell-makers throughout China had been put to death by the Emperor because they were unable to make a bell which sounded like the tinkling laughter of his daughter Mei Mei.

'Ah Loy's daughter thought and thought how she could help her father. All that day she wandered through the countryside thinking of a plan to save him. She knew, she knew so well, that no bell-maker could ever make a bell that sounded like the tinkling laughter of the Emperor's daughter, and that her father, too, would die like all the others before him. Then, as she walked, she came across an old, old man by the roadside. He spoke to her as she passed, and she told him of her problem. He listened to her with deep interest and when she had finished he took a huge book from a sack he carried over his shoulder. He spent much time turning over the pages of this book until he found the page he wanted. Then he told her what she must do. He spoke for a long time. And when he had finished he said:

' "If you do as I have said you will become a saint, and people for the rest of time will worship you and call you the Girl of the Bells, and when they look into the autumn sky they will see a star, and this star, they will say, is the Girl of the Bells, riding in the heavens among the blessed for ever more." When he had thus spoken the old man went slowly on his way.

'Mei Mei walked sadly home. But as she went she made up her mind that she must follow the advice of the wise old man. She came to the workshop and saw that it was empty, for her father had gone to his house for his supper. She stole towards the great fire he had built to melt the metal for the Emperor's bell and climbed up the ladder by the side of the cauldron and looked down into the molten metal, all seething and bubbling and inexpressibly hot. For a moment she stood poised on the ladder, and then without a sound flung herself headlong to the death the Gods had willed for her.

'That night, Ah Loy and his wife, and all the people of the village, searched the countryside for Mei Mei. With torches guttering in the darkness they climbed the hills and descended into the valleys. They walked by the rivers and searched in all the gardens. But none could find her. All they found was an old, old man with a sack over his shoulder who said that Mei Mei had gone, "where none could find her but all would know her".

'Sadly, Ah Loy the bell-maker went back to his dark little workshop and went on making his bell. He poured the fiery metal from the cauldron into the mould he had made, and when the metal had hardened he chipped the mould away so that the bell lay rough and half formed upon his workshop floor. His wife, and many of the people of the town, helped him polish it until it was possible for a man to use it as a mirror, so brightly did it shine. Then he fixed the clapper, and for the first time the bell he had made sent out its note. It was unutterably sweet. It sounded as no bell he had made before had ever sounded. The note was a note of magic. And when the people of the town heard it they cheered and said that Ah Loy was bound to be rich, and they helped him to load the bell onto his donkey cart and saw him on his way to the capital of China.

'The Chief Minister crept into the august presence of the Emperor.

' "There is a bell-maker with another bell, Your Majesty."

' "Tell him to ring it, you fool!"

' "Your slave will do your bidding, Your Imperial Majesty", said the Chief Minister, who crept out and returned to Ah Loy.

' "Ring it, you fool", he said.

'Ah Loy took the shining clapper in his hand and gently rocked it so that it struck the bell. A constant note of wondrous purity at once rang out so that all the people who heard it fell to their knees and covered their faces, for the sound was a sound that had never been heard on earth before. The Emperor rushed from his palace. He stood in his great doorway and said:

' "This is the bell that rings with the tinkling laugh of Mei Mei. Where is the man who made it?"

'Ah Loy stepped forward. He was poorly dressed and yet he was dressed in the best clothes he had. He held his old hat in his hand and walked towards the Emperor.

' "I am the man who made the bell, Your Majesty."

' "What is your name?" asked the Emperor.

' "My name is Ah Loy."

' "In future, Ah Loy", said the Emperor, "you shall be known as The Duke of the Sounding Kingdom, and you shall hold the office of the Chief Bell-Maker to His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of China. In addition you shall be given one hundred thousand taels of silver in recognition of the miracle you have wrought!"

'Ah Loy answered:

' "Your great and terrible Majesty, I ask only that you grant your humble servant the privilege of choosing his own reward. I have no need of grandeur, for I am an old man and have not long to live. In my life I have been a poor man and I have been happy. I have been happy until I made this bell. For when I shaped it from the metal I had melted, my daughter, whose name also was Mei Mei, went away. I do not know where she is. But now that I have heard my bell in Peking I think I see into the heart of the mystery. Nothing is any longer important to me except that I should be allowed to live within

the sound of the bell I have made, so that I may hear it whenever it is rung. It sounds, Your Majesty, it sounds to me, just like the laughter of my daughter, Mei Mei."

'The Emperor looked for a long time at old Ah Loy and understood.

' "Your wish is granted, great bell-maker."

'And ever afterwards the Emperor caused the bell to be rung each morning and each evening at sunrise and sunset, and at these times Ah Loy was always at his door to hear it. Then Ah Loy died, and his wife died, and then the Emperor died, and people forgot about the bell, until one day it was taken down and melted to make a bigger bell which rang with a raucous and unpleasing note. Then it was that a new star was seen in the heavens, which shone ever afterwards with a peculiar brightness at harvest time. And the people of China named this star the Girl of the Bells (although none of them knew why they named it so) and in her honour gave presents to each other on the same day of each succeeding year.'

'What a wonderful story', said Jennie, who, with the other children, had listened spellbound.

'What are the children doing tomorrow, Mrs Scott?' asked Mr Chan.

'In the morning we are going into town to do some shopping, and then in the afternoon we are thinking of going to the Batu Caves.'

'Would they like to have some Chinese food with me at lunch-time?'

'We should love to', said all the children at once.

'Very well, then', said Mr Chan. 'Meet me at my office at half past twelve.'

And so it was arranged.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CHINESE COOKING AND INDIAN CAVES

WHEN Simon and Jennie awoke the next morning they found that as long as they stayed in Malaya they would never get away from rubber. When they looked out of their bedroom window they found that as far as they could see the land was covered with the bursting tops of rubber trees. Little hills, undulating, one behind the other, each thickly covered with the neat rows of trees to which they had become accustomed, stretched to the horizon. Among the trees, here and there, they could see the roofs of the bungalows which housed the staff of the estate.

They discovered, at the same time, that the house in which they were staying was situated on the top of a high hill. It was naturally cooler on the hill than on the plain below, and the rising sun had not yet dispelled the damp chill of the night. It was, in fact, positively nippy, standing at the open window —and this taught them another thing—that the nights were colder in Kuala Lumpur than in Singapore simply because it was just slightly removed from the moderating influence of the sea. As they looked down into the valleys of the rubber estate they could see little banks of mist still gathered around the tree tops, little earthbound clouds that would disappear almost as soon as the sun shone upon them.

Then Paul bounded into their room.

'I say', he shouted, 'there's a snake in the garden!'

'A snake? Quick! Where?' shouted Simon and Jennie together.

The three of them raced down the stairs and out onto the front lawn which was still wet with dew. And there, sure enough, was a long black cobra.

'It must be at least six feet long', said Jennie.

'What is it?' asked Simon excitedly.

'A cobra!' announced Paul with a certain amount of pride.

The snake lay quite still on the sparkling grass, its smooth round body coiled neatly about itself. Suddenly Jennie felt frightened and backed away. For some reason the snake noticed

this movement and raised its head and spread its wicked, evil-looking hood. At the sight of this Jennie shuddered and ran into the house calling Mr Stewart. There was then such a commotion that the snake immediately slid off at high speed into the hedge which marked the boundary of the garden. Mr Stewart ran out of the house and met the two boys on the lawn. When they told him about the cobra he said:

'But why on earth didn't you tell me? Don't you know that they are deadly?'

The boys felt that this was scarcely the proper way to treat their fearlessness.

'Don't ever go near snakes unless you know they are harmless', Mr Stewart went on. 'Many snakes *are* harmless. But the cobra is not one of them.'

Then the Chinese cook came out and started thrashing about in the hedge with the broom, but the snake had gone. It had presumably gone back to its mate and possibly also to its young.

When breakfast was over Mr Scott and Mr Stewart were called for by a Malay driver in a station wagon and they went off to inspect all the things it was their mysterious business to inspect.

Shortly afterwards, Simon, Jennie, Paul, and Mrs Scott and Mrs Stewart set out for the shops of Kuala Lumpur in the Stewarts' car. On the whole it was an uneventful morning, until they passed a full-scale Chinese funeral winding along the main street of Kuala Lumpur.

It was a most extraordinary procession, and several hundred yards long. Leading it was a brass band vigorously playing 'Happy Days Are Here Again'. The music was not in tune at all, and the man playing the big drum hit his instrument as though he were trying desperately to knock a hole in its side. Each bandsman was dressed in a white, military-style uniform with a peaked cap, and every instrument was of very considerable age—battered, bent, and dented, the result of a thousand funerals. Mrs Stewart explained to the children that the more noise the band made the better it was for the dead person, since its object was to drive away all evil spirits that might be lurking about.

After the band came a great procession of people, presumably

relatives and friends, hauling in two columns on two long, coloured ropes. These ropes were attached to the gaily decorated hearse, heaped with flowers, on the top of which was mounted a full-size photograph of the man who had died. The hearse was simply a decorated lorry, and Simon suspected that it was actually being driven and that the people on the ropes in front were only pretending to pull.

Following the hearse were other lorries loaded with beautiful paper models of magnificent houses and servants and stupendous motor-cars. Again Mrs Stewart explained their purpose.

'Later they will be burnt and will therefore go with the dead man into the next world. This ensures that he will be provided with the best of everything in his new life.'

Simon also noticed that some of the people, as they meandered slowly forward, were scattering small pieces of paper with patches of gold or silver paint upon them.

'Imitation money!' explained Mrs Scott. 'Some say it is scattered so that the deceased will have plenty of money in the next world. But I believe the more accurate explanation is that it is just another way of keeping the evil spirits at bay.'

Behind the hearse also followed the mourners, some of whom were weeping and wailing vigorously. All were dressed in sackcloth.

'Don't be too put out', said Mrs Stewart. 'Some of them quite likely are professional mourners, who are paid to wail.'

Then came more friends and relatives of the dead man, followed by a band consisting entirely of gongs. There must have been twenty men in the gong band, who beat out an intricate, deafening, and changing rhythm as they passed along the street. Then came more lorries heaped with flowers and wreaths, and more friends; friends on foot, and friends and relatives in motor-cars, until the whole magnificent procession ended with three chartered motor-buses full of yet more friends and relatives.

All Jennie could say when the remarkable procession had passed was:

'But nearly everyone seemed so happy!'

'Not quite true, dear', said her mother. 'But I think the Chinese are much more sensible about funerals than we are—as they are in so many other things. I am sure it is far more

hygienic to eat with chopsticks than with forks, and I am quite certain that it is much more sensible to put the surname of a person first instead of last as we do. When we wish to compile a list we have to turn all our names round. The Chinese have theirs the right way round in the first place. And there are other things they do better than we.'

Simon chose that moment to be awkward. Sometimes he could be very awkward.

'Such as what things?' he asked.

'Well', answered his mother. 'All sorts of things. Cooking for instance. Now Chinese cooking is much. . . . Goodness me! What on earth is the time?'

'Crikey!' said Simon, 'It's half past twelve. We shall be late for our lunch.'

'We shall have to get a taxi', said Mrs Scott, 'and taxis are not easily found in this town.'

But by good luck a taxi was passing at that moment. Mrs Scott hailed it and they all climbed in. In no time at all they were at the imposing, modern offices of Mr Chan, who appeared to be connected with a very big and wealthy Chinese company. The three children and Mrs Scott were taken up in the lift to the fourth floor and here they found Mr Chan waiting for them.

'Ah! Here you are', he cried, 'I was beginning to wonder what had happened to you.'

'I'm afraid we got ourselves mixed up with a Chinese funeral', said Mrs Scott, 'and did not notice how the time was getting on. But here they are. May I leave them with you, Mr Chan?'

'Certainly, certainly, Mrs Scott', replied Mr Chan. 'When the meal is over I shall return them to you at Mr Stewart's house.'

'That is very kind of you, Mr Chan', said Mrs Scott. 'Good-bye, children!'

Mrs Scott rang for the lift and left them with Mr Chan.

'Well, now', he began, 'just let me get my jacket and we'll be off.'

'We are going to my favourite restaurant', he said as they went down in the lift, 'a place called the Diamond Restaurant. It has the best Chinese food in Kuala Lumpur.'

They took another taxi to the Diamond Restaurant, which

was some distance away in the middle of 'Chinatown'—almost every Eastern town of any size has an area which is predominantly Chinese and which is therefore known as 'Chinatown'. It is almost always the place where the most tasty Chinese food can be found.

The Diamond Restaurant did not appear very inviting from outside. It looked almost dirty. Its front was open to the street, where crowds of people passed continuously, and the seating accommodation was crude in the extreme. Rows of marble-topped tables extended along both sides of a central aisle and the chairs were of the cheapest possibly quality. The walls were colour-washed and covered with old and dirty calendars, and an enormous Victorian clock was suspended from the wall at the far end. Already the restaurant was almost full, but Mr Chan had taken the precaution of booking a table.

As soon as they were seated at their marble-topped table a waiter brought each of them a scalding hot, wet towel with which to wipe their hands and face. It was deliciously refreshing. Then another waiter brought them Chinese tea in little cups—no milk or sugar—which Jennie, particularly, liked at once.

'Well, now', said Mr Chan, 'I have taken the liberty of ordering the meal in advance. I hope you will like it. First we are having Bird's Nest Soup!'

'Bird's Nest Soup!' exclaimed Simon. 'Is it really made of bird's nest?'

'I am afraid it is', replied Mr Chan, laughing at Simon's surprise. 'You have both seen the nests of swallows, stuck to walls under the eaves of houses? Well, swallows live in great numbers in the East in many of the great caves that are to be found—particularly in Borneo. Swallows make thousands of nests in these caves, and the material with which they build these nests is largely made up of their own saliva. It hardens into a gelatinous mass which Chinese, in great peril, collect from the high roofs of the caves. They fix incredibly long bamboo poles between the floor and the ceiling of the caves and then shin up them to collect the birds' nests. Every now and again, I am told, they miss their precarious footing—and then there is one bird's nest collector the less. But when the birds' nests are

cleaned and treated and boiled the result in the form of soup becomes a highly prized Chinese delicacy.'

The children sat in silence for a moment while they digested this information, before attempting to digest the real thing. When the waiter returned he brought the soup in a huge, steaming bowl which he placed in the centre of the table. Simon and Jennie and Mr Chan were each provided with a small bowl and a porcelain spoon.

'Help yourselves, children', said Mr Chan.

Floating in the soup were the gelatinous masses, quite transparent, which Mr Chan had described. They easily broke at the touch of the spoon, and once the children tasted the soup they quite forgot that they were eating birds' nests. It was piping hot and delicious. Simon had three helpings, and this pleased Mr Chan more than anything, since he was most anxious that they should enjoy their first Chinese meal.

When the soup was finished the waiter brought a further dish, which he again placed in the centre of the table.

'Fried crabs' claws', announced Mr Chan with keen anticipation. 'Now you will have to use your chopsticks!'

He spent some time teaching Simon and Jennie to hold their two chopsticks in one hand in such a way as to cause the ends to grip a morsel of food simply by a tiny movement of the fingers. It looked easy enough, but it was an accomplishment that could come only with practice. Paul was very clever with his chopsticks.

'Don't worry about dropping food onto the table instead of into your bowl. We Chinese do not treat the table or the table cloth with quite the same reverence as you do. In fact, one of the ways you can show your appreciation of a Chinese meal is to leave the table scattered with the inedible remains of your food.'

Simon and Jennie tried valiantly to grip the crabs' claws, fried in a delicious batter, between the ends of their chopsticks. When Simon at last succeeded he let out a whoop of joy. But he whooped too soon, for he immediately dropped his prize into his tea.

'It is permissible to use fingers', said Mr Chan laughing at the children's determined faces.

So Simon and Jennie ate their crab's claws, holding them in

ABOVE. *Kuala Lumpur, capital of Malaya, was a mixture of big modern buildings, as in the Market Square here, and narrow side streets full of Chinese shops.* BELOW. *To one of these old houses in Malacca, with their carvings and ornamental tiles, Jennie and Simon were invited to tea.*

This gateway, standing all by itself on the shore of Malacca, puzzled the travellers at first. Then they heard the story of how the Portuguese Albuquerque took the town and built the fort, which he called 'A Famosa', 'the famous'.

their fingers and sucking the delectable meat from between the hard crusts of the shell.

So far Simon and Jennie were enormously impressed with Chinese food. But the *pièce de résistance* was yet to come.

'Chicken', announced Mr Chan simply.

The waiter removed the remains of the crabs' claws and placed in the centre of the table an enormous dish of roast chicken. The whole chicken was there, but it was clearly not meant to be carved in the English way. Instead, it had been cut up, bone and all, into conveniently sized pieces, and Mr Chan demonstrated to the children the correct way of holding a piece of the chicken in the chopsticks and then biting off the meat. This the children thought they would never manage, and, although they made several brave attempts at this most difficult manœuvre, they soon reverted to the use of fingers, which were so much easier to manage. An especially succulent part of the chicken was the browned skin which had about it a strange aroma which the children had not before encountered.

'It is a sauce made from a secret recipe', said Mr Chan, 'which the cook rubs into the skin of the chicken before it is roasted. All sorts of things go into the formula—herbs, spices, and honey.'

After the chicken came fried rice, and after the fried rice came ice-cold fruit. It was the most magnificent meal either Simon or Jennie had ever tasted. They felt that they would require nothing further to eat for the whole of that day.

Mr Chan returned them to the Stewarts' house shortly after two o'clock, and they at once set out on their expedition to the Batu Caves, situated a few miles to the north of the town.

As they travelled there in the Stewarts' car Mrs Stewart explained the significance of the caves.

'Millions and millions and millions of years ago,' she began, 'Malaya was covered by the sea. In this sea there were immense numbers of tiny creatures which lived in shells. When they died they sank to the bottom and mixed with the coral and other things. Gradually a layer of shells and similar material collected on the sea bed. As millions of years went by the layer of shells on the ocean bed grew to be hundreds and hundreds of feet thick. And so heavy did the layer become that it squashed the

true ocean bed downwards as it grew. Then there was a great eruption, and the solid layer of shells was heaved upwards, and molten rock gushed out from the earth, and the mountains of Malaya were formed. The limestone, as the shells had become, once they were exposed to the wind and the sun and the rain, began to erode. If you run water over limestone it will, in time, dissolve. And so much of the great limestone covering of Malaya has disappeared in the millions of years since the mountains first erupted, that only isolated outcrops still remain. The Batu Caves are in one of these isolated outcrops. They are found all over Malaya, growing sheer out of the plains in which they stand. And because limestone dissolves in water they are usually honey-combed with caves and caverns and passages, many of them as yet unexplored.

'The Batu Caves are particularly well known in Malaya, since, in the main cavern, there is a shrine venerated by all Hindus in Malaya. A great many of the Indians in Malaya are Hindus, and once every year they have their great and joyful festival of Thaipusam, and thousands and thousands of them come to the Batu Caves to worship at the shrine.'

Soon they arrived at the great limestone hill which, as Mrs Stewart had explained, grew with sheer sides out of an otherwise level plain. Leading up the side of the hill was a huge flight of steps which the Indians had built. The children, with their mothers, slowly toiled to the top. When the last step was behind them they found themselves in a gigantic cavern.

'It's as big as a cathedral', said Simon in an awestruck voice.

'This is the main cavern', explained Mrs Stewart. 'There is another nearby which is reached through dark passages, but we will not go into that one for it is rather dangerous if you do not carry lights and proper equipment. It is full of stalagmites and stalactites, and snakes and scorpions.'

Simon was going to ask why they could not go in the other cave which sounded much more exciting, but the presence of such things as snakes and scorpions in the darkness caused him to think twice.

For perhaps half an hour they pottered about the huge cavern. They visited the Hindu shrine, where they were given a handful of flowers from a tray, and climbed about the great

heap of rocks at the far end, which in the infinite past had thundered down from the roof, leaving behind a gaping hole through which the daylight illuminated the cave. The strong shafts of sunlight, streaming through the jagged hole high above, and the way in which they lit up the grotesque rock formations which glinted greenishly in the darker corners, provided a most impressive sight.

Then they climbed down the steps again, and as they travelled homewards Mrs Scott told the children a true story about the Dark Cave, the cave they had not visited.

'Not long before the Japanese invaded and occupied Malaya during the last war a Chinese went into the Dark Cave. It seems that he climbed up a cliff within the cave a hundred feet high until he came to a ledge. Here he remained. Just recently a party of cave explorers found his bones. On the wall he had scratched his name, his age and the place from which he originally came in China. Having done this he presumably lay down and died. No one knows why. No one knows whether he did in fact commit suicide, or whether he climbed the cliff and was unable to get down again. The latter theory seems unlikely, since he would no doubt have called out if he had found himself trapped, and the guano diggers would have heard him.'

Simon was uncertain whether to ask questions about the poor Chinese or to inquire what a guano digger was. Jennie solved the problem, for she had no liking for gruesome stories.

'Guano diggers?' she asked. 'What are they?'

Paul answered her question:

'In the Dark Cave there are millions of bats. Bats have lived there almost as long as bats have lived in the world. Guano is their manure, which after thousands of years forms a thick carpet on the floor of the cave. The guano diggers dig this manure up and it is sold as a valuable fertilizer.'

'Ugh!' was Jennie's only comment.

They were soon back at the Stewarts' house, and their first full day in Kuala Lumpur was over. They were to stay, altogether, four days, and although in that time they did many things nothing was to prove quite so exciting as the snake, the Chinese funeral, the Chinese meal, and the Batu Caves which they experienced during their first day there.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RICE—AND RAIN AT LAST!

THE time soon came for the Scotts to leave Kuala Lumpur. Once more it was necessary for them to pack their suitcases and place them ready in the hall. Their next stop was Malacca on the west coast of Malaya, not very many miles to the south.

The children had spent a hectic few days in Kuala Lumpur. Each day they had seen something different, something new. They had wandered among the shops; the Indian silk and textile stores, where tall dark men in turbans and fat Pakistanis had offered them every kind of material; the Chinese grocery stores where the pungent odour of dried fish tickled their nostrils until they sneezed.

They had been into the big European department stores on Mountbatten Road—named after Admiral Mountbatten who commanded the forces that liberated the people of Malaya from the Japanese—and into the Malay art shops, where they found wonderful knives or daggers, in beautifully carved wooden scabbards. They had learned that not so very long ago in Malaya a Malay would never dream of moving far from home without his dagger, or *kris*, at his waist. They had wandered into Chinatown where the poor people lived in terribly overcrowded tenement houses, and they had ridden along the fine avenues where the more fortunate people lived.

They had sat in the sun on the Padang and had learned that wherever the British colonized in bygone years they usually managed to preserve from the encroaching buildings of commerce and trade a stretch of green grass in the centre of the town, so flat as almost to be termed a lawn, where they would hold military parades, football and cricket matches, and musical concerts, and all the other curious things that Englishmen have always insisted on holding. They had been into the new and very modern government offices in Federal House, and, in complete contrast, had discovered in a side street a Chinese puppet show just like a Punch and Judy Show, watched by an excited crowd of Chinese children. And in the big commercial buildings to which their father had taken them they had learned

that Kuala Lumpur was not only an administrative centre but a centre for the twin supports of Malaya, tin and rubber.

One day Simon went to visit Paul's school where, to his surprise, he found his school-mates were of every race. It was a fine, airy building on a hill, and some of the masters were European and some Chinese, and others were Indian and Malay. Simon learned quite a lot about schools in Malaya that day.

He learned, for example, that there were several different systems of education. He learned that there were Chinese schools for which the Chinese paid, and to which they sent their children if they wished them to have their education in Chinese; and that there were Malay schools for which the government paid and to which most of the Malay children went to be taught in Malay. Then there were Indian schools where the children were taught in the Tamil language. Finally, there were the English schools to which English, Chinese, Indian, and Malay and Eurasian children went if they wished to have their lessons in English and gain a school certificate.

It was all very confusing—a country where some of the people spoke English, some one of the several Chinese dialects, some Tamil (the language of most of the Indians in Malaya), and some Malay. Simon wondered how anything was ever accomplished when so often one Malayan could not understand the language of the other. Then he found out that most people could speak either a little English or a simplified form of the already simple Malay language. With these two languages the people of Malaya managed, perhaps imperfectly, to understand one another.

And with all these things fresh in their memories the children were being whisked off again to Malacca where they would receive an entirely new set of impressions. Had they not conscientiously kept their diaries they would never have remembered the half of what they saw. As the car in which they were travelling to Malacca ate up the miles, Mr Scott began to tell them something about the journey.

'It's one of the most beautiful journeys in the whole beautiful land of Malaya', he said. 'The road will wind up and down little hills and in the valleys between them you will see lots and lots of ricefields. You have already seen a great deal of rubber—and you will see much more today—but you will also see something

of one of the other great agricultural products of Malaya—rice. Rice, in the end, is more important than rubber, since, although you can live without rubber, you cannot live for long without food. The Malays grow much of Malaya's rice—padi-farmers they are called. They plant the rice out, stalk by stalk, in flooded fields, and before it is ripe the fields become a wonderful emerald green. Then the rice turns brown like corn and is harvested by the padi-farmers in much the same way as wheat is harvested in England, except that all the work, back-breaking work in the hot fields, is done by hand. The Malay padi-farmers sell their rice to the millers, who are almost always Chinese, and it goes quite a long way towards feeding all the people of Malaya.'

Malaya was trying to increase its rice production, he told them. The government had many plans for rice, and the area of land growing it was increasing all the time, but one of the troubles with Malaya and Singapore and, indeed, with most of the Far East, was that as fast as anything was increased the population increased equally.

'Where does Malaya import her rice from, then?' asked Simon.

'From Siam, mainly, and some from Burma.'

'Look', exclaimed Jennie, 'is that a rice field?'

The car was travelling down an incline towards a level plain. At the foot of the hill, on either side of the road, the green expanse of rice extended for miles and miles. In the distance the travellers could just see the point where the ricefields ended and the jungle began again. It was a remarkable sight of productivity, and here and there they could see the sun glinting on the water which flooded each field to the depth of a few inches. The small fields were divided from each other by mud banks so that the farmers could control the level of the water in which the rice was standing.

As they went on they passed dozens and dozens of such ricefields, and among them they saw, for the first time, the lovely Malay houses of the people who grew the rice.

The Malays, Mrs Scott told them, are sometimes known as Nature's Gentlemen. They are very different from the Chinese and the Europeans, who tend to be always working and striving to better themselves. The Malays are not greatly interested in

business and commerce. It has been said, perhaps unfairly, that they are not very interested in work either. It might be more accurate to say that in some ways they are too sensible.

'Just look at these villages we are passing now', she said, 'these little groups of wooden houses shaded by coconut palms. How much nicer to live in one of those houses than in a busy city street! The Malays do not like to live in the towns. How right they are to prefer their villages! Do you see how smart their houses are with wooden shutters and colourful curtains and steps leading up to the front door, and their overhanging attap roofs made from the fronds of coconut trees, or attap, which keep them cool inside? How very much more beautiful they are than any of the tenement houses, or even the modern flats in Kuala Lumpur! The Malay grows his rice and picks his coconuts and catches enough fish to spice his diet of rice—and he is happy. I sometimes wish that I were a Malay—not troubled with great ambitions, living a quiet and peaceful life in a beautiful *kampong*, as the Malay villages are called.'

'You see,' said Mr Scott, 'the Malays of Malaya are the people of the land. They were here before anyone else, and most of them still live in the rural areas. As your mother says they plant padi, they pick coconuts, and they have a few rubber trees which bring them a little extra money, and they are wonderful fishermen and seamen. The Chinese, on the other hand, came to Malaya much, much later, mainly during the last century. They came as penniless immigrants from China to earn a living which they were unable to earn in their own land. They did most of the heavy work. They worked as coolies on the new tin mines and they loaded and unloaded the ships in the growing ports. Some of them, it is true, took to farming, many of them to vegetable farming, so that they could supply their produce to the ever-developing towns. The Indians, too, came to Malaya as labourers, and to this day they are mainly employed as tappers—as you have seen—on the rubber estates. So you see, the people of Malaya are not only divided in race and religion and language, but also, to some extent, economically. The great and urgent problem before all statesmen concerned with Malaya is how to weld all these divided peoples together into one nation.'

Mr and Mrs Scott told the children many other things on the way to Malacca and the time passed quickly. Within a couple of hours the car was passing through the outskirts of that ancient town. Soon it pulled up at the Rest House, where they were to spend their few days in Malacca.

The Rest House was situated on the sea-front, looking out over the famous Straits of Malacca, one of the most important waterways in the whole world. When they had unpacked, Mr Scott pointed out of their bedroom window to the sea and said:

'If the air were a little clearer you would see land over the water there. That would be Sumatra, which is now a part of Indonesia. The Straits of Malacca are bounded on this side by Malacca and on the other by Sumatra. Ships travelling from the East to the West, or from the West to the East, or, if you like, between India and China, must, if they are to avoid a wide detour, pass through the Straits of Malacca. So you see the Straits are important, and Malacca is the most important town situated upon them. But history can wait until tomorrow!'

'Will you be working tomorrow, Daddy?' asked Jennie.

'I'm afraid so', answered Mr Scott. 'But I have a lot of friends here and they will show you round.'

'Well, I suggest we go for a swim', said Mrs Scott.

'Jolly good!' exclaimed Simon. 'When? Now?'

So off they all went to bathe in the placid waters of the Straits of Malacca from a delightful little beach called Tanjong Kling, where the trees came down to grow almost in the sand. Then they lay relaxed on the soft, hot sand, almost asleep.

'I wish I lived in Malaya all the time', said Simon lazily. 'It never rains, it never blows, and it is never cold.'

'Oh! but it does', said his father. 'Don't you remember what I told you when we were in Singapore? As a matter of fact it looks as though we are going to have a thunderstorm this evening. Do you see those clouds over there?'

Simon raised himself on one elbow and looked out to sea.

'Do you mean those high clouds that look like the mushrooms of atomic explosions?'

'Yes, those—although I would not have described them quite in the same way', said his father. 'Those clouds are cumulo-nimbus. Thunder heads. Air currents inside them

whirl upwards so that they become thousands of feet deep. Those are the clouds that build up and bring torrential rain.'

They drove slowly home through Malaya's brief twilight. Over the sea, as Mr Scott had predicted, lightning flashed repeatedly, flooding the heavens with white so that the clouds stood out like solid black puddings. Then, in the distance, the thunder began to roll.

As the children ate their supper in the Rest House the thunder grew louder and the lightning more vicious. Great streaks of white light shot across the sky, seeming to join it to the earth below. The rain arrived as they climbed into bed. First a sudden gust of wind made the curtains fly, but instead of dying away it continued to blow at a steady rate which was something the children had never experienced before. In England the wind always blew in gusts and the whining noise it made in the eaves of houses always went up and down, sometimes almost dying away, at others shrieking to a wild crescendo. But this wind rather gave them the creeps. It bent the trees before it so that they remained bent until the wind ceased to blow altogether. After two or three minutes of this constant blowing a few huge drops of rain splashed on to the window-sill. Then, far away, they heard a subdued roar above the noise of the wind.

'Here comes the rain!' said their mother.

The rain was racing towards them like an express train until suddenly it was upon them. Millions of gallons of water came bucketing down on Malacca. It was so thick and heavy that it was almost impossible to see the street lamps on the road before the Rest House. The huge monsoon drains that line all the streets in Malaya became filled with raging torrents of muddy water. The streams that ran down to the sea soon filled to their brims. And for perhaps fifteen minutes the world belonged to the rain and the lashing, dripping palms. Then, as suddenly as it had arrived, the rain stopped. The clouds slowly cleared, the thunder died away and the moon took the place of the lightning. And everywhere among the sodden trees the bull-frogs came out to croak their bloated chorus. But by that time Simon and Jennie were asleep.

CHAPTER NINE

THE PAST GLORIES OF 'SLEEPY HOLLOW'

SINCE Malacca is such a quiet and peaceful little town Simon and Jennie were allowed to go off the following morning to explore the place for themselves. They walked along the shore towards the centre of the town, and on the way they passed what seemed to them to be an incredibly old gateway of stone. No buildings were attached to it—it simply stood alone on a patch of grass, facing the sea. They went up to it and learned from the plaque affixed to it that it was all that remained of Albuquerque's old fort. The children had never heard of Albuquerque, but he was clearly an important man as far as Malacca was concerned.

At that moment an old gentleman came up to them. He was very smartly dressed in a white suit, and his face was burnt the colour of mahogany, shaded from the sun by a wide-brimmed felt hat.

'Are you interested in old Malacca?' he asked politely.

'Yes, we are, very', answered Jennie.

'Would you like me to tell you about it?'

'Yes, please—I mean, if you've got time', said Simon.

The old man smiled. 'I have all the time in the world.'

'Well, in that case . . .' began Jennie.

'Permit me to introduce myself', he said. 'My name is Manuel de Silva and my ancestors came to Malacca with Albuquerque whose Fort stands before you.'

'How do you do', said Simon. 'My name is Simon Scott and this is my sister, Jennie.'

'It is a great pleasure for me to know you, Simon and Jennie', the old man began. 'Well, now, how should we begin? Malacca is often known today as Sleepy Hollow. But it was not always so. Hundreds of years ago it was the centre of the Malay civilization of Malaya. The most important sultan of Malaya lived in Malacca, and all the other sultans paid homage to him. And not only this: Malacca was also a very thriving port. It acted as a collecting station for the goods of the East and shipped them to the West. There were many Indian merchants

here in those days, and Arabs too, and their ships carried the goods to India, and from there on to the Middle East. Here they were trans-shipped and carried by land to the Mediterranean Sea, where they were put in ships again to be taken to Venice. Venice, in those days, was one of the most important ports in Europe. Certainly, as far as the East was concerned, it was *the* most important port. When Venice was at the height of its prosperity Portugal began to envy its wealth, and it was rivalry with Venice that brought Portuguese sailors to Malacca.'

'When did they come?' asked Simon. 'I mean, what was the date?'

'You know', answered the old man, 'I would not trouble myself too much with dates if I were you, but if you remember about 1500—an easy date to remember—you will be about right.'

'Oh!' said Jennie, 'a very long time ago!'

'Yes', agreed Mr de Silva, 'a very long time ago. Then, in 1511, a fleet of Portuguese warships sailed into the harbour of Malacca, for the Portuguese knew that if they were to take the trade of Venice they must first take Malacca. Their leader was Alfonso de Albuquerque, and among the officers of his ships was one of my ancestors, one Louis de Silva. He never went home to Portugal again, but stayed in Malacca and married a beautiful Malay woman and had many children. I am descended from them. I am therefore a Eurasian. There are many Eurasians in Malacca, and some of them still speak the Portuguese language.'

'Why did the Portuguese go away again?' asked Jennie.

'Now you are getting ahead of the story. First you must know how the Portuguese took Malacca. Let us walk down the road towards the river—there, do you see? The narrow river divides Malacca into two parts. Albuquerque, having arrived, had to make a plan for taking the town. The Malays had built stockades along the waterfront and the task of overrunning them was not an easy one. But Albuquerque saw at once if his plan of attack was to be successful he had first to take the bridge which crossed the river, so that the Malay defenders on the one side would be unable to support those on the other.'

Mr de Silva and the children, having walked along the short stretch of seaside road separating the ruins of the fort from the river, now stood on the ancient bridge. Mr de Silva stood for a moment in silence, as though trying to remember the day of the battle, long ago, and a smile played on his lips.

'Do go on', said Simon.

'Well, now. Where was I? Oh yes! Albuquerque fixed St James's Day as the day of his attack on Malacca and told his troops that their war-cry would be "Santiago", which means St James. Then, early in the morning, they stormed ashore. The Malays bitterly defended their stockades and fought hand to hand with the invading Portuguese. Many men were killed and buildings were set on fire and all Malacca was a battle-field. But Albuquerque could not take the bridge. Later that day he had to retire from the blazing ruins of the town and return to his ships. He had been defeated.'

'Did he go away then?' asked Jennie.

'Oh, dear me no! Albuquerque was made of sterner stuff than that. He made a new plan which, even more than the first, had as its primary objective the taking of the all-important bridge. This time he took a Chinese junk and covered it with sail cloth. His soldiers with their guns hid behind the cloth. The junk, the harmless looking junk, was sailed up the river to the bridge. When it arrived there the soldiers jumped out of their hiding-places and sprang onto the bridge. This time they held it, and Malacca fell to the might of Portugal. The poor Malays, with their elephants, their spears and knives, were no match for the guns and cannon of the Portuguese, and the Sultan and his followers fled.

'The first thing that Albuquerque did was to build his fort, some of which, as you have seen, remains standing to this day.'

'Poor Malays', said Jennie. 'It was their country after all!'

'How right you are', agreed Mr de Silva. 'But then, in those days, all the European nations were intent on building empires for themselves. Nowadays we do not go in for such robbery. But in Albuquerque's time it was the thing to do.

'The Portuguese were Catholics, as you probably know, and one of their aims was to make everyone else Catholic too.

Have you ever heard of Francis Xavier? He was a Jesuit and came to Malacca in Portuguese times. You see, the Portuguese had conquered territory in many parts of the world—particularly in India (Goa, there, is still Portuguese) and Francis Xavier visited many of these places as a missionary. He was a very great man. Two stories are told about him. When he first came to Malacca in the sixteenth century he stepped ashore from the ship in which he had travelled and was immediately surrounded by children. He loved children and children always loved him. He spoke to them at once, addressing them all by their Christian names—although he could not possibly have known what they were beforehand.

'The other story is this. Francis Xavier stayed in Malacca for some time, and spent most of it helping the poor and the sick and preaching to the people. From time to time Malacca was attacked by its enemies and its ships were constantly being pirated by the Achinese who lived across the Straits in Sumatra. The Governor did not wish to deplete his garrison by sending soldiers and his ships to punish the Achinese, but then, on the other hand, he had to do something to put a stop to their piracy. Francis did all he could to persuade the Portuguese to go out and teach the Achinese a lesson, for, if Malacca fell, a stronghold of the true faith, in Francis's view, would also fall. The Governor eventually agreed, and the ships set sail, leaving Malacca undefended. It was therefore unfortunate that the Malays should choose this time to attack Malacca from the sea. Their fleets of war ***prahus*** appeared not far away to the south. The people of Malacca blamed Francis for their predicament. They said that if Malacca fell while the fleet was away, it would be his fault. Francis even went in danger of his life.

'The following Sunday he preached in the church to a very sullen congregation. In the middle of the service he stood up and said to the people, "We have won a wonderful victory over the Achinese. Malacca is safe!"

'The people did not believe him. How could he know whether the Portuguese fleet had scattered the Achinese or not? But when the ships returned they found not only that Francis had been right, but that the victory had been

won at the very moment that Francis had announced it in the church.'

'What a wonderful man he must have been', said Jennie.

'Yes, he was a very wonderful man, who wanted nothing for himself and gave away all that he had. When he left Malacca he went to the almost unknown country of Japan, where he underwent terrible hardships, but in the end he won the hearts of even the Japanese. Then he returned and set off on another journey to China. But he died at sea before he could reach that great country. They brought his body back and buried it on the hill there. If you walk up there you can still see his grave. Later they removed the body to Goa, the capital of Portuguese India. He was finally buried in the great cathedral of Goa, and ever after he was known as the "Apostle of the Indies".'

'Malacca is full of history, isn't it?' remarked Simon suddenly. 'When we were in Kuala Lumpur we saw nothing that was very old. It is such a recent town that there has been no time for any real history. Singapore was the same.'

The old man agreed. 'Malacca', he said, 'is one of the most fascinating places in the whole of Malaya, for it is chiefly here that the rival European imperialisms contended for power.'

'Oh?' said Jennie, politely, not quite understanding what he meant.

'Yes', went on Mr de Silva, 'the Portuguese had many European enemies who coveted the trade and strategic position of Malacca—which, incidentally, I should have told you, is the Arabic word for Market—and of these enemies the Dutch were the most powerful. They had established the town of Batavia in Java and therefore controlled a good deal of the spice trade. Portuguese Malacca was a thorn in their side. They decided to take it, but Albuquerque's fortress had been well built and the Dutch were thrown back whenever they attacked.

'In course of time, however, the Portuguese fleet grew weaker, strung out, as it was, across the world, and the Dutch fleet grew stronger. In 1630 the Dutch felt strong enough to blockade Malacca so that Portuguese ships could sail neither in nor out of the harbour. From that day Malacca was lost to the Portuguese. They had become lazy and inefficient, and the people of Malacca did not like them. Food became scarce, and

it was impossible for the Governor to replace from Portugal the many soldiers who died. After eleven years of blockade the Dutch attacked for the last time and the once mighty citadel fell, and well over a century of Portuguese rule came to an end.'

'And did the people of Malacca like the Dutch any better?' asked Simon.

'I don't think so', said the old man wistfully, 'though they made many improvements and left some fine buildings behind them. Do you see the Government offices just there, the red-coloured building? The Dutch built that, and many of the houses on both sides of the river were built by them too. Many of them are still gaily decorated with Dutch tiles, just as in Holland, and some of the streets of Malacca still have their Dutch names.'

'What a battleground Malacca has been', said Jennie. 'Who would think that the sleepy old town had been fought over so often!'

'Well, it wasn't fought over again', said the old man. 'It became British by peaceful terms when the Dutch and the English agreed to differ in the East and parcelled out their spheres of interest. Since Malacca became British, however, it has declined sadly as a port, for Penang and Singapore, which the British also established, took away most of its trade. Now its river is silted up and big ships cannot call here any more.'

'Would you rather live in this old town, Mr de Silva?' asked Simon. 'Or would you prefer to live in the noise and bustle of Singapore?'

'Me? Wild horses would never drag me to Singapore. I am an old man and I prefer a quiet life. I am happy in Malacca and I shall die here.

'Come, let us take a trisha and go to my house for a cup of coffee and then I will take you back to the Rest House.'

They stopped a trisha and somehow the three of them managed to squeeze into the seat meant for two. They did not travel far before they entered a narrow street with a terrace of little houses on either side. Many of them were decorated with colourful tiles, and the front doors were delicately carved. The street was quiet and empty, a study in light and shade. The

pavements, protected from the sun by the overhanging upper storeys, were cool and dark, while the road shone brilliantly in the light of the overhead sun.

Mr de Silva stopped the trisha before one of the houses, paid the Chinese driver, and led them towards the front door.

'Come in!' he said.

He led the way into the darkened interior which was further shaded from the heat and light of the sun by lace curtains at the windows. Shiny linoleum was on the floor, and the furniture—mainly, Jennie noticed at once, Chinese blackwood furniture, inlaid with mother-of-pearl—was shining and spotless. An old lady came from the rear of the house. She was about the same age as Mr de Silva and wore a sarong and kebaya. The sarong, which came down to her ankles, was printed in a colourful design, and the kebaya, a loose, white garment, decorated with lace, reached to her knees. Her jet black hair was swept back from her forehead to a large bun at the back of her head, where it was held in place by what seemed to Jennie to be a short, golden dagger. Her face, like her husband's, was dark, with a remarkably olive-like complexion.

'This is my wife', said Mr de Silva. 'Her family, like mine, have lived in Malacca since the time of the Portuguese.' Then he turned to her and spoke in a foreign language, but the children heard him mention the names Simon and Jennie.

Mrs de Silva smiled and bobbed her head and said, 'Simon and Jennie?'

Mr de Silva explained:

'I'm afraid that my wife speaks very little English. I speak to her in Portuguese, which is the language we always use in the house. I used to work for many years in a Government office so I *had* to learn English. Now what would you like to drink—coffee or tea?'

'May we have coffee, please?' said Jennie.

Mrs de Silva went into the kitchen and returned in a little while with a tray bearing cups, a pot of steaming coffee, and a huge round cake.

As they ate their cake and drank their delicious coffee Mr de Silva spoke to them about old Malacca. He told them many stories, some of which were almost like fairy stories—as when

ABOVE. *From their aeroplane the landscape near Ipoh looked like part of the desolate surface of the moon, but it turned out to be pitted with tin mines.* BELOW. *Muddy water pouring over a sluice and leaving the tin trapped behind the bars.*

OVE. *Millions of great trees grew so close together in the jungle that from the rcraft their tops looked like a carpet of leaves. Simon did not envy the soldiers nting bandits among them.* BELOW. *A little bit of England in the tropics. The noke House, where the Scotts stayed, was just like an English country inn.*

Prince Paremeswara first found Malacca and established it as the centre of a Malay kingdom—and others were of bloody battles and great cruelty.

When they were ready to go Simon said to Mr de Silva:

'I think I now know why you like living in Malacca so much.'

'Why?' asked their host.

'Because, I think', said Simon, 'that it reminds you of Portugal—the lazy little town by the sea, the hot sun shining into the quiet streets. I have never been to Portugal, but I think it must be something like this.'

'I have never been there either', said Mr de Silva, laughing, 'but I think it's very probable that you are right.'

Then he hailed a passing trisha—which would have been very foreign in Portugal—and after the children had said goodbye to Mrs de Silva, and thanked her for her wonderful coffee and cake, the three of them rode back to the Rest House.

They saw Mr de Silva many more times before they left Malacca, and, whoever else they met there, he remained their firmest friend. When the time came for them to continue their journey he came to say good-bye:

'I am a poor man and I have very little money. I would like to buy you a most expensive present. But, alas, I do not have the wherewithal with which to buy it, and even if I did I would not know what to buy. So I have brought you this, which will remind you, I hope, of the happy time we had in Malacca.'

He held out a piece of rough stone which Jennie took from him.

'I have several such pieces of stone at home. They are of no value at all—that is, if you ever wanted to sell them. But all of them were once a part of Albuquerque's fortress. Imagine sometime, when you look at this stone, that you see those old Portuguese, toiling in the tropical sun, piling stone upon stone to build the Fort that was to protect Malacca for so long. Do you know what they called the Fort? "A Famosa"—which means "The Famous".'

And with these words he stumped away, his stick tapping regularly on the road which led away from the Rest House. During the whole of their Eastern journey the children were not to receive a more treasured present.

CHAPTER TEN

HALF THE WORLD'S TIN

THE Dakota roared down the Malacca airstrip and the Scotts again were airborne on the next stage of their long journey. The hop on which they were just embarked was the two-hour flight to Ipoh, centre of the great tin-mining area of Malaya, with an intermediate stop at Kuala Lumpur. Scarcely had the aircraft completed its climb than it began to descend again to Kuala Lumpur. As it made its circuit of the Kuala Lumpur airfield, Simon noticed a large number of helicopters, drawn up in line by one of the taxi-tracks. His father explained that they were used extensively in anti-bandit operations, particularly in evacuating wounded soldiers from the depths of the jungle.

They had not long to wait at Kuala Lumpur's modest airport before they were airborne once more in another Malayan Airways Dakota for Ipoh. This proved to be a short but most exciting flight, since it took them right over the hilly jungle country of central Malaya. Looking out of their window the children could see the tree-covered peaks just below them and at one point the aircraft seemed to fly so low (although quite high above sea level) that a peak on their left towered as high as they. This, of course, was one way of seeing the real jungle and only when they had flown over it did they realize the extent of its awful impenetrability. At no point could the ground be seen. The millions and millions of great trees grew so close together that their spraying tops united in a gigantic carpet of leaves. Simon was not greatly attracted towards the jungle with its snakes and wild animals, its swamps and the heat. He did not envy the work of the soldiers whose duty it was to force a way through it for weeks on end, always searching for the elusive Communist bandits.

As they approached the plain on which Ipoh stands the children noticed that for as far as they could see the earth had been scarred. The jungle had been cut back and great holes had been dug in the soil to no apparent purpose. Once they had been dug, it seemed to the children, they had been

abandoned. For a moment Jennie was reminded of a picture of the desolate surface of the moon.

Their father leaned over them and pointed through their window:

'Look', he said, 'tin mines.'

Just then the 'Fasten Your Seat Belts' sign flashed on and the aircraft began its run into Ipoh airport. Soon they were bumping along the taxi-way to the small airport buildings, where they were met by another of Mr Scott's associates, Clive Burton.

The usual greetings were exchanged, and soon they were travelling the few miles into the town of Ipoh by car.

Clive was quite a young man, twenty-three or four, tall, handsome, and sunburnt. The children learned that he was closely connected with Mr Scott's tin-mining interests in Ipoh and that if they wished to know anything about tin mining he was the man to tell them. In fact they had scarcely reached the Station Hotel, where they were to stay, before Simon and Jennie had arranged with him to be shown round a tin mine the following morning.

That night the children were glad to sleep with a blanket—a thing they had not needed in Malacca, near the sea. When they awoke the following morning they found that Ipoh was almost entirely surrounded by hills. In the distance they could see limestone hills like the one they had visited in Kuala Lumpur, and beyond, more of the great, tree-covered peaks which they had seen so clearly from the aeroplane.

Clive called for them shortly after breakfast and brought with him his Chinese assistant, Chong Hock Lee. Hock Lee was about the same age as Clive and was obviously delighted to be able to take time off to show the children how tin was extracted from the earth. Clive explained, with a twinkle in his eyes:

'I expect your father will make my life a misery while you are here—wanting to know this and that. I really think that I had better devote my time to him rather than you. But Hock Lee will be able to tell you anything you want to know.'

They set off in a jeep and drove through Ipoh to the outskirts of the town. From here they followed a straight and level road. They continued for perhaps half a mile, when Hock Lee brought the jeep to a halt and said:

'Now we have to get out and walk.'

He led the way over the rough grass towards one of the great holes that the children had seen from the aeroplane the previous day.

'There are two principal ways of mining for tin', he said, 'the old way and the new way. The way we are going to see first is the old way. It will never be discontinued because it is so cheap and simple. Come, I will show you.'

They soon came to the edge of the mine—for that was what the hole was—and looked down. It was perhaps a hundred feet deep, and the first impression the children received was one of wetness and water. There was water everywhere, shooting out of large hoses and trickling in yellow streams into the lake which occupied the bottom of the mine and which was probably a couple of hundred yards across.

'Let us begin at the beginning should we?' began Hock Lee. 'How did the tin get there in the first place?'

'I haven't the foggiest idea', said Jennie with conviction.

'Well', he said, 'almost all geology begins with the days when the rocks we know and recognize were in a molten state. Now take granite, for instance. Granite, which we know as an exceptionally hard rock, had in it, right from the beginning, a substance called cassiterite, which is another name for tin ore. In some strange way, when the granite ceased to be molten, and hardened into the rock we recognize today, the tin ore became separated from it—although never very far away from it. The tin ore hardened into sheets of no very great thickness which are called lodes. For some reason a very great number of these lodes of tin ore formed in Malaya.'

'What does the tin ore look like?' asked Simon. 'Is it that down there in the muddy lake?'

'Ah!' said Hock Lee, 'not so fast! Tin mining is not so easy as that. What I have just told you happened millions and millions of years ago. A lot happened to the tin ore in the meantime. In the first place there used to be rather better mountains in Malaya than we have today. But in the course of an unthinkably long time they have eroded and been washed away by the rains. This is exactly what happened to the tin lodes. They got washed away as the mountains disintegrated

and broke up into minute grains. These grains are quite heavy, especially when compared with the other forms of silt and gravel which the rivers carry away, and instead of being swept out to sea they sank to the bottom and stayed there. Now Malaya's rivers have not always flowed in the same courses and once there were, no doubt, rivers which no longer exist. So in time these grains of raw tin were scattered all over certain plains. The plains around Ipoh, where we are now, is a case in point. The problem of the miner is how to extract the grains of tin from all the tremendous amount of material that surrounds each grain.'

'I wonder why everything is complicated?' asked Jennie. 'Wouldn't everything have been so much easier if we simply found lumps of tin in the ground.'

'That may well be', answered Hock Lee, 'but few things in this world are so simple as that.'

'Well', said Simon, 'how do they get the tin ore out of the soil?'

'Like this', replied their guide. 'As I told you, tin ore grains are relatively heavy. Therefore, if you have grains of tin ore in a pond together with mud and silt and other things, and you stir the pond up the tin grains will be the first to sink to the bottom. That, very roughly, is the principle on which the mine we are looking at now, works. Come, if we walk along the top here we shall be able to get down to where the men are working so that we can see more closely what goes on.'

They walked along the top of the precipice until they came to a slope down which they clambered. It was rough going and muddy, but eventually they reached the bottom, where they found a Chinese with an incredibly wrinkled face.

'This is Mr Koh', said Hock Lee, 'who manages the mine. What he doesn't know about tin mining isn't worth knowing. He's been working in tin mining in these parts now for forty years.'

'Forty-one', corrected Mr Koh with a laugh, which revealed his gold-filled teeth.

Mr Koh continued the description of tin mining but his English was not very good. Although he could make himself understood perfectly he left out so many words that his

sentences were like skeletons, simply bare frameworks of speech.

'Tin mine need much water', he said, 'we take hose and make water go against side of hill so all mud and gravel and tin all come down. Woosh! Him then collect in middle and flow towards pipe which take him away. Everything!'

Hock Lee broke in tactfully at that point, seeing bewildered expressions creeping onto the faces of the children.

'Mr Koh means that when the hoses are directed into the sides of the mine as you can see they are being directed now, all the earth and tin ore is washed down. You can see that the water, mixed with various ingredients, then runs down towards the large pipe there. That pipe sucks the water away and up to the top of that huge erection of bamboo scaffolding which you can see from here. I suggest we go round to the bamboo to see what happens then.'

Again the children slipped and stumbled through the damp earth. Eventually they stood by what was virtually a high tower built wholly of bamboo poles lashed together. The pipe which sucked the water and earth and gravel and tin ore from below led to the top of this tower. When it reached the top it spewed out all the water it had transported there so that it ran down a long sloping sluice to the ground again.

'Now come a little further so that we can look up and along this sluice from the ground.'

When they reached the end of it they could see the muddy water tumbling down the sluice. They also noticed, at intervals, across the sluice and the flow of water, shallow bars so placed that the water was forced to flow over the top of them.

'Now', said Hock Lee, who was immensely enjoying his new role as a schoolmaster, 'what do you think is happening behind those bars?'

Jennie shook her head, utterly defeated. Simon thought for a moment.

'Of course', he said, highly pleased with his brilliance. 'The mud stays behind the bars and the grains of tin ore shoot over the top.'

'Go to the bottom of the class', said Hock Lee. 'You have the principle right, but it works the other way. It is the mud

which sweeps over the top and the tin ore which stays behind. The tin ore, remember, is heavier and that is why it stays behind. It sinks to the bottom of the flood and gets caught.'

'Oh, yes', said Simon, smacking his forehead with the palm of his hand, 'of course!' He was most anxious to keep his end up with Hock Lee.

'Now look behind you', said Hock Lee.

The light was blinding. All the mud and gravel that came swirling down the sluice was allowed to run off without its tin content, where it gradually hardened in the sun. It formed a dazzling white desert stretching for hundreds of yards.

'Tin mining makes rather a mess of a country, I'm afraid', admitted Hock Lee. 'These are what we call tailings—the residue after the goodness has been taken out of the earth that comes from the mine.'

'What happens now?' asked Simon.

'Well, if we wait a few moments they will stop the pump that forces the water to the top of the tower. Yes, I think it's stopping now.'

Gradually the cascade of water flowing down the sluice lessened until it was only a trickle. Several men appeared with panniers and made their way up the sluice and began to fill the panniers with the material they found behind the bars on the sluice. It still looked pretty muddy to Simon and Jennie.

'What they are collecting now', explained Hock Lee, 'is simply gravel that is exceptionally rich in tin. It still has to be washed again. They will take it to those troughs over there and mix it again with water and stir it up and drain the water off and then repeat the process again until only the black tin ore remains behind. Then it is packed in sacks and sent to the smelter. Eventually it will appear in bars from which tin cans and so on are made.

'Amazing', said Jennie.

'We'd better be getting back to the jeep now, for I promised your mother I would get you home in time for lunch', said Hock Lee. 'And we yet have to see a modern tin dredge at work.'

They stumbled and slipped over the uneven ground back to their jeep. The sun was fiercely hot and Simon's shirt was

soaked in perspiration. The cool air flowing past the jeep revived them a little. This was by far their most strenuous morning up till then.

When they reached the main road they turned away from Ipoh and then onto another minor road. It was not surfaced and was full of pot holes and ridges. No ordinary car could possibly have travelled along it. When Hock Lee eventually brought the wildly bouncing jeep to a halt they got out and walked to the crest of a low hill.

'There! Do you see it? A tin dredge!'

Again there was the great hole in the ground, the open-cast mine, and again it was full of water. But sitting in the centre of it, firmly anchored at both ends, was what appeared to be an enormous building of corrugated iron. It was as big as a row of three-storey houses.

'This is much more scientific', said Hock Lee proudly. 'It is one of the mines my company operates. At one end, as you can see, buckets on an endless belt bring up the gravel from the bottom in much the same way as a dredger removes mud from the bottom of a river. The mud and water goes into the heart of the dredger, where the ore is extracted by means of machinery but using the same principle as the mine we have just seen. Actually, centrifugal force is largely used to separate the heavy grains of ore. The water and its mud, after the ore has been extracted, is then pumped out again at the other end of the dredger, as you can see.'

As they returned to the Station Hotel Simon had plenty of scientific information on which to reflect. He felt that he was learning more in one morning in Malaya than in a whole week at school in England. But then, he thought, it was doubtful whether he could persuade his science master at school that knowing how a tin mine worked was as important as being able to recite Boyle's Law.

'How much tin does Malaya produce?' he asked.

'It produces more than any other single place', said Hock Lee. 'Altogether it produces something like half of all the tin used in the world.'

That, certainly, was something to think about.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

TIGER !

It was Friday, and the Scotts had been in Ipoh a couple of days. In the evening Clive Burton rang them at the Station Hotel to say that he was going with a couple of friends for a week-end in the Cameron Highlands and that if the children cared to come, and if their parents did not intend to go on to Penang before the following week, he would be delighted to take Simon and Jennie with him.

The children, of course, jumped at the chance and after a slight alteration of Mr Scott's schedule it was found possible for them to go. They left, very early the following morning, by car.

The Cameron Highlands are only a stone's throw away from Ipoh—if one is simply throwing stones. But if one wishes to reach them by road the process takes rather longer. First, it is necessary to go South down the main trunk road for thirty or forty miles to Tapah, and then to turn north-east again up the long winding road to the Highlands. By car it takes at least two hours.

With Clive Burton were two of his friends who were similarly engaged in tin-mining. One of them, John Bristol, was a tiny little man from London, wiry, agile, and always joking. The other was a very much quieter individual whom the others called Bish. To this day Simon and Jennie have not learned his proper name. The journey to Tapah was accomplished relatively quickly. The road is good and at that time of day there was not a great deal of traffic on it. They kept up a good average speed and turned off at Tapah at half past eight.

After a few miles the road began to wind alarmingly and the tyres screamed as the heavily loaded car took hair-pin after hair-pin. The children were to learn that the road continued in this way for fifty miles, climbing ever higher, until it exceeded five thousand feet. The vegetation all about them was jungle, jungle growing right down to the edge of the road so that at some points the great trees hung over it like a roof. As the car mounted further they were able to look down into

the tree-lined valleys, all part of the huge Malayan forest. They passed numerous waterfalls where the mountain streams fell down the steep sides of the mountains to the valleys below. Some of the views were quite breath-taking in their splendour; the deep valleys, all tree-covered, stretched into the hazy distance, flanked by precipitous sides which swept up to pinnacles wreathed in cloud.

'It must have been a tremendous job building a road like this', said Simon.

John Bristol answered:

'Last time I came up here it had been raining cats and dogs all day and there were landslides all over the place. In parts the road had almost disappeared under falls of earth and trees. In the end I was almost using the car as a bulldozer.'

'Look', shouted Clive to the children, 'there is an aborigine. Do you see his blow-pipe?'

Walking along the road was a most wild-looking individual. His head was covered in a matted mop of black hair and he wore only a coloured piece of cloth about his waist—a garment rather like a short sarong. In his hand he held a piece of hollow bamboo some seven or eight feet long. This was his blow-pipe. The aboriginal peoples of Malaya are exceptionally clever with this weapon, from which they can shoot little poisoned darts with great force and accuracy. They catch birds and monkeys in this way, and the poison with which they treat their arrows, and which they obtain from the Ipoh tree, works astonishingly quickly. The blow-pipe also has the great virtue of being almost completely silent.

'Who are the aborigines?' asked Jennie.

As Clive swept the car through the endless successions of corners he tried to tell the children something about the jungle people of Malaya.

'Most countries have aborigines', he began. 'The Red Indians are the aborigines of the North American continent and the Maoris are aborigines of New Zealand. The man you have just seen is one of the aborigines of Malaya. Briefly they are the people who were here first. The Malays will tell you that they are the people who own the land because they have been here the longest. That is all nonsense. If ownership goes to him

who has occupied a place for the longest time then Malaya should belong to the aborigines. The Malays came originally from the north. They migrated down from southern China thousands of years ago. Some of them stayed in Malaya. Others went on to Java and Sumatra and all the islands of the Indies. The Indonesians are, in fact, Malays. They all come from the same origins. But when this great immigration took place the aboriginal peoples were already here.

'The Malays treated the aborigines very badly. They made slaves of them and tortured them. The term Sakai, which is often loosely and quite inaccurately used to describe the aborigines, actually means slave. But even though the Malay people live for the most part in the countryside of Malaya they cannot live like the aborigines in the jungle. The jungle is the true home of the jungle peoples, who can survive there when other people would simply die. I'm afraid that the aborigines you will see on this trip are not absolutely the real thing. They have become contaminated with civilization and if you ask them if you may take their photograph they will probably ask you for fifty cents first. Some of the aborigines of Malaya have never seen a white man. I imagine they are well content to remain in such a blissful state of ignorance.'

Just then Clive brought the car to a halt.

'Look! Those are aborigines' houses by the side of the road there. Let's get out and have a look at them.'

They all got out of the car, crossed the road, and slid down the steep bank at the bottom of which the little houses had been built overlooking a magnificent valley of trees. Jennie had never seen such flimsy houses. They consisted of fragile bamboo frames with attap sides and roof. The bamboo floors were raised off the ground and so low were their ceilings that not even Jennie could stand up inside them. They had no windows, and all the cooking was done out of doors. Each house had one room only and none was more than eight feet long.

'Oh! I would like a house like that in the garden', said Jennie.

'These houses are comparatively modern', said Clive. 'Many of the aborigines in the jungle never bother to build anything as permanent as this. They simply put up shelters of leaves whenever they want to camp—and that is that.'

'Do the aborigines keep moving about then?' asked Simon.

'Most of them, yes', replied Clive. 'There are many different groups, many in different stages of development. Some still pursue the old nomadic ways of their ancestors. Others have settled down to live their lives permanently in the same place. Yet others move every two or three years.

'The old nomads keep moving. They eat jungle roots and fruits and catch the wild animals of the jungle for their meat. Those who move from time to time make what they call *ladangs*. A *ladang* is a clearing in the jungle where the aborigines plant rice and other crops. In a year or two the soil becomes too poor to support their crops so they move on and make a new *ladang*. Those who have settled down completely are usually those who live near the urban areas, like these people.'

As Clive had been talking almost every inhabitant of the little village had come out to look at the visitors. There were literally dozens of little children wearing absolutely nothing at all. They had round smiling faces and very fat tummies—the latter, according to Clive, caused by worms rather than by an excess of good food. Most of the men seemed to be away hunting but the womenfolk stood round, silent spectators of their strange visitors. They wore no clothes above their waists, and their hair, like that of the man they had seen on the road, looked as though it had never seen a brush or a comb. Clive gave the children a few silver coins—ten cent pieces, mostly—with which they seemed to be very pleased, and the party returned to the car and continued its journey.

As the road rose higher the air pouring in through the open windows was no longer hot and humid, making one even hotter, but like refreshing mountain streams. Jennie put her nose to the window and sniffed it delightedly, like a dog. Still the road wound around the valleys. Never for as much as a single yard did it follow a straight course. And at each hairpin, tumbling down the side of the mountains, was a little cataract of sparkling water.

After more than an hour of climbing they came to a village called Ringlet. It was clear at once that the major industry of Ringlet was vegetable gardening and the children learned that all the best vegetables in Malaya came from the Cameron

Highlands. The hillsides around the village were neatly terraced, and the soil was often held in place by logs at the lower ends of the slopes. The workers in the gardens were Chinese wearing the distinctive, conical straw hats which spread to sun-shielding brims at least two feet wide.

Clive drove the car on beyond Ringlet but the road did not cease to climb. It was then that the children saw something else that is grown in the Cameron Highlands, and nowhere else in Malaya—tea. Some of the long slopes of the hills had been cleared entirely of trees and replaced with thousands upon thousands of diminutive tea bushes. Malayan tea is sent all over the world and is just as good as many varieties grown in India and Ceylon.

Finally they came to the summit of their climb at Tanah Rata, another little village in the Highlands, consisting of nothing more than one main street and a number of shops catering largely for holiday makers. The next couple of miles brought them to their final objective: the Smoke House Inn. The Smoke House Inn is just like an English country inn. It might have been transported bodily from the English countryside. It stands opposite to the golf course and commands a magnificent view of the hills that look down upon the insignificant little plain on which the golf course stands. The golf course, and the few houses that stand near it, and the Smoke House Inn, are, in fact, a little bit of England, in the middle of tropical Malaya. But it was when Simon and Jennie went inside the Smoke House Inn that they received their greatest surprise: there was a fire, a merrily burning log fire, and just for a moment they were indeed back in England. The illusion was only dispelled by the appearance of a Chinese boy to deal with their luggage.

'Well, here we are in the good old Camerons', announced Clive to the world at large. He turned to the children: 'This is where the poor exhausted Europeans in this country come to get their breath back, you know. In spite of all that modern medicine can do we still get a bit worn out in the heat. So every now and again we come up here to recuperate. Who's for a game of golf?'

For the rest of that day they played golf. Neither Simon nor Jennie had ever played golf before and at first they were

reluctant to make exhibitions of themselves, but, once armed with the clubs hired from the clubhouse, they discovered that their three companions had very little idea of the finer points of the game either. The man the others called Bish could scarcely hit the ball at all. It was his method to swing at it as though his very life depended on it. Normally he would miss it altogether, and on one occasion, so vicious was his swipe, he flung himself headlong to the ground. But occasionally his club and the ball would connect, usually with disastrous results, in that the ball would sail away at an incredible velocity, in any direction other than that which he intended. John Bristol nearly laughed himself into hysterics. And so the game was not at all serious. Each one of them had a most hilarious time—an attitude that would not have found a great deal of favour among keen golfers—and by the time they finally returned to the Smoke House in the evening they were exhausted.

They sat round the welcome fire and ate their tea. After tea Bish walked over to the nearby Cameron Highlands Hotel where a friend of his was staying. He was away perhaps an hour and returned just as night was falling. Suddenly there was a great slamming and banging of doors and he raced into the lounge.

'I say', he gasped, 'I've just seen a tiger!'

'Don't be silly', said Clive. 'You've been drinking!'

'Nonsense!' snapped Bish. 'It crossed the road just ahead of me, no more than a hundred yards away.'

'But', protested Clive, 'tigers don't come up here. It's too cold for them at night for one thing.'

'But I tell you I saw it! I'm not fooling! A tiger crossed the road as I was returning here.'

'Are you sure it was a tiger?' asked John Bristol.

'Of course I'm sure', shouted the exasperated Bish.

'It wasn't an outsize in dogs or cats, do you think?'

'Oh! don't be stupid! I know a tiger when I see one. I'm not blind or half-witted. I saw it plainly, I tell you, on the road ahead of me.'

By now the others were beginning to believe him. Other guests in the Smoke House gathered round, and so certain was Bish that he had, in fact, seen a tiger that they too began to believe him. The proprietor was brought into the discussion

and said that, though he had never himself seen a tiger in the Camerons, he was old enough to believe anything.

After some discussion, during which it was generally assumed that if there was indeed a tiger it was clearly after the deer that haunt the precincts of the golf course at night, a gun was produced by the proprietor. The whole party went out onto the lawn, now shining in the moonlight, and with many mutual requests to be silent, squatted on the damp grass. Clive found himself, quite by accident, in possession of the gun. He began to hope that there was a tiger, for he was shortly getting married and it would be nice, he thought, to have a tiger-skin rug which he had actually shot himself. It was not likely that he would ever have another opportunity to shoot one. Jennie held Simon's hand, for she did not relish the idea of tigers bounding about in the darkness. Neither did Simon for that matter, but he put on a brave show and kept as close as possible to Clive without actually getting in his way.

Suddenly there was a shout, and a hand shot out by Simon's face.

'There it goes.'

And sure enough, a flashing tawny figure leapt off the high bank at the side of the road and bounded at tremendous speed towards the golf course. The shape could be seen only dimly in the moonlight but Simon received a tremendous impression of sheer power and grace. The tiger looked as though it could knock down a house, a great steel-hard cylinder of muscle and racing legs, and paws with claws that could rip a man in half. Then Clive's gun roared out. And then again. But there was no further sign of the tiger.

The party went out and searched the golf course minutely but the tiger was never seen or heard of again. But Simon, for one, was never in any doubt of its existence. Both he and Jennie had seen it with their own eyes. In a way the children were rather glad that the tiger had escaped. They could not help but feel that it was wrong to kill such a magnificent creature, a creature of such incomparable strength and grace, a creature which was, in its way, so beautiful.

'Don't you think it is a pity that people kill tigers?' Jennie asked Simon later that evening.

'Oh! I don't know', said Simon nonchalantly, intent upon preserving his manly calm. But he agreed with his sister, nonetheless.

The children spent another happy day on Sunday, and after a late tea they set out on the return trip to Ipoh. It was again a beautiful journey, and the jungle, in the softer evening light, took on a more romantic appearance. The great trees cast long shadows and the valleys began to fade into the encroaching night. No sooner had darkness fallen than a full white moon rose so that the road from Tapah to Ipoh was almost as light as by day. They reached the Station Hotel—which they found very dreary after the delights of the Smoke House Inn—in time for dinner, a meal at which their three companions joined them. The children were anxious to tell their parents about the tiger, but Clive asked them to wait until he had gone—for, after all, he had missed it, and a man should not miss the only tiger he is likely to fire at in the whole of his life.

Aborigines starting a fire by rubbing a piece of cane against bamboo until the bamboo gets hot, and then putting a certain kind of highly inflammable cotton on it so that it catches light.

BOVE. *Everywhere they went in Siam they saw the pinnacles of temples rising nto the sky. This is Wat Arun, or Temple of the Dawn, in the capital, Bangkok.* ELOW. *Arrival of the Penang Ferry boat, which carries cars and lorries as well as a great many passengers.*

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE SULTAN, THE ISLAND, AND A MERCHANT ADVENTURER

PENANG was the next town the Scotts were to visit and they travelled there from Ipoh by road. A distance of only one hundred miles, the journey was rapidly accomplished, since the last fifty miles were along arrow-straight roads. Thousands of Malays live on either side of the road, which runs through the Northern Malayan State of Perak, and make their living by various means close at hand. Some grow rice and others tap a few rubber trees. Some make their living from coconuts and some at least augment their income from the fish they catch in the straight canals that run down either side of the road.

Every few miles the car shot through little villages clustered about the main road. Each village seemed to consist mainly of shops kept, for the most part, by Chinese.

'Why is it', Simon asked, 'that, although most of the people living in these parts seem to be Malay, nearly all the shops are kept by Chinese?'

'It is all part of the Malayan pattern', his father answered. 'The Chinese are the shopkeepers throughout Malaya. If the Malays kept shops they would probably lose all their money. The Chinese, on the other hand, were made to be shopkeepers —it comes naturally to them.'

'Oh look!' exclaimed Jennie, 'there is a man with a monkey.'

'It's a Berok', said Mrs Scott, 'let's stop and have a look.'

The driver brought the car to a halt and everyone climbed out and walked back to the spot where a Malay was standing with his monkey beneath a coconut palm. The monkey was held captive by a chain round its neck to which was attached a long piece of thin rope which its owner held looped in his hand.

'I'm so glad we've seen this', said Mrs Scott. 'Monkeys like this are kept just to pick coconuts!'

'To pick coconuts!' exclaimed Jennie. 'How?'

'Just wait and see', said her mother.

The monkey seemed to be very angry at having so many spectators. It was quite large, as monkeys go, and powerful.

It kept drawing back its lips in a villainous way, snarling at the children and jumping up and down in a most agitated manner. But its owner kept a secure grip on the rope. He spoke to the monkey in Malay and pointed to the trunk of the coconut tree. The monkey snarled its defiance once more, and then jumped onto the trunk of the palm and ran all the way up its vertical surface with quite astonishing agility. Height clearly held no terrors for it, since it covered the sixty-odd feet to the first fronds in no time. As it went the Malay paid out the rope. When the monkey was actually among the nuts at the top it looked down and grimaced horribly at the people standing below.

Having climbed the tree, it was obviously feeling very, very superior and, being out of reach of immediate punishment, felt it safe to indulge in various forms of cheek. Then an astonishing thing happened. Holding on to the palm fronds with its left leg and its left arm it grasped a coconut growing some way away from the main trunk with its right arm and right leg. Having secured an adequate grip it twisted the coconut furiously round and round until it became detached from its stalk, and fell like a bomb to the ground. As it fell the monkey peered down with a malignant expression on its bad-tempered face, clearly hoping that the nut would drop on someone's head. An extraordinarily human look of frustration crossed its ugly face when it saw the nut thump harmlessly into the soft earth.

'Do you see the clever way it only picks the ripe ones?' said Mrs Scott, as the monkey threw down nut after nut.

Perhaps twenty nuts had been picked when the Malay whistled to the monkey, who then shot down the tree at breakneck speed to stand rather proudly by the little heap of nuts that represented the product of its labour. The owner smiled happily at his spectators and Mr Scott bought a couple of the coconuts from him. The Malay produced a strong knife, his *parang*, and slashed off the husk and then punctured the nuts at the top. Mr Scott handed them to the children.

'Here is a refreshing drink for you.'

The children held the coconuts to their mouths and allowed the cool, watery milk inside to dribble into their mouths.

'What do they use coconuts for?' asked Simon.

'Mainly to make copra', his father answered.

'What's copra?' asked Jennie.

'The people who grow coconuts', answered her father, 'split open the nuts and extract the coconut flesh from inside. These pieces of nut are then spread out in the sun to dry. As you travel along the roads of Malaya you can often see patches by the roadside covered with the drying kernels of coconuts. Every now and then the people rake them over so that in turn each side of each piece is exposed to the sun. Now this is the interesting thing: in the coconut flesh is both oil and water. The sun evaporates the water but the oil remains in the nut. Therefore, when the nut is completely dry, all you have to do is to squash it and pure coconut oil will run out. Easy!'

'And what do they do with the oil when they have got it?'

'Some of it is used for cooking', said Mr Scott, 'but the greater part is sold overseas to make all sorts of things—mainly margarine, I believe.'

'Well', said Jennie, 'I certainly never knew that monkeys had a hand in the making of margarine. I must tell the school cook about it. She will have a fit!'

When they continued their journey it was growing dark. Every few minutes along the straight road they passed a mosque to which the Malays in their bright sarongs and *bajus*, a kind of loose blouse, were going for their evening prayers.

'The mosque, to the Muslim Malays', said Mrs Scott, 'is the centre of the village, as well as being simply a place where they go to pray. When the day's work is over you will always find a number of Malays sitting on the steps or in the porch of a mosque, chatting away, just as old men sit and chat in public-houses in England. Of the two I sometimes prefer the mosque.'

Two hours after leaving Ipoh the road turned sharply left and they were on the last few miles to the coast. In the sky ahead of them they could see the lights of the houses on high Penang Hill and in a few moments the car pulled up at the ferry.

'In case you didn't know', Mr Scott told the children, 'Penang is an island and we have to get across to it by ferry.'

They joined a queue of cars which was expertly manœuvred onto the ferry boat which held, altogether, about a dozen cars and lorries as well as a great number of passengers. Its whistle shrieked, its engines thumped and they were heading out to

sea. The water was smooth and unruffled and they passed many ships anchored in Penang harbour, still loading and unloading their cargoes. Within half an hour they reached the wharf on Penang Island and shortly afterwards they drove ashore.

'Everyone refers to the town and the island as Penang', said Mr Scott. 'But in fact the town is called Georgetown after King George the Third, and only the island should be called Penang.'

They drove slowly through the quiet streets to the Eastern and Oriental, a large hotel in the grand manner, where they were given two delightful rooms overlooking the sea between Penang and Malaya—the Straits of Penang. The sea lapped against the sea wall just below their windows and out across the water they could see the lights of passing ships as well as the fainter lights of little fishing boats.

After dinner they sat for a while on the lawn by the sea.

'Time for another history lesson, and then you must go to bed', said Mr Scott. Strangely enough the children did not shudder at the thought of another history lesson. Simon was by no means fond of history at school and even Jennie was not very good at it. She was never able to separate one George from another, and all the King Henrys seemed to her to be so much alike as to be indistinguishable. But when history was closely related to the places they visited it took on a far greater degree of interest. Simon was quite astonished to find himself looking forward to what his father had to say.

'When we were in Malacca I told you about the rivalry between the Dutch and the English in the East. You will remember that the Dutch defeated the Portuguese in this part of the world and for some years the Dutch had it all their own way. Meanwhile the English grew steadily more powerful in India, where their chief rivals were the French—you see how the history of the East is bound up with the policies of the European nations. Just think! In Malaya we had the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the English. In India there were the French. In the Philippines there were the Spanish. All of them, including ourselves, were feverishly grabbing at any land they thought they could take and hold. Well, Britain came to the conclusion (or at least, a number of men of vision who were already in these parts came to the conclusion and persuaded the British govern-

ment that they were right) that she must have a share in Malaya. They also pointed out that Britain needed a naval station on the west coast of Malaya, that is, on the east side of the Bay of Bengal, where her ships could shelter from the north-east monsoon which made the east coast of India extremely dangerous to shipping for six months of each year. So, after a lot of argument, Penang was chosen as the spot.

'Now, another important thing to remember is that in 1600 the English East India Company was founded by the Royal Charter of Queen Elizabeth. You may wonder what the English East India Company had to do with the things I am telling you now. But it is essential to realize that the British Empire in the East was founded largely through the agency of the East India Company. The Company, the Honourable Company, as it was called, was an enormous institution with its own army and fleet of ships. When it went out to trade it also went out to conquer. The Company engaged in the wars and politics of India in order to carve out areas for itself in which it could trade and in which the French could not trade. And, having carved out these areas, whether it liked it or not, and very often it did not like it, the Company had to set about governing them.

'The same thing happened in Malaya. Penang, Malacca, and Singapore were all trading stations of the East India Company, administered by the Company's officials. Of course, in a loose sort of way, the Company also administered them on behalf of the Crown but it was only later, after they had been well founded by the Company, that they became colonies of England. The English East India Company, now, of course, no longer exists.

'Well now, to return to Penang. There was at that time in these waters the captain of a ship based on India, one Francis Light. Francis Light was the man who brought the Island of Penang to the attention of the Company and stressed its desirability from every point of view. He was eventually empowered to negotiate with the Sultan of Kedah, Kedah being the state on the mainland directly opposite to Penang, and the state which at that time owned it. The Sultan agreed to let the British have Penang, provided they paid a proper rent for it and provided they would help him to fight his many enemies,

principally the Bugis of Selangor. The British refused to enter into a firm commitment over this latter point but told the Sultan that he would not be the loser by entering into the agreement they proposed. Later there was a good deal of trouble over the point, for it is clear that the Sultan was led to believe that he *would* receive direct assistance against his enemies. When he found after he handed over the Island that he had, in his opinion, been cheated, he sent his war *prahus* to attack it, but they were driven off and peace was patched up. I do not myself know who was right and who was wrong, but it is as well to remember that the British were not always as upright and virtuous as we are sometimes told.

'So, in 1786, Francis Light, who was made the first Superintendent of the island, raised the English flag, and Penang has remained part of the Empire. It failed as a naval base, but it has always been important as a port for northern Malaya. It would have been a greater port, of course, if Singapore had never existed because Singapore took away a lot of its trade. But, since Singapore is so very much better situated, the process was inevitable.

'An interesting tale is told of Francis Light when he was clearing the jungle on Penang Island to build his first houses and godowns. He found that the people he was employing were not working very hard. Although they were cutting down the jungle, they were not cutting it down as quickly as he thought they should and could. No amount of talking to them made any difference. So Captain Light loaded one of his cannons with gold dollars and fired them into the jungle that was to be cleared. He told the workers that they could keep the dollars if they found them. After that there was no further trouble with the labourers. They cut down the jungle so fast that even Captain Light was astonished.'

The moon shone over the rippling water of the Straits and overhead the palms rustled softly in the gentle breeze. Simon and Jennie, although they had enjoyed the story of Penang, could scarcely keep their eyes open. Simon yawned.

'Jolly good chap, Light', he said sleepily.

'Bed time', said Mrs Scott firmly.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A STORY-BOOK PARADISE

THREE days later the Scotts went on a tour of Penang Island. When they returned, the children knew why Penang has been called the Jewel of the Orient. With them went another of the children's newly found friends, Sheila Lim, a pretty little Chinese girl who attended one of the English schools in Penang. Sheila's parents were what are known as Straits-born Chinese. That means that they have lived in Malaya all their lives. Many of them have never been to China at all.

The road round the Island led along the edge of glorious beaches and delightful sunny bays, and then up and over a shoulder of the high hill that stands in the middle of Penang Island and back to the town through the flat land where grow, bent into fantastic shapes by the seasonal winds, acres of coconut palms.

They stopped at a little hotel on one of the sandy bays and watched the Indian fishermen drawing in their nets. The large net is fastened at either of its ends to an immensely long rope, which is paid out from the beach as a little boat takes the net out to sea so far that the boat becomes almost invisible. Once they have done this the fishermen begin the infinitely laborious task of hauling it in again, a column of dark-skinned Indians on each rope, hauling and hauling, chanting as they haul, chanting faster as the net comes nearer to the beach. The hauling of the net can take well over an hour, perhaps two hours, and at the end of it the catch is sometimes bad and sometimes good. But if the catch is bad the fishermen do not seem to complain—it is the will of God.

They stopped at the Snake Temple, which is kept more as a tourist attraction than as a Buddhist place of worship. Here, all over the altar and the paraphernalia of worship, quite free to go where they like, are dozens of little green snakes. They can leave the temple if they feel the urge to be free again, but they rarely do, for they are well fed by the temple attendant. Neither do they take the slightest notice of the thousands of people who visit the temple every year. In the courtyard, in

a sunken cage, is a huge and quite appalling python, the snake that kills by squeezing and crushing the life out of its helpless victim. Buddhists are very kind to animals and will not willingly kill one, however dangerous.

They visited the Ayer Hitam temple, one of the biggest Buddhist temples in Malaya. And here again they found a veneration of animals. In a large pond were kept innumerable tortoises, crawling all over one another through sheer lack of space.

They went by funicular railway to the top of Penang hill, two thousand feet high. The air was fresh and much cooler up there, and the view over the Straits to Malaya was the finest they had seen since their holiday began. They had tea and played about in the cool air and Sheila came across a group of soldier ants marching in determined rows from one tree to another. They saw a number of beautifully coloured birds, and everywhere they went they found the common sparrow that seems to flourish as well in the tropics as it does in temperate England.

On another day Simon and Jennie were taken by Sheila's father by air to Kota Bharu on the east coast of Malaya, almost directly opposite to Penang. No road leads over the terrible jungle-covered hills that lie in between. No railway has yet been built that goes direct from Penang to Kota Bharu. It is possible to make the journey by train but it is necessary to travel four hundred miles south to Gemas and four hundred miles north again to Kota Bharu, a journey of two days and nights. The aeroplane takes about an hour, and it never seems to get any further from the ground, for, as it climbs, the mountains climb too, and there is never an inch on which a forced landing could be made.

Kota Bharu is in the state of Kelantan, which, not so many years ago, was not a part of Malaya at all. The King of Siam considered that Kelantan belonged to him, and each year the Sultan of Kelantan was obliged to send expensive tribute to the God-King of his northern neighbour. It was not until the present century, when the grasp of Siam weakened and Malaya grew stronger, that Kelantan became part of the country to which she properly belongs. South of the State of Kelantan lies

Trengganu, and both states are predominantly Malay. Few Chinese and Indians work here, for there are no towns of any consequence and most of the land is still covered with virgin jungle.

Kota Bharu stands on a river a few miles from the sea, and the beauty of its beaches is known throughout Malaya. Once a year the giant turtles drag themselves from the sea and up the silver sands to lay their eggs in the holes they have first dug with their flippers. Some of the eggs eventually hatch and become turtles but most of them are taken by the Malays, who prize them as a great delicacy.

Many of the Malays living in the coastal areas of Kelantan and Trengganu are fishermen, and their prowess in small boats is unequalled. Every year the Pawang, or witch-doctor, holds a ceremony of the sea and tries to placate the evil spirits of the water who are the enemies of all those who go out onto the seas in boats. All the people join in the ceremony and a bull is sacrificed and later eaten with great relish—a Hindu tradition going back untold years to the time when the Malays were Hindu, before they were converted to the teachings of the Prophet by the traders who came from India.

Sheila and her father took Simon and Jennie to a little Malay house where an old man spent his time beating silver to a leaf-like thinness and then making bangles and belts, bowls and betel-nut boxes, each piece finely decorated with an intricate, beaten design. Silver has been beaten and made into ornaments by the Malays of Kelantan from time immemorial.

They also went to another house where a beautiful Malay girl was weaving on a simple hand-loom one of the glorious sarongs at making which the people of Kelantan excel. She was weaving into her sarong a squared design of golden thread, and she showed them another which she had just finished, which was a rich royal blue with a design of silver thread running through the whole of it. Simon wanted to buy one for his mother—but when he discovered the price he quite rightly felt that it was a little beyond his reach.

Before they caught the plane back to Penang they went and sat on the beach just beyond the breakers from the China Sea which dashed themselves with fury at their feet. This was a

different Malaya, far removed from the busy plantations and tin mines, divorced from the money-making atmosphere of the towns. This was the tropical paradise which the children had read about in books but never dreamed they would see. With the noise of the roaring surf in their ears, and memories of a dozen different Malayas in their minds, they walked slowly back to the waiting car. Their time in Malaya was almost at an end. Tomorrow they would be winging their way north to Bangkok. Eventually they would return to Singapore but they would not again see the Malaya they had come to love, for a very long time.

Back in Kota Bharu, at a little shop that seemed to sell everything under the sun and moon, the children bought some picture-postcards of Kelantan. They took a long time choosing the ones they wanted, but when they had selected them and paid for them, they had acquired something that would rank next in their esteem to the rock they had brought from Malacca. Still clutching their postcards, Simon with his stockings round his ankles and Jennie with her shoes full of Kelantan sand, they boarded the plane again and crossed the narrow peninsula of Malaya back to Penang. They looked out of their window, down, down, at the leaping, plunging mountains. Good-bye, they said to themselves. Good-bye, until next year. And the mountains seemed to hear them and a long slope soared towards them, as though to reach out and touch the speeding aircraft, only to fall away again into its own deep and darkening valley.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TEMPLES AND TEAK FORESTS

SIMON and Jennie had never in their lives seen so much rice. As their aircraft swooped in low over the coastline of the Gulf of Siam, and flew towards Bangkok, the spectacle of the rice-fields stretching for mile after mile after mile was something they would never forget. Hundreds and thousands of square miles, divided by mudbanks into literally hundreds of thousands of little fields, contained nothing but rice, rice, and more rice. The land, as they could see, was absolutely flat, segmented with innumerable straight canals and streams which brought water to the rice and served as water-roads for those who grew it.

'Rice is Siam's biggest industry', explained their father. 'Almost everyone in Siam grows rice. This great plain you see below has been formed by the Menam river, which flows down from the northern mountains. In the course of thousands upon thousands of years it has brought down from the north so much silt that it has formed the immense plain you see below, which now produces so much rice.'

The aircraft steadily lost height until it was only skimming over the ricefields. Imperceptibly the wheels touched the runway and the Scotts were in Siam. The aircraft taxied along to the imposing and modern airport buildings where the Siamese Customs and immigration officials dealt with them speedily and courteously. In the waiting-room was Mr Vichitrananda, a man whom Simon and Jennie liked at once, but whose name they were never properly to learn to pronounce.

Mr Vichitrananda was, it appeared, quite an important man in the Bangkok office of the Company with which Mr Scott was connected. He was also, as far as the children were concerned, one of the most charming and gentle people they had ever met. He was thin and willowy but his square, smooth face with its high cheek bones was both strong and handsome. Simon and Jennie tried to relate him on the one hand to the Chinese and on the other to the Malays. But he was like neither of these peoples. He was, if anything, a mixture of them both and therefore distinctly Siamese. But they knew they would need much

practice before they would be able to say with certainty that this man was Siamese, that that man was Chinese, and that the other was a Malay.

The Scotts were to stay with Mr Vichitrananda while they were in Bangkok and that was one of the reasons he had come the long way to the airport to meet them. His big Buick car was waiting and only a few moments after arriving in Siam they were travelling along the flat, straight road to Bangkok, the capital, the city that has been called the 'Venice of the East'. The road led through the heart of the ricelands.

'What on earth do you do with all the rice you grow in Siam, Mr Vichitr . . . ?' asked Simon, quite unable to pronounce the name.

'Why not call me Mr Vichy? Most Europeans do. It is so much easier. What do we do with all our rice? We sell it, eh Mr Scott? We sell it. That which we cannot eat ourselves. To places like Malaya—for a high price!'

He was clearly not accustomed to speaking in English and his sentences were as short as he could make them. As he spoke he waved his hands to emphasize his points and Jennie noticed how fine and delicate they were—long, slender hands, like those of a girl.

'Is that a temple over there?' asked Jennie, pointing across the intervening ricefields to a brightly-coloured building with many roofs and a central spire.

'Yes', answered Mr Vichitrananda. 'In Siam, we sometimes get tired of growing rice. And felling teak in the forests. Then we build a temple.' His eyes twinkled as he spoke. 'Now we have so many temples. We don't know what to do with them all. And the cost of their upkeep is terrible.'

This was the first really fine temple the children had seen since they had arrived in the East. The temples in Malaya had been rather tawdry compared with this example of Buddhist architecture. It was built in the form of a thick, squat cross. Each arm of the cross had several roofs, one above the other, but each one ending a little nearer to the centre of the building. The last, central, and highest roof extended upwards in a series of steps to a circular, tapering pinnacle. It was like no building they had ever seen before, but beautiful, and expressive of a

unity of design which few countries have surpassed. And it looked so odd, standing there so alone in the middle of the rice-fields, surrounded on all four sides by a wall that seemed to serve no useful purpose, since it had never been properly finished.

The long road through the rice seemed to stretch to eternity. Mile after mile slid beneath the silent Buick; and never a sign of Bangkok. But after something like half an hour they found themselves in the suburbs of the city and shortly afterwards—for Bangkok proved to be not such a big town as they had imagined, since they had been told that its population was nearly a million—they reached the centre.

'This is New Road', said Mr Vichitrananda. 'Our main street.'

New Road was a narrow and not very imposing thoroughfare. The buildings standing along it were for the most part mean and dilapidated and its surface was full of potholes. And yet it was packed with traffic—old cars and new cars; lorries and buses and vehicles that were half lorry and half bus; long tramcars racing along precarious rails set in the gutters; bicycles, trishas pedalled and trishas motorized. And every vehicle was either hooting its horn, ringing its bell or blowing its whistle. Pandemonium reigned.

'Is it always like this?' asked Simon, astonished.

'I'm afraid so', said Mr Vichitrananda, rather sadly. 'Except that sometimes it is a little worse. Then everything comes to a stop. The street becomes jammed. And everyone gets down from his vehicle and tries to take charge. Things really get bad. The police come and try to sort the traffic out. Often they get it into an even bigger mess. Sometimes they come to blows with the drivers. But somehow—like the English, eh, Mr Scott?—we manage to muddle through.'

Eventually the driver extricated himself from the dangers of New Road and the car soon entered a magnificent boulevard. The children had never seen a road so wide—it must have been almost a hundred yards across. The odd thing was that there was no traffic on it. All the traffic of Bangkok was far too busy hooting its heart out in the free-for-all chaos in narrow New Road.

'Oh, yes', said Mr Vichitrananda, who took a refreshingly amused view of the foibles of his own people, 'I forgot to tell you. We Siamese also like to build statues. With wide and useless avenues leading up to them. This is one such avenue.'

At the end of the boulevard they came to a great open square in the centre of which was a giant obelisk of which not even Mr Vichitrananda knew the origin. Then, dramatically, the road narrowed to the proportions of a lane. A few more twists and turns and they were at Mr Vichitrananda's home.

It was a brick building, standing in its own little garden, and very much like any other house in the tropics, except for its roof, which was high and steep and reminiscent of the temple they had seen on the way from the airport. In the garden there was a large pond, which, Mr Vichitrananda explained, drained the garden and kept it relatively dry. Were the pond not there the garden would tend to become boggy, so low is the land that surrounds Bangkok.

Later in the week Mrs Vichitrananda, a thin, slight, highly intelligent woman, took the children out to see the sights of Bangkok. It is useless to try to describe all the temples the children saw. Everywhere they went there were temples and pagodas and gilded, gigantic Buddhas. In every quarter of the town the round, tapering pinnacles pierced the air. It was possible to wander for days in the paved courtyards of the temples, among the frightening Gods that stood watch before the temple doors, and to explore indefinitely the great halls within the temples, painted in strange, bright hues and often encrusted with precious stones. The children suddenly saw how natural it was that the Siamese should build temples while other countries were busy building guns and bombs. They conceived a great liking for the gentle Siamese people and saw at once that life did not consist entirely of hustle and bustle and the ceaseless striving after something that was almost unattainable, and often not really worth having even if it was attained. They saw that life could consist, quite adequately, of growing rice and then building a rather better and more beautiful temple than ever before.

'Who pays for all the temples?' asked Simon, who had some knowledge of the difficulty of obtaining money for churches in

England. He remembered that if his village church in England, near to his school, and where he would sometimes go with his aunt, collected seventeen-and-sixpence on a Sunday morning they thought they were doing rather well.

'In Siam', Mrs Vichitrananda told him, 'we take our religion very seriously. Very, very often, the sons of a family will become priests in the Buddhist church for a period of perhaps six months and then come out and carry on with their normal work. We have a great many permanent priests, too. You must have seen them walking about the streets in their saffron robes since you have been here. They spend a great deal of time collecting money from all the people of Siam and the money is used to keep the priests, and the temples, and, occasionally, to build a new temple.'

They had learned on their tour of Bangkok that day that the town was criss-crossed with canals and that this was the reason it had been called the 'Venice of the East'. But the children were not especially struck with these canals for so many of them seemed to be positively pestiferous. Their water, from the brown River Menam, was invariably muddy, and most of the accumulated dirt of Bangkok appeared to be shovelled into them. They wondered what on earth they were going to see when Mrs Vichitrananda said that she was taking them to a floating market.

They travelled across Bangkok in the car, this time avoiding New Road. They all got out when they came to a bridge and looked over the parapet. Below was a wide, straight canal and the water was just as muddy and dirty as they knew it would be. But the extraordinary thing was that the water was almost hidden, except for a narrow passage down the centre, by boats of every conceivable shape and size. And not only that: all these boats—big boats and little boats, open boats and boats with semicircular mat-like roofs, fat boats and thin boats, dirty boats and smartly-painted boats—were joined together with slender catwalks. It was possible to walk from the shore to any boat on the canal. Many of the boats had things to sell—vegetables and fish mainly, as far as the children could see—and the numerous people walking along the catwalks were clearly doing their daily shopping.

What a time Simon and Jennie had racing along the planks that joined the boats together. They walked all over the canal! They saw that many of the people lived in their boats because, as Mrs Vichitrananda explained later, there was no room for them in the limited number of houses in Bangkok.

Finally it was time to go home. Simon then asked Mrs Vichitrananda a very special favour. Could he, he asked, be allowed to follow the car home in one of the motorized trishas. Mrs Vichitrananda was at first aghast, but in the end Simon, with his special mixture of persuasion and charm, convinced her that he would not be killed.

In Bangkok the trishas differ from those in Malaya where, in Kuala Lumpur, the passenger sits at the side of, and, in Penang, in front of the driver. In Bangkok the passenger sits behind the driver, and there he feels a certain amount of additional security against the possibility of sudden death on the assumption that if they hit anything the driver will hit it first. The motorized trishas of Bangkok are not pedalled but are driven by two-stroke engines. Simon hailed one of these spitting monstrosities and the driver was given his instructions by Mrs Vichitrananda. He waited until she and Jennie had got into the car and then followed the Buick, as first it threaded its way through the busy streets, and later sped along the wide avenues. The racing, overworked trisha engine made a frightful racket. The driver was completely fearless. The largest potholes in the road were quite beneath his notice. He put the speeding trisha onto a course and held it to that course, come what may. The strange three-wheeled contraption, making as much fuss and noise as a military tank, swayed and bucketed after the Buick. Simon bounced up and down on the narrow seat like a pea on a drum. They tore round corners with a supreme indifference to the possibility of opposing traffic, and if anything looked like getting in their way the driver simply put his hand to his hooter and held it there until the obstacle either fell down or fled in terror. Simon had rarely known such a thrill, and he laughed aloud in his exhilaration as the air rushed past his face. Finally, with a magnificent gesture, the grinning trishaman slammed on his brakes outside the Vichitranandas' house and slithered to a totally uncontrolled stop. Simon literally fell out

The road round Penang Island led along the edge of glorious beaches and delightful sunny bays.

ABOVE. *The Penang funicular railway, which goes to the top of Penang Hill, 2,000 feet high.* BELOW. *Elephants at work in the teak forests of northern Siam.*

of his seat onto the road. Mrs Vichitrananda paid off the driver, who sped away again with a cheery wave of his hand followed by a pall of black smoke. Simon felt that the ride would have been cheap at twice the price.

That night Mr Vichitrananda told Simon and Jennie all about the teak forests in northern Siam. He was sorry that they were not to have the opportunity of seeing them and so he told them all he knew about them. He told them how the great trees are cut down and how the elephants handle the huge logs, pushing them with their heads and trunks and nudging them with their behinds; how they can lift the logs up between their tusks and their trunks and place them in neatly stacked piles. He told them much about the elephants and confirmed that elephants do not forget, especially injustices and cruelty. Then he described how the logs are brought to the river and lashed into floating rafts, and told them of the men who live on the rafts and bring them down the long Menam, past Ayuthia, the ancient capital of Siam, through the scrub and the forest and the rice, to Bangkok. He told them how the logs are prepared for export in Bangkok and how Siamese teak, Siam's other major product, is shipped all over the world, mainly through Singapore.

Simon and Jennie would have loved to have spent far more time in Bangkok, but the days were slipping by and soon their holiday would be over. Within a few days Mr Scott had finished his work and they were off again, this time to Saigon.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

PERIL IN SAIGON

WHEN they were airborne on their way to Saigon the children still had some questions to straighten out in their minds about Siam, before they plunged into a new set of impressions in French Indo-China.

'When we were in Malaya', said Simon to his father, 'we learned that the Siamese used to control Kelantan. Does that mean the Siamese were once more powerful than they are today?'

'Oh! yes, indeed, they were', his father replied. 'At one time they controlled the whole of Malaya and even ruled in Singapore. They were continually at war with Burma too, but in the end, like all empires, they began to lose their grip. So they have no empire at all now and they are probably the happier for it.'

'And what about the king? Does he have much power?'

'He used to have. He used to be as much a god as a king. He was literally worshipped by his people and he had the power of life and death over them all. He was educated as a priest and his word was as the word of a god, a cruel, bloodthirsty god. Only a hundred years ago people accused of even the smallest crimes were publicly tortured in the streets. You have heard of Anna of Siam who went to Siam at that time as governess to the young king? She saw public torture and executions and has told about them in the books she wrote.'

At that point the air hostess interrupted their conversation by bringing them their simple lunch of coffee and sandwiches. Neither Simon nor Jennie ever quite lost the pleasure of eating in the air and looking down at the hills and rivers and cities that moved slowly below them. The aircraft was flying high and the children saw the land only occasionally through the gaps in the clouds. But what they did see suggested a wild and uninhabited country, given over largely to the jungle that has always covered the land.

After about an hour's flying they crossed a long range of forest-covered hills, but beyond them the country became progressively flatter. Later, when the aircraft began to lose height, and came below the cloud level, they saw that the country

was very much like that around Bangkok—hundreds of square miles of rice. The river which had formed this great rice-growing plain was, their father told them, the Mekong, which flows into the China Sea through numerous mouths. Thus, in southern Indo-China, was the pattern of Siam repeated.

Eventually the aircraft began to circle Saigon airfield and the Scotts soon found themselves dealing yet again with determined little men who wished to know about everything they had in their suitcases. An airline station-wagon took them to a comfortable hotel in the centre of the city. The first thing the children noticed about Saigon was its French appearance. They were now in what was, in fact, a French city, built largely by the French in an important part of their now fast-disappearing Colonial Empire. The buildings had an indefinable French aspect and wherever possible the French had planted trees along their avenues. There were many cafés with chairs and tables out on the pavement, just as in France, and the children saw many French soldiers walking about the streets.

The second thing they noticed was that, although the traffic never approached the confusion of New Road in Bangkok, the drivers of the many vehicles and the cyclists weaved in and out with a wonderfully abandoned verve.

Over tea Mr Scott told them something about Indo-China:

'It is not a safe country to be in', he said. 'While you are in Saigon you must be careful not to wander about in side streets. There is a war on and, as in Malaya, the country is at war with the Communists. And in Indo-China the Communists are winning.'

'Do most of the people in Indo-China live in and around Saigon?' asked Jennie.

'Quite a lot of them do', replied their father. 'But most of the people live either in the Mekong River area—where we are now—or in the Red River Delta far away in the north, where the principal city is Hanoi, or on the eastern coastal lowlands. The remainder of the country is wild, mountainous, and in many cases unexplored.'

'I can never understand the several states that go to make up Indo-China, nor the various races of people who make up their populations', bewailed Mrs Scott.

Her husband sympathized with her.

'Neither can anyone else, my dear. The country consists mainly of Cochin China, Cambodia, Annam, Laos, and Tonking. Cochin China is where the Mekong River rice is grown, Tonking is where the Red River rice is grown and the Annamite coast is where most of the remainder of the people live. As for their numerous races, religions, sects, and incredibly diverse politics, it is sufficient to know that they are closely related to the Chinese and can be divided, very roughly, between Communists and anti-Communists, or, at least, people who have not yet been taken over by the Communists.'

Before dinner the Scotts went down into the street and strolled along to one of the open-fronted cafés. They ordered drinks and sat there and watched the people walking past—urchins in rags, smart French army officers, wealthy Annamite business men, French housewives, beggars, clerks, coolies, servants, millionaires, and labourers. As they sat there, enjoying their drinks, thinking of nothing in particular, they heard something drop heavily on the floor a few tables away. A woman screamed. Several people sitting at different tables sprang to their feet and raced out into the road. Mr Scott yelled 'Down' and pulled Mrs Scott and Simon and Jennie to the floor, overturning the table as he did so that they were able to crouch behind it. Then the bomb went off, and the force of the explosion shook the building as a dog shakes a rat. Plaster cascaded from the roof and there was a confused shouting and screaming of injured people. The children found themselves unharmed, except that their eardrums felt as though they had been pierced by the explosion. Only their father's presence of mind had saved them. Had they got to their feet and run away as others had done they might well have been hit by flying splinters. The iron table which Mr Scott had pulled down so that it had stood between them and the home-made bomb had saved them from everything except the shock of the blast.

Simon and Jennie, for the moment, were rather afraid. Simon felt, according to the adventure books, that he should now be displaying all manner of heroic tendencies. But his impulses in this direction were obstructed by the furious trembling of his legs—the after-effect of the shock of the explosion. Mrs

Scott was afraid, too, but she had great confidence in her husband and waited for him to tell her what to do.

There were several wounded people lying where they had fallen on the pavement. It was impossible to say whether they were still alive or not. Those who had not been injured were leaving the café as quickly as possible. Outside in the street pandemonium increased as a large crowd gathered, and police struggled to force a way through the growing number of spectators of the tragedy. In the distance the Scotts heard the sound of a siren.

'Come on', shouted Mr Scott. Together they ran towards the crowd, Simon holding Jennie's hand, so that they should not be separated. Then the terrible chatter of a machine-gun was heard. The crowd into which they had forced themselves scattered violently in every direction, bearing the Scotts with them. In a few seconds the panic-stricken people had separated them. The only good thing was that Simon held on like grim death to his sister's hand. Men and women were screaming and shouting and an old Chinese dressed in a black Chinese suit fell across their path, apparently injured by a stray bullet. Simon, dragging his sister with him, raced to the side of the road. The machine-gun, which appeared to be mounted not far down the road, chattered again, and more of the running, fleeing people fell to the ground. Bullets ricocheted wildly from the road. But Simon and Jennie reached the shelter of the buildings at the side, not far from the café.

'We must get away from this street', shouted Simon, 'and try to get back to the hotel.'

They ran a few yards down the road keeping as close as they could to the wall, until they came to an entry running between two buildings.

'Down here!' yelled Simon and together the children plunged into the dark corridor. But if they had escaped from the confusion and the bullets of the street, they were not sure that they had greatly improved their situation. The corridor was as dark as night and they were unable to see more than a few inches ahead of them. Simon's legs collided with something rough and hard and he sprawled full length upon the concrete floor.

'Simon?' shouted Jennie, 'Are you all right? Where are you?'

'I think I'm all right', answered Simon, gingerly feeling his bruised and bleeding shin.

He climbed to his feet and groped for his sister in the darkness. Then they heard the sound of running feet coming from the road down the black corridor. The noise might be made by a man fleeing as they were, or it might be made by one of their pursuers. They did not know.

'Get down behind this packing-case', whispered Simon.

The children made themselves as small as they could in the darkness. The feet approached and then passed them. Then they stopped. A torch shone in the darkness and a shattering explosion ripped down the corridor, and the man who had passed them was silhouetted for a second in the accompanying flash. The children heard him crumple to the ground like a sack of potatoes. Immediately, at the far end of the entry there was a great deal of shouting and the sound of running feet. It seemed that their enemies were at both ends. Then Simon had an idea. What could a packing case be doing in the middle of the entry? It had been opened and it was empty. Was it not possible that whoever had emptied it had carried the goods it contained into one of the buildings on either side? And would not, therefore, that person have emptied the case near to a door?

Simon explored the wall behind him. Nothing! Then he repeated the process on the street side. Yes, here was the door.

'Jennie', he whispered, 'there's a door here.'

'Is it open?' she asked.

Simon leaned his weight against it and it creaked open on rusty hinges.

'Come on', he called.

The children found themselves in what they assumed to be a room, but which, like the corridor, was in complete darkness. With their hands outstretched before them they groped their way forward. Eventually they came up against another wall.

'Look,' said Jennie, 'do you see a light there?' She gripped her brother's arm and turned him in the right direction. Simon's eyes tried to penetrate the gloom. At the foot of the wall there was the slightest, barely perceptible, strip of light, as though it came from under a door. The children crept towards it. For a moment they stood by it, wondering what they should do.

Should they try the door and risk detection? Or should they return to the horrible passage in which they had seen the man shot? It was Jennie who made up her mind first.

'Open it, Simon', she whispered.

'If it *will* open', her brother replied, but nevertheless grateful to his sister for making up his mind for him.

He groped along the door and found an iron latch. He pushed the latch up and the door swung silently inwards.

Simon and Jennie stayed in the shadows and peeped into the room. It was long and narrow and lit by a single oil lamp. On either side there were rough beds with loose and coloured covers. Most of the beds were unoccupied, but they could see sleeping forms on three of them. Simon looked at Jennie and Jennie looked at Simon.

'Come on', said Simon, beginning to enjoy his role of adventure.

They tiptoed down the passage between the beds. The room was quite unoccupied except for the sleeping men.

'What is this curious smell?' asked Jennie.

'I don't know', her brother answered.

The whole room was pervaded with a curiously acrid aroma that made their nostrils twitch, a sweet, sickly, and yet pungent smell.

'Of course', said Simon suddenly. 'Opium!'

'Oh! my goodness', said Jennie in distress.

'Never mind', said her brother, 'if we keep going we must be able to get out again.'

At the end of the room they came to a set of curtains. They pulled them aside and found themselves in another room exactly like the first.

'Whoever the birds are who run this opium den', said Simon, 'they've certainly flown.'

He felt more like 'The Saint' with every step he took.

They tiptoed through the second room, keeping as quiet as mice lest they should wake the slumbering forms on the coloured beds. At the end of the room was another door—locked, from the outside.

'Oh dear', said Jennie, 'what on earth shall we do now?'

'Wait', said Simon, with authority. He examined the door and

found it to be old and flimsy. He pushed against the lock and felt it give to his pressure.

'We must break it down', he said.

He walked back down the room and turned. Then he raced towards the door and flung himself sideways so that his shoulder hit the door fairly and squarely. But the door did not give. Jennie looked at the sleeping forms with an anguished expression, fearing that they would be awakened by the noise. Simon picked himself up from the floor where he had fallen after charging the door. He was getting bolder every minute.

'They won't wake up', he assured his sister, 'they're out for the count with opium.'

Again he threw himself against the door. Again it resisted him. But the third time the old lock gave and the door flew open. Miraculously, they found themselves in the open air. They seemed to be in an alley, dark and narrow. Simon took his sister's hand again and together they raced between the dark buildings. Soon they came to the main street. Calm seemed to have been once more restored.

'There's the hotel', shouted Jennie, pointing across the busy street.

Together they sped across the wide road, a tremendous relief surging through their bodies. They ran up the steps of the hotel and plunged through the open doorway. And there, wonder of wonders, stood their mother and father, talking in a most agitated way to a French Police Officer.

There is no need to describe the relief with which they were welcomed back by their parents. Even the French Police Officer was carried away by the joy they all so freely expressed, and stayed and had dinner with them.

That evening the children related their adventures in a city where gangs and rival warlords shoot out their differences in the main streets whenever their patience is tried too far. When their story was ended Jennie looked at her brother.

'Simon was wonderful', she said.

Simon was covered with confusion. He blushed wildly and gruffly told his sister not to be so silly. But unconsciously his hand groped for the halo that he felt ought to be round his head. He was well satisfied with the work he had done that night.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE CITY ON THE ROCK

MRS SCOTT and the children spent the next two days inside the hotel and did not venture out again. The City of Saigon was still in a state of considerable turmoil and they were advised, as were all foreigners, to stay indoors. Simon, after his recent single-handed battle with the forces of evil, did not take kindly to this instruction at all but he had to put up with it.

Mr Scott finished his work as quickly as possible so that they could continue their journey to Hongkong. How delightful it will be, thought Mrs Scott, once again to experience the comparative peace and security of a British Colony! The period of the children's enforced confinement soon ended and early in the morning, two days after their great adventure, they found themselves in a Constellation, speeding down the runway of the airport at Saigon.

This time the greater part of their journey lay over the sea after they had crossed the Annamite coast, and there was nothing to see below them but the occasional flecks of foam which resulted each time an over-anxious wave overtopped itself. The journey took nearly four hours, and during that time they saw nothing but the sea and two minute cargo boats steaming through it. Towards lunch-time, however, land loomed up beyond the long wings of the aircraft. In the way to which the children had become accustomed, the engines were throttled back and the Constellation began slowly to lose height on its run in to Kai Tak airfield. They flew over a number of small and barren islands around which the waves dashed themselves into a ring of foam. Sailing among the islands were more junks than they had ever seen before. In Singapore and Penang they had seen the junks lying with sails furled against the wharves but they had never before seen them sailing along in the open sea. They were wonderfully stately and completely Chinese. Their large brown sails billowed out from the stout masts and the bows dipped gracefully into the water.

'What are they doing?' asked Jennie.

'Fishing, carrying cargo—anything that a ship is ever called

upon to do', answered Mrs Scott. 'They are ocean-going junks and they sail all over the East.'

Then on their right they saw the wonderful city of Hongkong, clinging to the side of the high and ragged rock on which it is built. As they flew along they were no higher than the Peak, the highest point of Hongkong, and they saw that houses stretched from the water's edge to the very summit. Below them, in the clear blue of the harbour, a hundred ships lay at anchor: great passenger liners, cargo boats, warships, and tramps. On their left stretched the industrialized New Territories, a part of the Colony of Hongkong but on the mainland of China proper. And beyond the New Territories stretched the mountains of China until they were swallowed into the haze of the far horizon. The aircraft banked and began its circuit of Kai Tak. The children could see the runway down below and wondered how on earth the pilot would ever manage to set his aircraft down among so many hills. One end of the runway ended at the sea wall, and hills, barren and eroded hills, hemmed in the airfield in almost every other direction. They roared over the busy streets of Kowloon, the city that is a part of Hongkong but on the New Territories side, still losing height. The aircraft straightened out and headed towards the runway. The hills on the left were terribly close, their peaks now much higher than the Constellation. The children watched fascinated as the ground shot past them. Never before had they flown so close to destruction. Then the pilot cut the engines and the heavy aircraft dropped towards the runway and made a perfect landing. Everyone on board heaved a sigh of relief when they knew they were safely down again.

Steven Wong was there to meet them. He was the perfect example of the successful Chinese businessman. Immaculately dressed in a well-tailored sharkskin suit, flaming American tie, and neat straw hat, he looked as though he has just stepped out of his tailor's shop. He was slightly corpulent, and his fat, round face was as smooth and hairless as a woman's. And he was always laughing, laughing uproariously at his own jokes as well as those of his friends. He seemed not to have a care in the world, yet he controlled a great mercantile business.

'Hello! Hello! Hello!' he said, as the Scotts emerged from the

airport buildings. 'Did you have a good trip?' and without waiting for a reply went on, 'and how was Saigon? Did you have any trouble?'

Mr Scott at last got a word in:

'You'd better ask Simon about that', he said. 'These are my two children, Simon and Jennie.'

Steven Wong laughed with pleasure. The children for a moment did not know whether to laugh with him or maintain a solemn and suitably nervous aspect.

'Welcome to Hongkong', roared Steven, giving Simon a slap on the back that almost felled him. 'Welcome to Hongkong', he repeated. Before the children could make their reply he had jumped to his feet. 'The car is over here', he said, waving his arms.

He led the way to an American car the like of which Simon had never seen before, a gigantic Cadillac Convertible.

'I say', gasped Simon, 'what a beauty!'

It was indeed a beauty. The latest thing from America. The automatic hood was down and as they rolled silently away from the airport Mrs Scott felt that they should at least be travelling in a great procession, or reviewing an army, or something similarly grand. The most extraordinary thing, to Simon, at least, was that the engine was completely silent. Not the slightest suggestion of a sound escaped from the highly polished bonnet.

Then they were in Kowloon proper, making their way through the busy streets. Chinese hurried in every direction, many of them wearing loose Chinese trousers and Chinese coats. In Malaya, he remembered most of the Chinese wore western dress, or adaptations of it. At last they were in a Chinese city in which almost everyone was Chinese.

'You might as well be in China, Simon', said Mr Scott. 'But there is still a British Government here, and that makes a world of difference.'

Steven thought this a huge joke and almost rolled in his seat with laughter.

There were thousands of shops. Every street seemed to be largely composed of shops. And every shop was covered in Chinese characters which, Simon and Jennie presumed, told

the people who could read them what the shops were called and what they had to sell. Jennie longed to explore them.

Gradually the buildings thinned out and the car climbed up a winding road which led over a hill. When they reached the top they found that they had a glorious view of the hills beyond and, down below, of an island-studded sea, turquoise blue in the sunlight. The car dropped down the other side of the hill and drove into the entrance of a most palatial villa which stood at the water's edge. This was where Mr Wong lived in wonderful style and luxury. The car pulled up at the front door and several servants at once appeared to carry the luggage.

A slender and beautiful Chinese woman came to the door.

'This is my wife', Steven roared, and there were handshakes all round.

'And these are my children', he added, his fat face creased with pleasure, 'Mary Anne, Juliet, and Robert.'

Mary Anne and Juliet were twins, with pert, oval faces and plaits. They were 9 years old. Robert, already resembling the build and bouncing energy of his father, was 11. No sooner were they in the spacious and airy house than Robert said:

'What about a swim?'

And the rest of that day was spent by all the children either in, or nearly in the water. They acted the fool, swam out to sea with an inflated rubber horse, ducked each other, fought, collected shells, and hunted crabs. At the end of the day they were exhausted. But during it all the children picked up several items of information. They discovered something about the weather. They learned that, unlike Malaya, Hongkong had a distinct winter and a summer. Summer, which was just ending, was wet and muggy when the Peak was hidden for weeks in a damp blanket of cloud. Then, as the wind changed, and blew from China instead of the sea, the days and nights would become colder and the sun would shine in a blue and empty sky until, by Christmas time, it was cold enough to wear overcoats and gloves, things which people in Malaya did not possess, for they had no use for them.

Later that evening they discovered something else about Hongkong—that when the British took it over in the previous century it was a wild and uninhabited rock that no one thought

of any value—except the pirates who used it as a hide-out. British merchants were the first to recommend its use since they wished to trade with China in tea and opium—they exchanged China's tea for the opium they brought from India—and the Imperial Government of China made things so difficult for them at Canton, a few miles away, where they dealt with the Chinese, that they gave up in despair and established Hongkong. Simon recollected that Singapore, too, was once regarded as a place of little value—nothing more than an almost uninhabited and useless swamp. Yet Singapore and Hongkong had prospered equally. The British, it seemed to him, had a genius for building great trading cities on uninhabited islands.

The following day all the Scotts and all the Wongs went by car to Hongkong, although the city proper should be called Victoria. Like Penang, the city and the island have different names, but only one is used to denote either or both of them. They took the car over the intervening water by the vehicular ferry and the children found themselves in the busiest city they had ever known. Every pavement was crowded with people. Every road was chock-a-block with cars and buses and lorries and rickshas. They left the car and walked along Queens Road Central to look at the brilliantly lighted shops and found that they could only shuffle along, as if they were in a queue for a football match, so dense was the press of people.

'How many people live in Hongkong?' Jennie asked Steven.

'I don't think anyone is terribly sure', he said. 'Before the war we had a million people. But so many people have fled from China during the last few years that now there are between two and three million.'

'Between two and three million on this small island?' said Jennie. 'What do they all do for a living? There's not much trade with China now, is there?'

'There is still some', answered Steven, 'but it is less than it was. But the people of Hongkong have much energy, and when one source of income is lost they find another. Now we do a great deal of business importing things from America and selling them to South-East Asia. And we have industrialized ourselves and built factories that make textiles, and clothes and tinned food and paint and a hundred and one other things.'

As Simon and Jennie walked along the intensely crowded streets, they sensed the great energy of the city. This energy, they knew, came from the Chinese, one of the most tireless races under the sun. Nothing could stop them once they set themselves a course of action.

Later that day they went further afield in the car. They passed fine houses and horribly dark slums. They came face to face with great wealth and terrible poverty at every turn. The problem, Mr Scott told them, was almost insoluble since there were too many people. Not only were there too many people but more people were being born at every moment of the day and night, far more people than were dying.

Then the car headed along the finely engineered roads that led up to the Peak. As they ascended higher and higher, one of the most exciting sights in the world opened out before them. When they reached the top they looked down on the whole huddled city, on to the tops of the tenement houses and the stately skyscrapers. They looked down over the harbour, filled with ships, its blue surface streaked with the wakes of the busy ferries plying between Hongkong and Kowloon. And beyond they saw the eroded hills of China holding before them, it seemed, the teeming city of Kowloon where thousands and thousands of people were busily at work in factories and workshops.

Then they went down the hill again to the ocean side of Hongkong Island where they picnicked on beautiful sands and bathed in the clear, deep sea. How long, Mr Scott wondered, would they be able to come to this paradise? How long before it became a part of China, when the doors would be locked against the foreigner? And what would people like Steven Wong do then, he wondered.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE LAND OF THE WHITE RAJAHS

THE Scotts took over a week to travel from Hongkong to Sarawak. Sarawak is not an easy place to get to from Hongkong since so very few ships sail there direct. But they were lucky, and one hot and sultry evening they sailed out of the rock-bound harbour of Hongkong in the small cargo ship, *Sea Horse.* They were the only passengers—there were only two cabins for passengers in the ship—and the voyage was a perfect rest, especially so for Mrs Scott, who was beginning to feel the strain of continually packing and moving on, unpacking and settling in to yet another house or hotel.

They took their meals with the captain in the ship's small dining-room and the First Mate was only too ready to take the children under his wing. Nothing was too much trouble for him and by the time Simon left the ship he felt that he could almost manage it on his own if the necessity arose. The mate's name was Franklin, Mr Franklin as he was known throughout the ship. He took the children up to the crow's nest and he took them down into the holds where were stored an incredible miscellany of goods—steel girders from America, crates of cooking utensils from Japan, bales and bales of textiles from Hongkong, and one hold was filled entirely with Japanese cement. He took them onto the bridge and showed them how the ship was steered and taught them the proper orders for altering her course. He explained the charts to them and showed them the ship's course drawn on the chart, calculated by dead reckoning and regularly checked with star-sights and sun-sights. He taught Simon how to use a sextant, although, once the sight had been taken, neither of the children knew enough mathematics to be able to work out the ship's position from the tables provided. They learned the sixty-four points of the compass and for the first time properly understood the difference between magnetic variation and deviation. They made model ships which they moved about on the deck so that they could learn the rule of the road; and they learned the

little rhymes which help sailors to remember its essential points, such as:

> Green to green, red to red
> Perfect safety, go ahead.

They also spent some time in the boiling hot engine-room where the Chief Engineer Billy McDermott—all ship's engineers are Scots, it seems—introduced them to the mysteries of reciprocating engines.

It was a wonderful week of sunshine and laziness. At one time porpoises swam beside them, leaping out of the sea like swift and miniature whales. And when there was absolutely nothing else to do it was always possible to go up into the bows and watch the flying fishes leap out of the water as the sharp bow sliced into the ocean, to glide ahead on outstretched fins, fifty, a hundred, two and three hundred yards away, when they would re-enter the water with a little plop.

After seven days and nights of sailing they arrived at the entrance to the Sarawak River and for a day they steamed along its broad reaches. On either side low banks brought jungle and scrub to the water's edge and from time to time they saw the little waterside houses of the people who live as much on the water as on the land. In the late afternoon they rounded a bend and before them lay the little town of Kuching, the capital now of a British Colony, once the capital of the old White Rajahs of Sarawak. Gingerly, *Sea Horse* edged alongside the wharf and willing hands ashore secured her hawsers and ropes to the bollards. Mr Franklin supervised the receipt of the gangway from ashore, secured it, and the passengers, consisting of the four Scotts, were free to go ashore.

They were met by David Dumont, who looked after Mr Scott's interest in Sarawak. He was a much older man than any of the other associates of Mr Scott whom the children had met on their travels, doubtless because Sarawak was comparatively such a backwater. Mr Dumont had lived in Sarawak all his life and before the war had been employed in the Rajah's Civil Service. He knew the whole of Sarawak like the back of his hand, even though there are scarcely any roads. He clearly loved Sarawak, too, and in many ways regretted the passing of the Rajahs.

Shopping on a canal. The floating market of Bangkok, where hundreds of boats of every imaginable kind almost covered the water and housewives walked from boat to boat to make their purchases.

A Dyak Long-House—which really was enormously long. Two hundred Dyaks ved in it, with a room for each family at the back of the house, and sections for eetings, guests, housework, and so on in the front.

Since Kuching is such a small place, and since the roads of Kuching penetrate only a few miles beyond its boundaries, Mr Dumont did not run a car. He had hired one, however, to transport their baggage to the Rest House, where they were to stay, and he suggested that the five of them walk the few hundred yards up the road. On their right they passed the old government offices which the Rajah built, and on the left a number of Chinese silversmiths' shops where Chinese workmen were busy beating out belts and ornaments. Further along they passed the fine modern Secretariat which the British Government has built since the war, and a little later the old wooden cathedral, a delightful relic of life in old Sarawak.

Then they were at the Rest House, an old rambling building, but mercifully cool inside. Over tea Jennie could not delay the question any longer:

'Will you tell us about the Rajahs, Mr Dumont?'

The term White Rajah had captured her imagination and she wanted to learn all about them.

'Oh!' said Mr Dumont, who never needed a second prompting to talk about the Rajahs. 'It all started a very long time ago, over a hundred years ago, in fact. Sarawak, as you know, with Brunei and British North Borneo, where the oil is found, comprises the whole of the Northern seaboard of the gigantic Island of Borneo. Borneo is one of the biggest islands in the world. Southern Borneo belongs to Indonesia. Well, as I was saying, a man in England called James Brooke was left a good deal of money by his father. With this money he bought a ship which he called *The Royalist*. It was his ambition to sail this ship to the East and one morning about a hundred years ago, he arrived in Singapore. He met a good many of the merchants there who were anxious to do business with Borneo but were unable to do so because the country was in such a troubled state and also because of the pirates who, at that time, in this part of the world, ruled the seas. James Brooke was at once interested in the idea of going to Borneo, and the merchants encouraged him. So off he went and fetched up eventually at Kuching, just as you have done today.

'He found the country in a state of civil war. The population was made up of three main groups: foreign Malays from Java,

Sea Dyaks, and Land Dyaks. The Sea Dyaks preyed on the Land Dyaks, and the Malays, under the Sultan of Brunei, preyed on them both. James Brooke became embroiled in the local politics and intrigue, and, to cut a long story short, the Sultan of Brunei gave him the territory round Kuching to govern. And that is how he came to be the Rajah of Sarawak. Later, much more territory was added to his possessions, until Sarawak grew to its present size.

'He was fair and just and treated all men alike. That is why the natives of the place accepted him. He gave them justice which they had never had before. He built a lovely house by the river—which you saw as you left the ship—and from there he governed the whole of his wild country which included among its difficult population men whose fondest love was head-hunting and others who spent all of their days plundering and pirating. He put down the head-hunters and he vanquished the pirates. The country was pacified and made safe for trade. The people prospered and were happy.

'Then, after the war, after Sarawak was liberated from the Japanese, the present Rajah saw that the amount of capital required to develop so large an area, that it might keep pace, economically, with its neighbours, was beyond his means. So he handed Sarawak over to the British Government who have carried on the Rajah's rule in much the same way as he himself had exercised it. And that very briefly is the story of the Rajahs.'

Jennie and Simon thought it a wonderful story, rather like something out of a book of fairy stories. Simon could not help feeling that he, too, would rather care to be a White Rajah. He became one, that night, but only in his dreams, and so vigorously did he fight the head-hunters that he brought down the mosquito net on top of him and nearly died of suffocation.

The highlight of their stay in Sarawak was a visit to a Dyak Long-House. The children travelled in a motor launch with Mr Dumont for miles up river, past pepper plantations and jungle, until they came to a cleared area of ground on the bank of the river. Here they went ashore and walked towards a quite enormous wooden house—a Long-House as it is called in Sarawak. The whole party was met between the house and the

river by beautiful young ladies, the daughters of the local chief, who wore nothing above their waists except the flowers in their hair, which was brushed sleekly back from their foreheads.

The whole house was built on stilts because of the damp and to keep out animals and insects, so that it was necessary to mount a precarious ladder in order to enter it. The first thing that the children were told when they went inside the house was that no less than two hundred Dyaks lived in it. And no wonder, the children thought, for it was of truly amazing length. It appeared to be divided into two main parts, the dividing line running down the centre, lengthways. In the rear half were individual rooms, and the children learned that each family living in the Long-House had a room to itself. Behind each room was a kitchen where the family meals were prepared. Leading upwards out of each room was a ladder to the loft where the rice belonging to each family was stored since, like all Eastern people, rice formed the basis of their diet.

The other half of the house was not divided into sections at all but ran the whole length. But the children soon learned that, although there were no walls, different sections of it were put to separate uses. It was divided into the long subsidiary strips: the one nearest the middle wall was where the women did their work, the centre one was where the whole community gathered to talk and have meetings, and the strip nearest the outside wall was reserved as sleeping accommodation for guests of the community. Beyond the outside wall, but with no roof over it, was yet another strip which was largely used for drying padi before storing it away.

Jennie, of course, was charmed with everything. To her, a house in which dozens of families lived in perfect harmony, was a new conception. She had never before thought it possible. People in England considered that every family must have its own home. Some even said that if more than one family lived together they would fall out. But when she asked she was told that the Dyak families rarely fell out. 'What very nice people they must be', was her conclusion.

They stayed all night at the Long-House and ate the Dyak

food, consisting mainly of sticky rice and fish—which the children did not like very much—and slept on the soft mats provided on the guests' private strip on the wide enclosed veranda. That evening the girls danced for them and they played hilarious games of blind man's buff. It had been a wonderful day, and when it was time to leave on the following morning, in order to return to Kuching, they would very much have preferred to stay in the Long-House by the river.

The same motor launch brought them back with Mr Dumont. Their parents were waiting for them at the Rest House and it took the children a long time to tell their mother and father about all that they had seen and done while they had been away.

The following day they boarded the *Sea Horse* again, bound for their last port of call before they returned to Singapore—Djakarta in Java.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

GOOD-BYE TO THE CHINA SEA

ALTHOUGH the journey from Kuching to Djakarta is not so long as from Hongkong to Kuching it took the *Sea Horse* four days' hard steaming to get there. It was not really necessary for Mr Scott to go to Djakarta at all, but since the *Sea Horse* was travelling from Kuching to Singapore, via Djakarta, they thought they may as well stay with the trusty little ship that had brought them so far.

Simon and Jennie spent much of their time on this part of the journey writing up their diaries, trying to put down their impressions while they were still fresh in their minds. It was on the second day out that all the excitement occurred. Both Simon and Jennie were on the bridge at the time, waiting a few moments before going below for their tea. It was Simon who first saw the aircraft, low on the horizon to the north.

'Look', he shouted, 'there's smoke coming from that aeroplane.'

The others on the bridge looked into the sky and Mr Franklin located the aircraft in his glasses.

'It's in trouble', he said.

The little party on the bridge watched in silence as the aircraft came towards them, leaving a black trail of smoke behind it. Suddenly it lost height alarmingly and swooped towards the water. Just as it was about to hit the waves it seemed momentarily to recover. Then its nose came up and its belly ploughed into the water and the whole aircraft disappeared in a cloud of spray.

'Hard a starboard', cried Mr Franklin down the voice pipe.

Mr Franklin then rang the telegraph for full speed ahead. The bell clanged in acknowledgment. As the *Sea Horse* came round in a broad circle the engines began to thump alarmingly as Billy McDermott strove to get every revolution possible from them. The aircraft had come to rest in the water two or three miles away and now that the spray had settled the watchers on the bridge could see one wing projecting steeply from the water. The remainder of the aircraft seemed to have gone under already.

'There's their dinghy', shouted Jennie, 'and I can see people swimming in the water.' As they drew nearer they could see perhaps a dozen people splashing about in the water and some of them had been able to reach the dinghy and climb inside.

The ship had now almost come round to the direction of the aircraft.

'Midships', called Mr Franklin into the voice pipe.

He rang slow ahead on the telegraph and then stopped the engines altogether. There was an uncanny silence in the ship as soon as the engines stopped and the children could hear the cries of the people in the water.

Mr Franklin gave the necessary orders for putting out the lifeboat.

'Can we go with the lifeboat?' asked Simon.

'I'm afraid not. There isn't room', he replied.

The lifeboat was slipped and dropped into the water and as the crew pulled away the aircraft disappeared completely. The coxswain steered the boat towards the rubber dinghy and one of the people in the dinghy passed him a rope which he made fast to the stern of the lifeboat. Then with the dinghy in tow he steered the boat from one person to another. Eventually, watched closely by almost every one aboard the *Sea Horse*, the lifeboat picked up sixteen people, and brought them alongside. A scrambling net had been let down in the meantime and the rescued people came on board. From then on the ship was very crowded and Simon and Jennie took to sleeping on deck, letting an elderly man and his wife have their cabin.

It afterwards transpired that the aircraft had developed engine trouble and was flying south in the hope of sighting land before ditching. But it had struggled only as far as the *Sea Horse* which, providentially, had been in its path. The pilot had made a perfect job of the ditching. No one was injured beyond a few bruises and no one had been lost. But they would not have lived very long in the water had the *Sea Horse* not been handy. The sun is too hot for unprotected heads, and there are many sharks only too pleased to find a tasty human dinner.

Eventually the overcrowded ship arrived off Tanjong Priok, the port of Djakarta, which lies a little way inland in Java. It was scheduled to stay there for twelve hours only, so the Scotts

were able to take nothing more than a hurried ride into the town and back again. They hired a car and sped along the straight road to Djakarta which, before Indonesia became independent, was known as Batavia. Mr Scott told them something of the country:

'Long, long ago, Java was the centre of a great empire called Majapahit. Majapahit was the most powerful force in the whole of South-East Asia. Its armies went far and wide, and one of them, centuries ago, razed the ancient city of Singapura to the ground. I haven't told you that before, have I? Although Raffles found a deserted island when he first arrived at Singapore it is generally agreed that many hundreds of years before him a city flourished on the site on which the present city stands. Majapahit destroyed it and killed all the people in it so that the ground ran red with blood. That, they say, is why the soil of Singapore is still red!

'So, you see, Java was an important place long before the Dutch came here. Java was the Dutch sphere of influence. The British developed in Malaya, while the Dutch developed in Java and Sumatra. The Dutchmen who came here handled almost the whole of Java's trade, and when it is remembered that seventy million people live in Java you will have some idea of how extensive that trade was. It seems extraordinary, does it not, that the little country of Holland could control and hold in subjection this whole vast land? But that, you will find, has been the keynote of British imperialism too—millions and millions of people controlled by a few devoted men.

'The Dutch built Batavia in the same way as the British built Singapore, although the town existed before the Dutch took it over. They built the fine buildings which you see now, and the lovely houses, so distinctly Dutch. They laid down roads throughout th country and built the railways. They showed the people how to get better crops and they introduced proper laws. Why, then, did the people throw them out? The answer to that is that no people likes to be ruled by another. They usually prefer their own inefficient form of government to the efficient government of a foreign power. And no government in the world is quite so inefficient as the present government of this country. Just compare this city now with Singapore!

It is dead! The people are poor. Trade is at a standstill. But, it seems, they prefer it that way.'

'What do they grow here?' asked Simon.

'Java is an incredibly rich country, really. Great quantities of rice are grown—although the people eat all that it produces. There is none left over for export. They grow rubber, as we do in Malaya, and spices and tea and coffee and sugar—all sorts of things. Java is a great agricultural country. That is why it is able to carry on with such a useless government. Most of the people work on the land, and if the soil continues to produce enough to feed them they are largely content.'

In the main street of Djakarta they found a few large western-style hotels and a number of large shops. But they were empty and deserted. The town was dirty and dilapidated, slowly rotting away. It was a pitiful sight when one thought of Singapore.

They drove back to the ship in the evening and the air was full of fireflies, darting about in the air over the canal like thousands of lighted cigarettes. The ship sailed almost as soon as they were aboard and the children waved to a land that had more people in it than Britain and yet which no longer had any use for cities. The life of the people was in the countryside which Simon and Jennie, unfortunately, had not been able to see. But there was no denying the truth of Mr Franklin's statement over dinner that night.

'What do people want with towns, anyway?' he asked. 'They are usually dirty, always crowded, and people who live in them get up to all kinds of mischief. Give me the country and you can keep your town.'

In just under three and a half days the *Sea Horse* was steaming into the outer roads of Singapore. There, before them, was the familiar skyline. The children recognized as old friends the hideous Fullerton Building, standing right on the waterfront with the elegant skyscraping Bank of China just behind it. There was the clock tower of the Victoria Memorial Hall, the spire of the Cathedral and the dear old landmark of the Cathay building. They were home. They had travelled through the towns and the countryside of Malaya, through the musical-comedy state of Siam, through war-torn Indo-China, to

bustling, busy Hongkong, down to sleepy Sarawak and then to decaying Djakarta. They had been on the round trip of South-East Asia. They had described a circle round the China Sea. And now they were home with only their memories and their diaries to remind them that all these places really existed.

Perhaps, Simon and Jennie thought, they would be able to go to some of the other countries of South-East Asia the following year. Perhaps! It was something to dream about. Meanwhile there was baggage to be got ready and good-byes to be said. A boat came alongside and took them ashore and landed them at Clifford Pier. They took a taxi through the familiar streets to their home in Tanglin. Ah Han and Ah Eng were waiting for them in the shining, spotless house. Everyone was delighted to see everyone else. There was a great talking and shouting and laughing, and in no time at all tea was on the table. Simon broke into a lull in the conversation, his face long and mournful.

'I've just thought of something, Jennie', he said. 'At this time next week we'll be back at school in England.'

'Let's run away to Hongkong', answered Jennie, her mouth full of home-made cream puff.

INDEX AND PRONUNCIATIONS

It is not always possible to write the equivalent of the exact sounds of words. You should regard the pronunciations given here as a guide which will enable you to get reasonably close to those generally considered to be correct.

a as in bat	ā as in bate	å as in calm	ă as in aunt (pronounced very shortly)
e as in bet	ē as in beat	ė as in her	
i as in bit	ī as in bite	o as in cot	ō as in coat
ōō as in coo	oo as in soot	ow as in cow	
u as in but	ü, u with rounded lips, as in French *lune*		
g as in gold	s as in miss	ng as in singer	

zh, a soft sound very much like that in plea*s*ure, and as in French bon*j*our

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GLOSSARY

A Famosa (á fa-mō'za), 'The Famous', name of Albuquerque's fort in Malacca.

Baju (bá'zhōō), kind of blouse worn by Malays
Berok (be'ro), kind of monkey

Coagulum, a stage in the processing of rubber

Kampong (kam'pong), Malay village
Kris (kris), Malay knife

Ladang (la'dang), temporary forest clearing for cultivation
Latex, raw rubber

Padang (pa'dang), open space in town, or clearing on estate
Padi (pa'dē), rice plant
Pomelo (po-me'lō), fruit resembling grapefruit
Prahu (prá'hōō), Malay boat paddled by any number of men from two to forty, depending on the size

Seladang (se-la'dang), animal resembling bison

Towkay (tow-kā), Chinese business man