

# Woodsmoke and Temple Flowers

Memories of Malaya



*In memory of my dear husband  
JOHN FALCONER MA MCS  
who so enriched my life.*

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Memories of Malaya

by Jean Falconer



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THE MALAYAN PENINSULA

## BACKGROUND

Britain's involvement in Malaya began in the eighteenth century when there was keen rivalry for trade in the East, particularly between the British and the Dutch, British trading being the prerogative of the East India Company.

### THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

The East India Company was established in 1600 by charter from Queen Elizabeth I to a company of London merchant adventurers, and had its rival in the newly formed Dutch East India Company. It was about this time that the British discovered there was very rich trade to be followed with India, so around the coast of India they opened small trading posts known as 'factories'. The East India 'Merchantmen' brought English goods to the posts and returned with exotic cargoes such as silks and spices. Gradually these trading posts assumed considerably greater importance. The Mogul Empire was breaking up, the Mogul Emperor losing power over his provincial Governors. Some of these endeavoured to destroy the British trading posts, others turned to them for support. The officers in charge of these posts were often rewarded for their support with land, and with the right to collect taxes and to govern territories. Thus the power of the East India Company expanded, eventually requiring an army to protect British interests on land and a navy to protect their merchant ships. This growing power culminated in the appointment of an English Governor-General, ruling over millions of people in India and over the Company's Eastern trading posts – principally Penang and Bencoolen – as well.

### PENANG

In 1786 Francis Light, a Captain of one of the trading ships, discovered an ideal site for the East India Company's headquarters, where British warships could refit. This was the uninhabited island of Penang. On behalf of the East India Company he negotiated a lease of the island from the Sultan of Kedah, a condition of the lease being that Britain would protect the State of Kedah if Siam should attack it. Penang then became a Presidency of India like Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. That represented Britain's debut into Malaya.

### MALACCA

Malacca came into the British orbit much later. Its history is a long, interesting and turbulent one.

From the archives of the Malacca Historical Society comes the record that after the destruction of Singapore as a Settlement by an invasion from the Javanese Empire in 1377, Malays in large numbers took refuge in Malacca, creating the nucleus of its future importance.

Legend has it that the actual foundation of the town and its name originated with Rajah Iskander Shah. He was hunting one day when one of his dogs attacked a mouse deer. The deer retaliated and drove the dog into the sea. So

impressed was he by the small creature's courage that he regarded it as a good omen and decided to build a township right there. He named the place after the tree under which he stood. Still today the crest of the Municipality and the Fort is of the malacca tree and the mouse deer. It was inevitable that Malacca's natural advantages would from the beginning attract trade. As early as 1409 there was exchange of gifts and trade between the Chinese Emperor and the Sultan of Malacca, and peaceful trading also with India, Arabia and Java until the Portuguese conquest.

In 1511 the Portuguese under Albuquerque attacked and defeated the Malays who, though they fought bravely, were overcome by more modern weapons than their own. However, life was not easy for the Portuguese. For the next twenty years they were persistently harried by the Peninsular Malays, but after the death of their leader in 1525 trading agreements with local chiefs brought peace, and prosperity returned.

With the Portuguese conquest the Sultan of Malacca with his followers fled to Johore where he became acknowledged as Sultan of Johore. For 130 years the Portuguese held Malacca until the arrival of Dutch and British ships in Eastern waters, coinciding with the waning power of the Portuguese there, spelt a change of fortune.

In 1641 the Dutch, aided by native *prahus* provided by the Sultan of Johore, finally defeated the Portuguese after battles by sea and land, with siege, disease and enormous casualties on both side. (The Malays aided the conquest of the Portuguese because of their efforts to supplant the Muslim religion with Christianity.) Despite the cost of victory Malacca as a trading post never thrived under the Dutch. It did however give them greater control of the Straits – the Spice Route – which was probably their main objective.

The Dutch, in turn, were not left in peace. Throughout the eighteenth century Malacca was periodically attacked by raiding forces of Bugis (an aggressive people from Celebes). In 1784 it was surrounded on all sides, by Bugis from the north and from the south by Rajah Haji Haji's forces which came from Rhiow. For three months Malacca was besieged. Ultimately Rajah Haji was killed and the Bugis's fleet was destroyed. After that Malacca slipped into relative insignificance.

During the Napoleonic war the Netherlands were occupied by the French army and Napoleon was using the Dutch fleet and the Dutch colonies in the war against Britain and her allies. So in 1795, as a precautionary measure, a small British squadron was sent to Malacca where, after a token resistance, the Dutch surrendered. Dutch officials were retained, however, under the supervision of a British Resident.

In 1810 the Governor General of India decided to take Java from the Dutch and in 1811 the conquest was completed. But as the Dutch were not enemies of the British it was agreed to return Java and Malacca to them after Napoleon's defeat. They resumed possession in 1819. Meanwhile Britain had acquired the island of Singapore, thus threatening the virtual Dutch hegemony over the Straits. With Penang in the north and Singapore in the south Malacca was isolated from all the main centres of the Dutch Indies. The Dutch reaction was

extremely aggressive, to the extent of sending an attacking force intent on taking Singapore. It was driven back before reaching the island.

It became obvious that such rivalry between the two powers leading to probable conflict could only be damaging to both, so negotiations were entered into in Europe between the British and the Dutch Governments for an exchange of territories. The town and fort of Malacca were ceded to Britain and Bencoolen transferred to the Netherlands. This agreement was ratified by the Treaty of London in 1824. It suited both parties, Bencoolen being in primarily Dutch territory; Malacca completing the line of British posts.

## SINGAPORE

Twice in its history Singapore had had an established city. The first was in 1150 when an Indian Maharajah built his palace there and ruled over his people until from Java came aggressive forces which destroyed the entire settlement. To save it returning to jungle some of the former population rebuilt the city, only to see it once more destroyed, this time by marauders from Siam. By 1390 Singapore had surrendered to the jungle. In 1811 some life returned to the island with the arrival of the eldest son of the Sultan of Johore, deposed through the influence of the Bugis in favour of one of their own so-called princes. These people at the end of the seventeenth century had migrated in great numbers from Celebes and settled in Johore. Through intrigue and chicanery they had insinuated themselves so powerfully into the Sultan's court as to interfere with the rightful succession. After fleeing, this deposed son, now called the Temenggong, built a village at the mouth of the Singapore river, peopling it with his followers from Johore.

Apart from this small Settlement Singapore was primarily a swamp; a lair of pirates and occupied by a few Malay fishermen.

In 1819 Sir Stamford Raffles, then Lieutenant Governor of Bencoolen, suggested to the East India Company government that the best way to circumvent the aggressively exclusive policy of the Dutch in the Straits of Malacca would be to acquire the island of Singapore. This proposal was put to the Temenggong and subsequently a Treaty of Friendship was agreed on conditions of payment of 5,000 Spanish dollars a year and an outright payment of 3,000 Spanish dollars. This acquisition gave the East India Company undeniable freedom of the Straits.

Quite rapidly the development of Singapore brought people of many races to trade there and it was declared a free port. Trade with the mainland of Malaya, however, was delayed until order was established there under British influence and the obstructive control of the East India Company was released.

Representations to the British Government from all commercial quarters and from the Settlements' governors to change the status quo could not longer be ignored. In 1867 authority was transferred to the Colonial Office, and Penang, Malacca and Singapore (with Labuan, Christmas Island and the Cocos Keeling Islands) were called the Crown Colony of the Straits Settlements.

Soon after, the first Governor, Colonel (later Sir) Harry Ord was appointed. He adhered strictly to the edict of non-interference in Malaya although he reported to the Colonial Office the chaos in Malaya that was preventing trade there. The next Governor, Sir Andrew Clark (1873) took matters into his own hands and visited several Malay Sultans with the result that within a year three of them had agreed to his suggestion that they accept a British Resident and British protection, to establish order for them in their States and to continue sound administration.

The monumental success of Singapore needs no emphasis – a success beyond imagining when it was established.

## MALAYA BECOMES A NATION

The strictly imposed policy of the British Government/East India Company in relation to its Straits territories had been one of isolation from the affairs of Malaya.

However, with the growth of investments in the Straits Settlements – by British, Chinese and, to a lesser extent, Indian concerns – this policy became untenable. There was anarchy in the Malay States. Coastal and river piracy by Malays and Chinese was rife; there was robbery and violence on land. And still in the river valleys fighting between Malay Chiefs and their factions went on as it had done for hundreds of years, destroying farms and embroiling Chinese miners with the consequent abandonment of mines. Then there was serious conflict between Chinese clans in the Larut district of Perak threatening to spread to Penang. Turmoil which threatened the well-being of British citizens who simply wished to trade could no longer be tolerated. For years commercial concerns in the Settlements had been bringing pressure to bear on the Colonial Office to relax its policy, pointing out that the Dutch and the French, among others, were extending their trade into the hinterland beyond Penang. The fighting in the Larut district was so serious that the British Government was compelled to take action. As a result, the Sultan of Perak was approached in 1874 to enter into a Treaty with the British Government whereby he agreed *inter alia* to accept a British officer to be called a Resident and to act upon his advice in all matters other than those concerning the Muslim religion and Malay customs. Some of the Perak Royals were indeed taken to England as guests to witness at first hand how well British administration succeeded. On returning they were able to assure their people that there was much to be gained by the acceptance of British administration and nothing to fear. The benefits of sound government soon became apparent to other Sultans who one by one requested the British Government for similar treaties and the services of a resident Adviser. (The last to enter into a treaty was Johore in 1914.)

Prior to the establishment of good order the borders of 'States' were not securely held. People were loyal only to their Chiefs, whose income was derived largely from the Chinese farmers in their territories (and sometimes from the spoils of piracy). Money for their local skirmishes was raised *ad hoc*, often being insufficient to pay their soldiers who then rampaged through the

country. But by 1895 with the blessing of good government peace, prosperity and order reigned throughout Malaya. As a consequence the Sultans gained in wealth, dignity and political maturity and the states a cohesion which welded Malaya into a proud nation.

## THE MALAYAN CIVIL SERVICE

Between 1914 and 1920 the British Administrative Service cadres then established in every State were consolidated and designated the Malayan Civil Service.

Members of the Service were men of special qualities. To be considered for appointment in the first place the young applicant had qualified through an Empire-wide competitive examination and was then assessed for personal qualities by a senior committee. If chosen he entered the Service as a cadet, to specialise in Malay, Chinese or Tamil. In the latter cases he was sent to the respective country to learn the language. Otherwise a guru was assigned to him and within two years he was required to be fluent in Malay, be able to read and write Jawi (the classic Malay script – an offshoot of Arabic) and to pass an examination in the appropriate law. With time, experience and ability the MCS man graduated through the ranks of seniority, some naturally achieving more distinction than others: from Cadet, through Passed Cadet, Assistant District Officer or Assistant Adviser, District Officer, Deputy Commissioner, to the most senior – Resident Commissioner or British Adviser.

There were then Administerial Divisions of Malaya: Singapore, Penang and Malacca were the Straits Settlements – British colonies, the head of which was the Governor of Singapore; the rest of Malaya was a Protectorate under the control of the British Government and consisted of Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Pahang and Perak which joined to make up the Federated Malay States with a Chief Secretary in Kuala Lumpur; and the others – Johore, Kelantan, Kedah and Perlis – referred to as the Unfederated States.

Every State had 'Districts' – the number according to the size of the State. Each District was administered by a District Officer – a member of the Malayan Civil Service, usually British, with sometimes an Assistant or Assistants who could be British or Malay.

In each of the States there was a Sultan who, under treaty with Britain, accepted a British Adviser whose advice would be sought and acted upon except on matters of Muslim religion or Malay customs. There being no Sultan in the Straits Settlements of Penang and Malacca, the head of administration there was called the Resident Commissioner. Singapore housed the Secretariat.

This was a benign form of Government. At every level there was provision directly or indirectly for consultation with the people. Corruption was unknown; no member of the British Administration could have had a personal 'axe to grind'; there was no nepotism; no political involvement to distract or seduce him from making decisions designed solely in the best interests of the country and its people.

## OTHER GOVERNMENT SERVICES

British officers to head all other branches of Government services were all meticulously selected in Britain and all have an honourable record.

## THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

Almost without exception all members of the British Establishment remained in Malaya during the Japanese war; many joined the fighting forces; many lost their lives. Almost without exception all who survived returned to Malaya as soon as health permitted after the war, eager to help heal the scars of the Japanese occupation.

Before the Japanese invasion in 1941 Malaya was a beautiful, peaceful and prosperous country where no income tax was necessary and where various races lived in harmony. People seemed relaxed and happy; hospital treatment for the sick was free and sufficient; unemployment was apparently not a problem.

The Japanese brought ruin to the economy, misery into every aspect of peoples' lives. Oppression, tyranny, general suffering and neglect was apparently their concept of the promised 'Co-Prosperity-Sphere'.

## THE AFTERMATH

When the Japanese capitulated, the hiatus created (the nearest Allied forces being a thousand miles away) gave rise to the equally brutal attempt by the Chinese Communists emerging from the jungle, to take control of Malaya.

That was quelled by the British Military Administration standing in for regular MCS and police officers on recuperative leave. But in 1948 these same Communists, now augmented by alien Chinese from their home-land, struck again. The 'Emergency', as it was to be called, launched terrorism throughout the country which took altogether nearly twenty years to root out entirely.

The cost, materially, and in human suffering, of these two disasters was incalculable.

## INTRODUCTION

'Chuck it,' he said,  
'and come back to Malaya with me.'  
My head spun:  
'Yes, John, I think I could.'

I met my husband when he came to Sydney on leave from Malaya in 1941. We were married in September and I returned to Malaya with him, both of us believing, in our happiness, that the war would not spread so far. Fortunately we did not imagine how very near it was and that within only four months we would be parted so drastically.

Faithfully I wrote in detail to my parents while there; after the war to mother alone, as my father had died. She kept all my letters.

Following are extracts from those letters, from letters my husband John wrote to me on occasions when I was absent from Malaya; diary extracts and relevant reminiscences including his experiences of living under the Japanese – a chronicle encapsulating a decade of historical events there; the Colonial ambience of the time shortly before Independence; the personal and official life of a top civil servant and his Mem Besar.



Kuala Lumpur, 2.10.1941

My Dears,

You will have received our telegram and know that all is well. I am thrilled with everything and we are so blissfully happy that I am almost afraid such perfection is too much. The one cloud over my Eden is the ever-present awareness of the sadness and difficulties in the family that I left behind. All I can do is to let you share, as far as letters will convey, this experience of living in Malaya.

How you would love it all. Just now there were fire-flies in the garden: tiny sparks of light shimmering in the trees; and heavenly scents from starry white blossoms. Night came suddenly before 7.00 like pulling down a blind almost, and soon a night-jar began dropping first one shoe then the other. It is referred to as the 'toc-toc' because of the sound it makes. We are staying with John's Assistant and his wife – another Australian – until the house we are to occupy is ready. Tea was served in the garden under a spreading tree. There were exotic fruits with it. The trim Chinese servant wears a crisp white jacket buttoned to the neck, white starched trousers and black canvas slippers. The day was still hot then but by now the air is balmy.

It seems longer than just a week since we left Sydney. The sea-plane took off from Rose Bay soon after 7.00 a.m. and as it flew over the harbour I looked towards our house hoping one of you would recognise it and wave us off. It is a pleasant way to travel; the plane makes an early start and comes down very early in the afternoon. Landing on the water and particularly when lifting off there is a delightful feathering of the water against the windows. It is complete with a promenade deck, and tables for playing bridge. At each hotel our bags had preceded us as if by osmosis and were whisked away with us at 7.00 or earlier each morning.

We sent you a card from Townsville; Darwin was next. There is little one can say about the place except that it all looks extemporaneous. The 'hotel' probably went up in a day or two – all very basic. And everywhere is flat, with small tin-roofed ugly suburban houses.

Flying over the Barrier Reef was certainly the most scenic part of our journey: it looks from the air like an immense collection of uncut opals.

At Sourabaya the real excitement began. It was blazing hot when we arrived but our 'Arabian Nights' hotel was gloriously cool – and soooo romantic-looking. Later we took a gharry ride, and in a row of little white houses saw one proudly bearing the name, in English, 'Always Sunshine'. Indeed! Of course, it is a distinctly Oriental city, teeming with rickshas; bicycles all tinkling madly; noisy little motor cars; and seething with humanity in various forms of dress: sarong with or without shirt worn tail in or tail out; shirt and trousers long or short; just trousers – for the very young, just shirt! There were fewer women to be seen but again, their dress varied from European style to Chinese, to long sarong with rather gauzy little jacket. The shops would make your eyes pop with the variety and mystery of their merchandise.

We reached Singapore at about 1.00 p.m. and went to stay with John's friends. After tea they drove us to the Botanic Gardens which as you can imagine are

wonderfully lush and green, first to pay our respects to the MONKEYS. What fun! There were about forty of them – ordinary little brown monkeys that live in the trees there and come down to welcome visitors. Some are just kid monkeys, some greedy old-men monkeys; some are nursing mums clutching their babies to their hairy chests. They climb on the cars, chatter and scamper round you and take peanuts out of your hand. Most are perfect little ladies and gentlemen. At night after dinner we went to an amusement place called The Happy World. There were Chinese Opera, boxing matches, stalls and side shows and Chinese taxi-dancers partnering soldiers. The term 'taxi' means, I suppose, that they are hired as partners, for a fee. The girls were wearing their native costume of tunic and trousers, mostly, but some have adopted European dress and have their hair permed, which spoils them. While watching the Chinese Opera which is all prescribed traditional actions, I asked the others 'What does she mean by that?' (the actress was moving her hands one over the other in front of her). 'Oh,' explained a Chinese gentleman standing beside me, 'She is thinking for a plan!'

On Saturday we lunched with the Bells at Raffles Hotel – perhaps the most celebrated hotel in the East, and always depicted with its picturesque travellers' palms. John and James had *rijstaffel*, one of the exotic dishes of this part of the world. Rice comes first, then follows a procession of about twelve waiters each bearing a dish of something different. On the plate would finally be a pile of food sufficient to satiate even the most enthusiastic gourmand. Lunch is 'tiffin', by the way. Singapore is somewhat the same type of city as Colombo: similar questionable smells; fascinating shops; carts drawn by oxen; rickshas rubbing shoulders with posh cars, their bells 'panging'; people in the various garbs of their several nationalities; nobody hurrying – except the running ricksha pullers – but there is a continuous flow of people and sound.

At night the temperature is comfortable enough but in a way that suggests that it will be up again to get you quite early in the morning. Everyone who can rests from about 2.00 until 4.00 but offices and shops remain open – there is no general siesta.

### *Kuala Lumpur, 9.10.41*

We moved into our house here a few days ago. We were greeted by the house-boy who straight away commenced speaking to John. 'What a strange language,' I remarked, 'Pim, pom, pin pong.' 'That's not the language,' John said, 'The Boy was saying he'd have to go and buy some VIM but couldn't quite remember the name of the stuff!'

This is a very large house in spacious grounds that will keep a gardener or two busy all the time. Big ceiling fans are in all the rooms and are certainly effective.

Here we're only a few miles from Kuala Lumpur city; it is rather similar to Singapore but on a smaller scale. Banks and Government offices are designed in a somewhat oriental style and are usually white.

I do so want to describe everything but it's difficult to know where to begin. Perhaps I'll get around it by going through one representative day of our life: at 7.00 the Boy brings tea to our bedroom – tea and fruit. He gathers up our mosquito curtain and in a very deft way throws it over the canopy part. This curtain net falls

from a square frame over the beds so that it forms four walls around. We get up at about 7.45. The gardener (*kbun*) is already at work with his scythe on the lawn. There is a bathroom and a dressing room for each of us so John and I are not in each other's way. At about 8.30 he calls 'Boy!' who answers 'Tuan!' John says 'Makan!' (food), Boy replies 'Baik, Tuan' (Right, Master). He announces when breakfast is ready, with 'Makan siap', and down we go. There are many kinds of fruit here that you and I had never seen or heard of in Australia, but I don't as yet know even their names. After breakfast the cook presents himself to be given instructions for the day's lunch and dinner, and to submit his little cash book with an account for the previous day's purchases – and to get a further cash advance if necessary.

Our driver (*syce*), named Din, wears a white uniform and the Muslim cap (*songkok*) of black velvet. He drives John off at about 9.00. The office is about two miles from the house. John is Public Trustee. After he goes I gather some flowers for the house – a bunch of orchids (this kind are as ordinary here as geraniums are there), canna lilies, bougainvillia, and some others I cannot name.

I love the way one takes a bath in this old house. The bathrooms have flagged sloping floors and are equipped with enormous 'Ali Baba' stone jars called 'tongs' which the *tukang ayer* keeps filled with water. This remains remarkably cool, and with the aid of a dipper you splash the water all over with as much abandon as you wish (*ayer* is Malay for water, *tukang* is used for any workman or artisan).

Bed-making is very simple and sensible; there is an undersheet of course, but the covering – usually a brushed cotton sheet – is folded and left loose across the foot end of the bed, folded in such a way as makes it easy to pull over the body if one needs it. Many people also have what is termed a 'dutch wife'. This is a small bolster which is held between the knees in bed, I suppose it is to keep one hot limb off the other.

About laundry: the boy or his wife washes our personal clothes; house and bed linen are collected by a *dhobi* – and returned next day. Whether their system is to bash the things on stones to get them clean, as is done in India, I have not asked. I only know that the laundry comes back snowy-white and fresh-smelling. Our boy does the ironing . . . it is an *electric* iron – not a hot stone!

This morning I went to a little tea party. One goes everywhere by car: there is no suitable public transport for us who must uphold the good old British prestige!! There are funny little buses that the locals use.

The shops we patronise have Asian or Eurasian assistants, almost entirely. They all speak English, of course. There are three fair-sized stores in Kuala Lumpur. In addition, as you can imagine, there are others owned by Chinese and Indians – the latter more in the nature of drapery; the Chinese, of greater variety. The sort that would interest us are grouped mainly in one street and they are filled with silk undies, embroidery of the Chinese kind, and trinkets galore.

There aren't rows of houses in the way familiar to us. Most are set in large grounds, are well back off the road and have pleasant gardens, no fences. The roads seem very good. There are trees and palms, as you would imagine, wherever the eye can reach. Vegetation is lush and abundant and one hears many birds. Here, we're not far from 'the hills'. We have a view of Fraser's Hill in the distance. Nearby is a tin mine (dredge) where we can see the little trucks running up and

down and hear the noise as they are emptied out. I love to watch the activity there. Chinese coolie women are permitted to collect the tin 'tailings' from the stream, for their own profit. They are forever carrying tin dishes back and forth, protected from the sun by the typical pointed straw hat worn over a white head cloth that comes over either side of the face and under the chin. And their blue tunics have long sleeves that end in deep points covering the backs of the hands.

John always comes home to lunch. It is not easy to get raw salads. They're not considered safe to eat unless bought at the Cold Storage, the Chinese method of fertilising being 'not quite nice'. His day ends at about 4.30.

At 5.00 we have tea – with fruit. I am often reminded of Ron's joke about 'a cup of hot tea and a cold orange' – the epitome of an incongruous mix – yet the common thing here. After tea we go for a drive, or walk; I'm in favour of walking. Yesterday afternoon we drove to the Botanical Gardens. It was really lovely. The Resident's house is up on a hill overlooking the Gardens. The Resident is, as far as I can gather, the 'Lord High Executioner' of the State. We signed the 'book' which is by way of letting him know that we are open to invitations! There are not so many kinds of exotic flowers as one would expect to find. The variety and vigour of palms is certainly remarkable, but most of the flowers we have in Australia. Frangipanni (temple-flowers people call them) is everywhere and its scent pervasive, and also a somewhat similar tree with starry-white blossoms which fall and cover the ground beneath.

The Chinese have the monopoly of the ricksha trade and I'm sure the others are quite happy to let them have it! They wear a pointed straw hat, butcher blue jacket and half-way trousers; usually bare feet – and their chests are so hollow they worry me. There are no pigtailed to be seen except on women who mostly wear the national costume of tunic and trousers – amahs in particular, white tunic and black trousers. Bound feet are few indeed. Women do a lot of manual work (Chinese and Tamils – not Malays); one sees them in the afternoon returning from labouring jobs, some carrying heavy loads on their shoulders. They have countless children.

The piano hasn't arrived yet, and the radiogram got somewhat damaged in transit so often we are without other entertainment than each other's company. We have quite a lot of laughs, however; John can be so crazy!!

We are not troubled by flies and even mosquitoes are relatively few. There are funny little lizards called *chichaks* (pronounced 'chee-cha') which come into the house in the evening to feed on moths and insects attracted by the lights. They make a kind of kissing sound; their bodies are semi-transparent, so you can see the contents. Another night visitor – but not in the house – is the bird I mentioned earlier, the *toc-toc* which keeps up its 'tocking' for hours and is said to drive some bad sleepers neurotic for you can never tell how many tocks it will drop.

#### *Kuala Lumpur, 17.10.41*

The climate is treating me quite well, though the fairly consistent sun and heat are somewhat tiresome. But we do get a good heavy shower of rain almost daily. In fact, rain poured down for hours yesterday afternoon and last night and there are no half-measures – the sky just gives its all, to the accompaniment of salvos of thunder and satanic flashes of lightning. While it was performing yesterday

afternoon John came home early because he thought 'I might be frightened'! How mistaken – I revel in it, as you know. But wasn't he sweet!

We're getting the house in order – such a fine old tropical house, so large it presents certain difficulties. The rooms are beautifully lofty and spacious, there are wide verandahs with 'chicks' (bamboo blinds), an enormous flagged entrance hall, a drive around three sides of the house, and on one side quite a beauty chorus of sumptuous jacaranda trees. Right now they and the grass underneath them are stippled with lilac.

I love to look down on the activities at the tin-dredge a little beyond. Often there is a funeral there, generally complete with professional mourners who wail hideously from beneath the sacks thrown over their heads, and who are accompanied by bands which, in their ignorance of the accompanying words, sometimes play most inappropriate popular Western tunes. I was told that on an occasion when a Chinese widow had arranged a slap-up send-off for her dearly beloved, the musical elegy was 'A tisket, a tasket, I've lost my yellow basket'. I'd like to believe it – but it could easily be true.

There have been two morning tea-parties this week – it is a popular notion here. The women take their knitting or sewing along and we talk for a couple of hours – very pleasant and innocuous (not a bit like 'Rain' or 'The Letter') – but not my 'cup of tea' exactly. (Please excuse!) Once a week would be quite enough, anyhow. Yes it is a little different from what I had envisaged; I suppose I imagined a more Somerset Maugham atmosphere, more 'jungly' and enclosed and somewhat redolent of mystery. Anyhow I find it all lovely, stimulating, altogether so agreeable to me that it seems to wrap me around. There is so much to write about, and I feel so very fortunate that all this has been given to me. I have to remind myself that I am not on holiday but am to live here, I hope, for a long time.

And now I am to go and have my hair shampooed by my loving husband who insists on performing this particular service. He sends his love to you all, as indeed do I.

*Kuala Lumpur, 23.10.41*

Today is the third holiday this week: Monday, Chinese; yesterday and today, Muslim celebrations.

The rain is so dense just now that it obscures everything beyond. On most afternoons the clouds open. Often it doesn't just fall, but 'plunges' – and then it looks to me like a great wall of ripple glass. It comes suddenly: you can smell it coming. And not even those 'mad dogs and Englishmen', who are said to go out in the midday sun, brave this sort of deluge if they can avoid it.

We have a friend of John's staying with us. He arrived for dinner last night and gave me an excuse for using the very beautiful table linen we regard as your gift. It is of very heavy handmade lace, ecru colour. John has the most delightful coffee set of Satsuma – I mention that because I know how you love Satsuma.

Perhaps Malaya is the last bastion of one old-fashioned genteel British custom – the calling card. You call on newly-arrived couples, and just from time to time on your friends, dropping your card into the box provided outside the house – or going into the hall if necessary. It is 'not done' to send your *syce* on this errand, but

occasionally people do so, hoping the *faux pas* will pass unobserved. Bachelors are not called on – they're just invited.

Chinese babies are adorable, as are the little Tamil and Malay children. But the Chinese in particular have such quaint wee faces. Many have their heads shaven half-way up leaving just a crown of black hair on top (only the boys, I think!). Their skin is smooth as beige velvet and their eyes are like brown leaves. Mostly they have pretty noses and well-shaped mouths, and trim little bodies. I can imagine how our children would enjoy them. I'd love to steal a fat one and send it down.

I am having a couple of morning dresses made by a Chinese dressmaker here. Her charges are regarded as rather high, and that is \$5, equal to 11s. 8d. sterling !!! Probably most of her work is done for European women, as I believe Chinese women – except more monied ones – sew for themselves and their children, and are very competent. Sewing machines are much in evidence just inside shop-house doors – and sometimes on the pavement which is the lady's workroom – and much else besides. The children play there, and the poor scratching dogs take cover there from the sun. The gutter is another chosen place – but for other purposes I won't mention.

Last night we gave a dinner party. We had guinea fowl, peas and carrots, artichoke hearts with white sauce (tinned artichokes of course) etc., preceded by prawn cocktails. I had to make the sauce for these because Cookie (bone-head) didn't know how. It was so funny: Mem hadn't done anything like that before so I think something like black magic was expected. As you know, in making such dishes, as with my oyster cocktail, the recipe is very much 'out of my head'. Anyhow I had Cookie prepare milk for the basic white sauce, then Mem swept out to the kitchen to perform. Not only the cook but all his family were there goggling. I thickened the mixture and told Cookie to continue stirring, then – me all over – I forgot about it. It must have been quite ten minutes later that he came upstairs with his little saucepan and a worried look – so I descended to the nether regions and, to save 'honourable face', I thought I would add the condiments in private, so that I could taste without giving bad example. But I couldn't get away with it; although I carried the saucepan into the pantry both the cook and the boy followed, to watch. What a job I had trying to look professional – and keep a straight face at the same time. So I measured out what I guessed to be right amounts of tomato and chilli sauces, dashed in a soupçon of lime juice – stirred in a spot of tinned cream (can't get fresh) – and hoped for the best while 'stirring briskly' as they say in recipe books. In the afternoon, while the servants were having their rest, I quietly padded down to the frig and tasted. The flavour was quite good. Now I must try to remember the quantities instead of 'add and taste' all the time, as I usually do.

We used our lovely new lace table mats and runner and I decorated the table with a great mass of orchids in a crystal bowl.

I know just a little Malay now, though when Chinese speak it I find difficulty in understanding. By the way, when I first arrived John explained to the cook that I did not speak Malay, to which he replied, in effect, that that wasn't a problem: he knew some English, he knew 'pudding'!

Pineapples are very plentiful, as you would realise, and so cheap: average 5 cents – that's about 1/3d., paw-paws likewise. Bananas are in abundance, too: a

bunch of the small sweet variety costs 10 cents; mangoes 20 to 30 cents a *katty* – equal to 1½ pounds. *Chiku* is a fruit slightly resembling a small smooth potato: very sweet soft flesh tasting rather like persimmon; and another I love is the pomelo which looks like an outsize green grapefruit. The flesh is coarser and sweeter than grapefruit. It is served with the skin cut right around the middle, the top half eased off to form a cap. You help yourself to the segments and the 'cap' is replaced to keep the fruit fresh until next time.

I'd so love to have my camera here so that I could show you some of the little everyday sights, how places and people look. It was very amusing one afternoon to see a team of fine young brown-skinned stalwarts playing football, with their long hair pinned up in a knot on top and the knot decorated with a comb. They were Sikhs (the comb I believe has some religious significance). The umpire, incidentally, looked somewhat like a wash-lady in a frazzle; his hair was pinned up similarly but had trailing wisps and he was very corpulent and wore his shirt hanging out over his shorts, as they all do.

How I wish I had been here in Malaya with John when he was more junior and stationed in the smaller more remote districts. He has described weekend picnics at a place called Batang Kali, years ago, when parties of friends would set off on a raft made of stout thick bamboo, poled along by two expert Malays, down the rather swift-flowing river between banks of massive jungle growth. Imagine how delightful: the heat mitigated by the draught across the water; the spreading trees providing some shade; the women sometimes holding up their Chinese umbrellas against the sun; and the only sound between snatches of happy conversation, those of the raft's motion and the voices of the small creatures in the trees. They would disembark at an appointed place where their cars would have been delivered by the *syces*, and there a cook or two would have prepared delicious curry, all hot and ready to be enjoyed. Rugs would be spread out and lunch would be served, and everyone would thoroughly enjoy the simple pleasure. The servants would have their meal also, and when people felt ready they would return home in their own cars. Well, this isn't a place with the right sort of river. But I would so love it.

A few days ago I got ants in my pants! We were trying to pull a pomelo down from a tree in the garden when I was suddenly showered with these big vicious things – called '*kerengas*'. They fell straight down the front and back of my low-necked sun-dress and there was nothing to impede their progress until they came to the one small garment which they invaded *en masse*. Their behaviour was most ungentlemanly. I took off like an arrow, as you can imagine, and into the bathroom and there I delivered my revenge.

SINGAPORE

What a fizzing busy bright exciting City:  
Movement, colour, traffic jangle,  
Contrasts fuse at every angle,  
Harsh polyphony.  
Tinkly bell and lordly horn,  
Richsha Coolie, 'Heaven Born',  
Past the squalor; past the places  
White and dignified and spacious  
Which Administration graces:  
All the 'Powers That Be'.

City of a million faces,  
People of a dozen races,  
Strange of custom, polyglot,  
Trading, selling God-knows-what;  
But there's treasure trove galore  
In Singapore.

China Town of narrow alleys,  
Ancient abacus for tally,  
Monsoon drains all velly smelly –  
Still the curious tourists dally,  
Markets, shop-house by the score  
All with ever-open door.

Baskets hang from poles on shoulders,  
Bucket-stoves where charcoal smoulders  
Cook the mysteries Chinese eat;  
Washing hangs across the street,  
Constant castanet of feet  
Is downtown Singapore.

*('Heaven Born' is a bantering epithet applied by Europeans in Malaya to members of the Malayan Civil Service.)*

*Kuala Lumpur, 31.10.41*

Well, we are just back from Singapore. John had to go there for a conference so I went with him. We left at 10.00 p.m. Wednesday; couldn't get an air-conditioned sleeper but were quite comfortable nevertheless and slept soundly until nearly 7.00 next morning when we got to Singapore. Dick Howitt was there to meet us and took us to his brother's flat where Vera and the brother welcomed us, gave us breakfast and put themselves at our disposal for the day. John had to go to meetings morning and afternoon; I did a little shopping, then Vera took me to morning tea where I met masses of people. Even in Singapore, it seems, about one quarter of the European population in any one place are known to quite another quarter. And, wonder of wonders, while sitting at tea a man came out of the lift, looked hard at me, then came over: Our old friend Russel Pearce, appointed Chief

Engineer of a tin mine in Ipoh – about sixty miles from Kuala Lumpur. He had been in Malaya only four days. Another coincidence: he is staying with a married couple whose name I know well. The wife and I were friends in London before she was married.

I hadn't nearly long enough in Singapore. The Asian shops are like Aladdin's cave, full of most fascinating things and comparatively cheap, too. I bought some lovely little gifts at a Japanese shop – won't tell you what they are – and when I collect a few more from time to time, I shall parcel them all up and you can have a grand opening, for all of you, at Christmas. John bought me a delightful Satsuma powder bowl.

Going to church here is a new experience. The congregation is, for the most part, Asian. The Chinese women don't wear hats but when approaching the altar rails for Communion they pin a little veil over the head – the girls, white; matrons, black. Most of the others wear European clothes which I suppose represent their Sunday best. And believe me, you see some natty ensembles: a blue lace dress with a black and orange tartan Glengarry cap, for instance. The choir seems to be all male, including ages from about ten years. They sing well, but rather too lustily, generally. Their star turn, however, is the National Anthem sung at the end of the Mass. They sing the first phrase: 'God save our gracious king', etc., softly, but when they reach 'Send him victorious', they let themselves go. Only they have ever been able to thrill me with this paean of loyalty – it is absolutely exultant, and I'm sure would warm the heart of His Majesty. The priest, by the way, is French. He reads the address in English and in Malay but if his Malay is as quaint as his English I'm sure few understand what he's talking about.

#### *Kuala Lumpur 7.11.41*

My main news today is that we're moving from Kuala Lumpur to Klang – a district, not a town – about twenty-one miles from Kuala Lumpur. It pleases John for he finds district work much more interesting than being Public Trustee. He will be District Officer so we shall have a very nice house to go with the position. I shall be expected to sit on committees – I suppose I'll get used to that. I have seen the house and it's lovely.

To outline the DO's function, John explains: The DO is in administrative charge of a District and in the larger Districts might have one or more Assistants and a sizeable outdoor staff as well.

The focus of any District is the Land Office, of which the DO is in charge. All land titles are kept there, all transactions of sale or mortgage registered and kept there, all land disputes are adjudicated there. Many of these disputes require inspection of the disputed areas. Applications for Mining Leases also often involve inspections, in company with a Mines Officer. These inspections take up much of the DO's time, but by moving about his District he gets to know the people and the areas under his control. To reach some of the more remote *kampongs* or mine sites it is necessary to travel by boat or sampan. By contrast there are occasions which require trekking through jungle.

The DO is also the Chief Magistrate of his District and most grudge the time spent on the Bench, usually listening to trivial disputes – often between Sikhs

about strayed cattle. Occasionally, but rarely, the DO as Chief Magistrate might be called upon to witness the scene of a violent crime, even murder, usually the result of a domestic fracas. He is also Inspector of Gaols.

In some States, from time to time there are floods to contend with. The DO then is much concerned in organising whatever assistance is necessary for the people affected.

Aside from all his official functions the DO has social obligations and receives a small allowance for the purpose. So he is expected to do quite a lot of entertaining as a means of bringing people together. There are also school functions to attend; sports matches; weddings; speech days; meetings of *Penghulus* (*kampong* Elders on a small Government retainer), etc, etc.

In general he represents a kind of 'father figure', quite young though he usually is. His office is open to all who seek his help or advice.

#### Klang, Selangor, FMS, 18.11.41

We arrived at Klang yesterday but have not moved into the house yet. We are meanwhile the guests of a doctor here until tomorrow when the outgoing DO and his wife will have been able to get their things away.

Yesterday we visited the Sultan of Selangor and his royal wife, called Tungku Ampuan. Unfortunately I couldn't talk to them, but the outgoing DO's wife made it easy by interpreting remarks backward and forward. The royals live in the Istana where we were received, but they have another for ceremonial occasions. The former is on the lines of a modern house, the other is in the traditional style of domes and arches; it looks like a carving in ivory. The Sultan was dressed in pink silk – wide trousers and long *baju*, with a colourful checked sarong around the hips. The Tungku Ampuan wore *kebaya* and long skirt of heavenly dark blue and gold, with a series of button-brooches of diamonds and rubies. She has a lovely spiritual face. I forgot to mention that the Sultan wore a white plush *songkok* on his head. Fruit squash was brought and offered on a tray by a Malay servant who went down on one knee to present it.

There are little squirrels in the trees at the doctor's house, but as yet I have not seen any monkeys except those in the Botanical Gardens.

I am told that the squirrels, if they are grey with five black lines down the back, these lines are said to be the finger-marks of the Hindu god Rama.

#### DO's House, Klang, 26.11.41

We moved into this delightful house on the 23rd. Life here in Klang, as Mrs DO, is odd for me. For instance, next Tuesday morning I go to inspect the needlework of the local Methodist Girls' School and on Thursday John and I will attend the prize-giving at the Anglo-Chinese all-nationalities knitting for the Klang District Patriotic fund . . . God save the King!!

Wherever we go everyone knows we're the new DO. There is a Malay who belongs to the fire station and who salutes us as if we were the King and Queen. He wears a uniform, leggings and a little flat cap. Just as we reach him he clicks his heels and salutes in the grand manner so that I feel at least a foot taller – but have difficulty in keeping a straight face. He does that whether we are in the car or on

foot. Yesterday afternoon we went for a walk which took us past the fire station. Just as we passed the side entrance I saw a small monkey there, on a chain. So of course I dragged John in while I talked to the little fellow. He was eating a piece of sugarcane and chattered to us and chewed his cane like an excited little boy. While we were there a Malay woman came to the window and told us the monkey's name, and so on. The sequel is that this morning our driver told us that the people at the fire station would give us the monkey if we wished. I don't know how he got the message – one never knows how this rapid telegraphic system among the locals works. John is not very keen because monkeys are mischievous and sometimes bite.

From monkeys to elephants. A small circus has arrived and is set up near the township. As you know, we don't approve of using (ill-using generally) animals in circuses. However, when out walking this afternoon we passed an open area where a few of the circus elephants were tethered. Among them was a baby jumbo with such a quaint baby face – and, in place of a thumb it was sucking the end of its trunk. That reminds me of an episode John related that concerned not himself but a colleague. This man had not long arrived in Malaya when he was stationed at a very jungly sub-district of Ulu Kelantan and was staying at the small *atap*-roofed rest house there. He had gone to bed one night and was fast asleep when rudely awakened by what seemed like a minor earthquake; the whole structure was swaying somewhat and seemed in the process of falling down around him. And indeed it might well have done, for a couple of jokey elephants had decided that wrecking it would be fun (or perhaps they were scratching their backs). Anyhow, the servants and everyone around raised the biggest hullabaloo they could muster, which fortunately scared them off – or perhaps just hurt their feelings.

I must tell you about my latest culinary effort. You will remember the awful result when I made a vegetable pie for John before we were married. (And he *still* married me!) Well, I came over all wifely on Sunday and suggested giving Cookie the evening off-duty and I would prepare a meal. Guess what I made. Yes, it's true . . . On the principle of 'If at first you don't succeed . . .' Eventually, having found a way of heaving off the carapace we found a horribly uninviting hotchpotch underneath. So, stealthily by torch-light we bore the body into the garden and there, using the only instrument we could find, which was a large kitchen spoon, we gave it a Christian burial – though I don't think it merited that. Funnily, all the time this was going on I was remembering a verse you used to recite to us when we were children – I think it was from 'The Burial of Sir John Moore' – something like 'They buried him deep, in the dark of night with his Marshal cloak around him'. Some day a gardener's pick is going to ricochet as it bites the earth and he'll wonder how that strange lump of concrete got there. (Sometimes I do wonder about me!)

We loved your description of Mary's birthday party and laughed about her remark that 'Granpump would need a lot of breath to blow out *his* candles'. True!

*Klang, 4.12.41*

I am so happy that your letters have started to arrive regularly. It means so much to me.

We are beginning to settle down. The house is more like a home though I haven't got all the curtains up yet. I have a woman – wife of the caretaker – who is going to work for me; she will sew, wash and iron, and she will make the curtains. We will pay her \$13 a month – that's about thirty shillings sterling, which sounds awful but it is standard rate and is fair considering the low cost of living.

How surprised people would be if they could see the official, dignified DO at home. A few nights ago after we had gone to bed I had a pain, got up about 1.00 a.m. and went into the sitting room. John heard me and followed and to take my mind off my troubles he put a record on the gramophone and started to cavort about in time to the music. When it got to *molto presto*, however, his gyrations were too much for him and he fell in a heap, whereupon my giggles changed into gales of laughter. And there he sat, eyeing me balefully. 'Not a word of sympathy when I might have been badly hurt,' he accused me. 'I know now I married a hard-hearted wench!'

Yesterday he had to check over the crown jewels at the Istana. It wasn't a ceremonial occasion, but I went with him. Apart from the Sultan's crown and the Tunku Ampuan's tiara there were insignia and swords, gold betel-nut containers, silver candlesticks and finger bowls – and spittoons! There were satin cushions with gold end-pieces, all manner of table-ware in silver, etc., etc. I was disappointed to notice that so little of it is Malayan craftsmanship. The Malays have a most sanguine philosophy which makes them sweet-tempered, lovable people but not very energetic or industrious.

We went for a drive to Port Swettenham on Sunday to where the river broadens as it reaches out to the sea. At the water's edge lay quite fifty feet width of mud, for the tide was half out. I was most intrigued to see fish crawling along the mud. They used their fins as legs, as far as I could see, and sometimes if startled gave quite a leap forward. John couldn't drag me away. They appeared to be from four to eight inches long, tapering to a narrow tail, grey in colour and as much like lizards as fish. They must be provided with dual breathing apparatus. Then we saw monkeys swinging in the trees over on the opposite bank.

The political situation might be worrying you. No doubt your papers are giving Malaya great publicity. Everyone here is prepared for a possible crisis; we women are rolling bandages, etc., but there is no nervousness evident. So don't you be nervous – it may never happen!

Unless the situation gets really threatening we shall be going to the hills for Christmas ... maybe!

The rain is pouring down, enveloping everything in an opaque film. I just love it. Remember when on a really stormy day I used to don that huge raincoat and waterproof hat and nip along to the Gap hoping that a big sea would be running. It certainly was a dramatic sight when the surf was flung even to the top of the rocks. How I long, sometimes, to be there with you.

8.12.41

*The Japanese attacked without warning. Bombed Singapore and the airfield at Butterworth, which destroyed all aircraft on the ground. This left unprotected the battleships Prince of Wales and Repulse which two days later were sunk off the*

*east coast of Malaya. The Japanese landed at Kelantan, north-east coast, to begin their rapid progress down the peninsula. They had long planned their strategy; almost every camera shop throughout Malaya had been owned by Japanese (they disappeared just before the attack) who had photographed and mapped every inch of the coast, as was realised very soon. On about the 10th or the 11th they attacked Port Swettenham.*

*When we heard the explosions the Boy and I ran into the garden. Smoke was rising in the distance. At first I hoped it was from oil-tanks at Port Swettenham being destroyed by our own forces.*

*Klang, 19.12.41*

I am writing this letter under rather odd circumstances. You will have heard the bad news of 8th December. It is 12.35 a.m. – really the 20th – and I am at the first-aid post. It is my hour to stay awake. Four of us are on duty here every fourth night; there are three other groups doing likewise so that the Post is never unattended. We hope, of course, that we shall never be required, but one sees too acutely these days the folly of being unprepared. The other three people in my group include a young European woman and two Chinese girls – charming girls named respectively EeEng Hua and Siew Hong. They speak and read English very well but it is amusing to me to see them reading Chinese books where they read the characters from right to left.

We are blacked out every night but are fairly comfortable for we had John's study curtained over, every chink, with dark navy cloth and there's a ceiling fan in that room so we have both light and air.

This will be the strangest Christmas I have ever spent. John told me today that he had intended buying me a puppy for a Christmas present, but naturally it is inadvisable now to add any encumbrances to the household. We didn't take the monkey, thank goodness. Klang is about six miles from Port Swettenham; the 'weather report' was that it was 'very hot indeed' there a few days ago . . . the 'haze' was clearly visible from here!

I do wish I had my camera, but a camera couldn't do justice to the house or the garden. The house is slightly crescent-shaped. Downstairs is a wide verandah at the entrance, then the morning room, with dining room and study, one bedroom and a storeroom. Upstairs is the sitting room and other bedrooms and over the entrance verandah is another verandah opening onto a lovely square terrace with a low stone wall around. This terrace juts right beyond the entrance making a roof, with pillars at the front. The architecture is said to be Dutch – perhaps Dutch Colonial. It stands on top of its own little hill surrounded by wide lawns and garden beds and with a drive entirely circling the house. The front entrance is a mass of potted and hanging ferns and leaves and flowers and from there on the other side of the drive stone steps lead down gradually to what might be regarded as the foot of the hill, down through an avenue of feathery great casuarina trees and a carpet of greenest grass. Beyond is the town. The French doors on the far side of the morning room open onto quite an English garden – first lawns and potted plants, a low ivy-covered wall, and a pedestal bird-bath, then there is a tennis court, a putting green, and the old caretaker's house. Beyond is the road and

then more green, green slopes, and further, as far as the eye can see, palms in one section right out to the sky-line, and from the front of the house the distance is wave after wave of jungle-clad hills. Nearer the house are more lovely casuarina trees with their soft fine plumage making a most romantic mesh for the moon! The house is cream, to offset so much colour. The colours of the sky in the late afternoon and evening are wild and fantastic sometimes, not in colour alone, but with something iridescent in the colours. It is almost frightening. At that time too, our lawns and the green slopes at the back look completely fey, reminding me a little of a quality of enchantment I always experienced as a child in seeing a garden reflected in a mirror. It is rather ethereal, like a transfiguration that might herald some supernatural event. I want to appreciate it all and record it all, for in this unfortunate age one can't depend on the permanent possession of anything much.

I wired you last weekend just to reassure you that we were quite safe. So far there's nothing for you to worry about. I received a wire from Russel Pearce a day or two ago, after the fireworks started in Malaya, saying that if in any danger I should go on to his house and bring a friend. Wasn't that kind of him?

It is now after 2.00 a.m. and time I went to bed. We get up at 6.00 at this 'Post' and after tidying up it's always 6.30. Our driver Din will bring the car for me then and soon after I shall be in my own bed, with tea and my Johnny making nice welcoming noises at my return.

Of course we are deeply concerned but I refuse to apprehend disaster. My fond love to all. A happy Christmas, and may it be a more fortunate 1942 for all of us – for the world!

### *Klang, 25.12.41*

What a sadly un-Christmasy Christmas Day. But it is amazing how under stress of circumstances one's sense of values changes; we both feel that little matters in our personal fortune beyond being safe and having each other. So many couples – husbands in the Volunteers and suchlike – have been separated during the last few weeks; for them it must be miserable indeed.

John being the District Officer is very much required to remain here. It is not being observed as a holiday. He is at his office as usual; he has been, and is, frightfully busy but the dear thing found time to buy me a bottle of Chanel 22 scent (must be old stock and perhaps the last remaining one in these parts I should think), put it in one of his socks, with a cheque, and hung the sock on the end of my bed. So the tradition you see is still unbroken. Poor darling, all I could find him in this funny old shopping centre was a pair of mouldy-looking khaki socks to wear with his khaki shorts. I had a very busy and tiring day yesterday or I might have thought of something else, as I did this morning. I remembered that his slippers were shabby – so I managed to buy him a new pair. (There are several Chinese shoe-makers in the town.) It is most convenient for me to have a *syce* who can speak English. He is a very nice boy and helps me a lot with my shopping. I took him along to the shoe-shop. When I go to the markets he comes in with me, won't let the rascally stall-holders charge me too much, and picks out the best of everything I wish to buy. The funny part of it is that we didn't know for some time that he understood or spoke English, little realizing that when John was saying

crazy, goofy things to me, in the back of the car, blissfully thinking Din was no wiser, Din probably understood all.

I hope you are all enjoying a happy day at home, I picture you. I suppose you can't help being somewhat concerned about us. Try not to worry, we are safe and well. I believe Malaya is already recovering from the first stagger and will eventually deal the last blow.

There was no midnight Mass; I went at 8.15 this morning. There is something very touching about these local congregations – something that makes me feel humble. The altar rails at every Mass are lined several times with mixed and oddly-garbed communicants. Many are Indians – young and old – men wearing sarongs, shirts (worn with tails out), a sort of sweat-rag thrown over the shoulder, and I always notice the strangely paler soles of their spread brown feet turned up as they kneel. There's a crumpled old Chinese man who wears black saten trousers and a white jacket and black canvas slippers. He is a dwarf. The Indian women look like figures from Bible illustrations, in their brilliant coloured costumes, often lovely faces, saree draped over the head. Many of them too have bare feet, and several go to the rails carrying their babies on their hips.

Last Sunday there were about six first communicants – they carried candles. There was a young man of nineteen or twenty and several boys and girls, all Indian. One of them was a rather pathetic little figure dressed in something approaching European style: a white calico dress gathered at the waist and falling half-way down her skinny little black legs. With this she wore a veil of white calico – and a lot of white in her beautiful big black eyes – bare feet, and the family's very best silver bracelets around her ankles. Poor little thing was, I think, tickled to bits: she grinned self-consciously as she took her place at the rails. Some of the Indian men still wear their hair long, I notice – this is rolled up in a bun at back, and some wear ear-rings. I know that cynics might find an easy explanation for their apparent devotion, but I feel in observing them that they have a simple wisdom and are probably much closer to the Infinite than many of us more sophisticated ones.

Your latest letter, Mama, has just been handed to me. It was rather funny: I heard a car arrive, heard footsteps up the stairs, so for a joke I bobbed down behind a half-wall near where I was writing and as the footsteps came close I shot up expecting to say 'Gotcha!' to John, through the aperture. Much to my astonishment the face I met wasn't John's, but the Boy's! He was bearing the letter on a tray. He registered no surprise, perhaps he thought I had just been picking up something – or fastening my shoe!

Recently when bombs were thundering down, frighteningly close, John pulled me quickly to the floor and covered my body with his own. On the same day we found that the gardener, probably instructed by our splendid Boy, had dug a trench in the garden for me to shelter in if necessary. How faithful and caring!

An amusing false alarm: on the same day I suddenly heard a series of loud thuds coming from one isolated direction and close. 'Bombs,' I thought and hurried to go downstairs but stopped short when I found the Boy banging and thumping the iron down very vigorously, on a shirt!

*Klang, 1.1.42*

First of all I wish you, my dears, a happy new year. It hasn't started very well here or anywhere but maybe the finish will make up for that.

It is difficult under the circumstance to settle down to anything. We saw the new year in in much different circumstances from any we might have imagined. I remember last New Year's Eve going to a dance at Manly with Colin. There was the usual collection of balloons, whistles, false noses etc. – and some random kissing – and I was a bit bored. Afterwards a party of us went for a swim at Collaroy, or somewhere near – and I remember sitting on the edge of the pool and saying the usual: 'I wonder where we each will be and what we'll be doing this time next year'. Well, well! I couldn't have guessed the answer in a million years!

*Mount Pleasant, Singapore, 7.1.42*

I wired you yesterday to give you my present address. I am quite well, and this house is in an outer suburb of Singapore, so don't worry about my being here. I left Klang last Friday night with other European women of the district. I can't tell you much – nor indeed is there really much to tell beyond the news you get in the papers and on radio. I still feel rather dazed, almost as though this is another self I am perceiving. Having to leave John behind, to abandon our home and all it represented, was like the sudden shattering of a mirror though I scarcely felt anything deeply – I was benumbed. But now sometimes the pain is acute.

John remains in Klang of course. The servants would stay with him, despite danger, I am sure, and be faithful to the end.

There are many people in this house – five women, seven children – much noise, but probably that is a good thing. There is a dear little girl who reminds me of Kathie in appearance: the same noble forehead and large eyes – but hers are grey. She never says a word except to members of her family, but just stands and looks at one, unblinking. Yesterday, she and her brother, a couple of years older, were running upstairs. He reached the top ahead of her and shouted, 'I'm first!' She tumbled laboriously after and when she'd made it piped, 'Maureen first too!' There is also a sweet little dog that has become quite devoted to me. He follows me everywhere – even sits outside the bathroom door when I go in. He's half sealyham, half dachshund, I should think, and was among those who had to make a hurried exit from Trengannu. With his master, I am told, he trekked through jungle for days before coming on down here. I de-tick him every morning – an operation which he seems to enjoy. We live quite well and are by no means down-hearted. Very few situations are entirely without a humorous side. And I always said I wanted 'incident' and experience and adventure, didn't I? John, however, expressed the opinion that this is the sort one can do without and still be quite happy. Singapore doesn't look the same as before. The shop-fronts are boarded up or roughly fenced in, with only small door openings remaining.

*Mount Pleasant, Singapore, 15.1.42*

John is with me now. He arrived on Sunday at midday, unshaven and looking rather strained. It was not a pleasant departure from Klang – he was the last to leave – and an even less pleasant journey down. His car had been left in dock at Malacca. That's all I can say here.

I can't report much of what has been happening here. At least it is surprisingly cool in the house and the temperature is pleasant outside. Very nice, except for the 'nuisance' visits.

I am going to have a typhoid injection today; we think it is a wise precaution at this time. The immediate future is so uncertain that it may mean a reunion with you.

*The last few days before my exit from Klang seem in review rapidly episodic like a quick-motion film – but there is much that is blurred. John was increasingly under pressure coping with arrangements to protect and to make the greatest provision possible for the local people against the inevitable arrival of the Japanese. Clearly he needed assistance but in reply to his phoned SOS to whoever had then the disposal of man-power, the fatuous answer was 'chin-up, Falconer!' (It became an in-joke between us.) Suddenly he decided the time had come for us European women – and whoever of the others could arrange it – to leave. I moved in a dream or like an automaton. A small bus, I seem to remember, was provided. Without emotion I said goodbye to John, but, strangely, I recall that his lips trembled as we kissed. Numbly, I realised that I might never see him again, for the Japanese descend like demons of death. In the bus nobody spoke – we were no doubt in a state of shock.*

*There were among us an elderly couple – Eurasians I realised later, but knew nothing of Eurasians then. Being locals they were better able to look after themselves than I was, but I felt as the DO's wife I had a duty to shepherd them. I remember the husband explaining to me the necessity for them to get away because when the Japanese arrived his wife 'would be raped'. Even in the misery of the situation I was amused because his dear wife must have been at least seventy, cadaverous, and the nearest human I had ever seen to a newly-hatched, but suntanned, bird.*

*We halted for the night at Seremban, where I was given the hospitality of the District Officer. The others were to go somewhere else, but when I told him that the old couple were in my care he said, 'Your friends will be made comfortable at the back.' They seemed quite content; they had their belongings packed in two pillow cases.*

*By the following evening we had arrived at Singapore and were accommodated in St. Andrew's Boys School – sans boys. There was bombing at night and I heard Old Dear scream: 'Where shall I go?' A voice answered, 'Under the bed!' Indeed she was the only adult human I believe capable of such a feat.*

*Incidentally, on the way down to Singapore, apart from a couple of old abandoned cars, probably escape vehicles which obviously couldn't make it, there was also an old abandoned road-roller sadly collapsed in a ditch.*

*The rest is a blank. How I got to the house at Mount Pleasant, or who arranged it, I have no idea.*

*Mount Pleasant, 22.1.42*

The weather continues beautiful, with a cool breeze blowing. The pleasantries of life are mainly suspended for the time being and the little I have seen directly of the wretched side there is no point in relating. One learns by adversity and I do believe that some good comes out of evil. It will be so heavenly when all this is over. (Indeed, it might have been for me this morning but here I am, quite safe.)

*I was on business in the vicinity of the Supreme Court when an air-raid began. The obvious place to go for shelter was the basement of that large, solid building – a publicised refuge at the time. I lay face-down during the raid, cheek-by-jowl with a Chinese ricksha coolie, and could feel the heavy reverberations of the nearby bombing. I prepared myself spiritually for death. The interesting aspect of this experience is that at that point I was not afraid, but found an acceptance of doom. From this I can only hope that people, and other animals, faced with inescapable death are similarly freed from terror. When the all-clear sounded and I went outside, there on a bush against the wall of the building were fragments of a body and rags of blue cloth of a poor ricksha coolie. No doubt he thought that by hiding there he would be safe. I am filled with anger and hatred for these barbarians who so indiscriminately and unprovoked destroy the lives and livelihoods of simple people in particular who ask nothing more than to live their humble lives in peace.*

*Mount Pleasant, 29.1.42*

John and I are well. I am acting as housekeeper, believe it or not, for this 'family' which consists now of five men and three women. The children and their mothers have gone. Shopping is quite an adventure. I leave the house about 6.30 in the morning – about every second morning – by car, taking the cook with me. I go to the Cold Storage and he to the markets nearby, and we stock up with a mass of food which you would think enough to keep a battalion for a day. Some of the Chinese servants are first-rate, and this particular cook is one of those. Yesterday I asked him to suggest a menu and he said 'Pish and Lice!' During John's last weeks in Klang our own Cookie and Boy were absolutely superb, John tells me. I am not surprised, for I had immense respect for the Boy and knew that Cookie was faithful though not so intelligent. Bombing continued but they braved the dangers there daily and catered no matter how many people had to be fed, for other men had gathered in the house by then. John said the Boy wept pitifully when he had to say goodbye.

Of course I can't write you a newsy letter as you will understand; there is only one topic of conversation these days and that is the 'latest score' and such like. John gets furious at the sameness; his one cry is, 'Can't we talk of something else?' I'm sure most of us go about somewhat stunned or like sleep-walkers, incapable of the full realisation of the present disaster. One thing is now certain: our adversaries are very efficient and so well prepared.

*c/o Barclays Bank, Durban, South Africa, 26.2.42*

My dears, you will be surprised to receive this letter from me – another change of address, but my travelling around is not by choice, and the moves have required instant decisions. I hope you will understand. Again, I am alone.

I have been wondering very much about you all – sorry I couldn't write earlier, but it wasn't possible, as you will realise. I am well and hope you are too.

Dorothy's sister lives here and is very kind and hospitable. The negro servant who waits at my table in the private hotel where I'm staying has the most cooing, dark-brown velvet voice. The highlights of my days are when he bends over my shoulder and asks, 'Tea or coffee, Madam?' It is almost – but not quite – worthwhile having to be here for the thrill of hearing it. How surprised he would be to know my reaction . . . how surprised most of us would be if given access to others' thoughts and feelings about us. (Of course I do not forget that John's lovely voice was one of his irresistible attractions for me.)

Keep well, my dears, I'll write again soon.

*The invasion progressed with alarming speed. By the first week of January it was clear that women and children should leave Klang. John remained at his post until the last possible moment, during which our servants behaved magnificently.*

*Singapore fell on 15th February. Most European women had left by that time (and a few – very few – Government men who had discovered most compelling reasons why they too must go). I believe it was on 1st or 2nd February that one of the women sharing the house got an urgent 'phone call from a friend working in the P & O office in Singapore to say that a ship would be leaving Singapore on the following day. He urged her to circulate this fact and persuade all remaining women to go as it would be the last to leave with any degree of safety. Whether to go or stay was an agonising decision. The Government had not organised an evacuation of European women as that would have been discriminatory. My decision was based on the belief that our men would be freer mentally and physically without the responsibility of women.*

*We said our private goodbye before leaving the house, silently, our desolation beyond words. It had that terrible finality of death. I felt strangely disembodied, afraid perhaps to experience the full agony of parting, to face the shattered end to our beautiful but so brief love story.*

*John had a little government business to attend to so we travelled separately to the P & O wharf, I with other women, John arriving a little later just in time for us to say our formal farewell. Then with 1,500 others, I went on board the Empress of Japan. During embarkation there was sporadic bombing as a result of which I didn't wave goodbye to John: I had gone below to stake out my few feet of deck-space with my one suitcase and when I returned up on deck he had disappeared and the ship had commenced to move out. (I learnt later that the man in whose car he had arrived wanted to go so he had no choice.) It was the final blow!*

*Below, in one of the lounges, where hundreds of dazed-looking women were hovering about, a gramophone record was playing 'I'll see you again'. For the first time in this whole devastating experience I burst into a flood of tears and I remember someone begging me 'Don't, please don't!' The previous merciful*

numbness had gone. It is impossible to express in words the overwhelming intensity of my grief – my bewilderment that such calamity could descend, totally without justification, upon my dear one and all the other good people, at the hands of such mindless barbarians; my fear for all the defenceless, knowing what atrocities the savages had committed already in Malaya and elsewhere.

The Empress pulled out speedily. She was in convoy with, I think, the Duchess of Devonshire and another ship. Bombs were dropped while the ships were in the roads and I believe the Duchess suffered a near miss. Because of the bombing we were all ordered below decks; it was horrible. I felt we could be trapped like rats and I would far rather have taken my chances further up.

We had been permitted to take only one suitcase on embarkation – a few cheated – and many of us discovered how quaint, at least in part, was what we'd chosen to pack. I had included one plate of our dinner-service, which I'd brought from Klang, the blue garter I'd worn on my wedding day, two fish-knives and two guest-towels! We had to sleep down in what seemed like the bowels of the ship, each woman having just enough space for her body and suitcase. About midnight mattresses arrived. There were cabins, of course, which some had been lucky enough to get, but for most that deck was their dormitory for the duration of the voyage. It was probably on the second evening out that I carried my mattress and dumped it in a large slatted empty crate on the open deck. And there I slept each night in the glorious healing sea-air, until 5.00 each morning when the swabbing of the decks made it necessary to take up my bed and go below. That was a small price to pay.

When the ship reached Colombo our reception by volunteer helpers was superbly organised. Every possible need had been provided for; they befriended us and took us into their homes. Our ship left Colombo on Friday 13th February. Many people were apprehensive on that account, but we reached Durban without incident. How different was the attitude there. Officially they didn't want to know: we were an inconvenience. However, I had a friend living there and through her life was made easier for me and for another Australian I had travelled with. The Empress was bound for England so we waited in Durban for six weeks when the Largs Bay took us off to Sydney. (She was sunk on her next voyage out!)

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*Meanwhile, back in Singapore . . . This is John's account of what was happening:*

Soon after Jean left, it became dangerous to continue living in the bungalow where we had been since I arrived from up country. My friends and I moved into the substantially built Supreme Court building. Everyone knew well before this time that there was no hope of escape; we would not have attempted it anyhow. Wives had left so suddenly – many of them – that husbands had not had time to make the usual kinds of financial provision for them. However, it was quickly arranged that Government servants could sign declarations authorising their wives to receive whole or part of their salaries, and one of my duties was to authenticate such declarations – which I suppose were telegraphed abroad. Meantime Hong Kong

had fallen to the Japs and there were reports of brutal behaviour there by their drunken soldiers. So we decided to destroy all liquor we could find. I remember pouring bottle after bottle of good Scotch down the lavatory – almost with tears in my eyes! It was also decided by the financial experts to deny the Japs access to money in Singapore Treasury. So there I was, escorting thousands of dollar notes to an incinerator.

The Japs came rapidly closer with continuous noise of gunfire and the dropping of bombs, and although we were comparatively safe in our solid building it was terrifying to contemplate what must be happening to the local people and their very vulnerable little shops and houses. Very large quantities of petrol stored in tanks on the numerous islands close to Singapore were fired to prevent its use by the Japs. The resultant blaze was awesome. I went up onto the roof one night to see the sight: it was like a scene from Dante's *Inferno*. In the daytime even the tropical sun hardly broke through the pall of black smoke.

Singapore's only fresh water supply came through huge pipes across the causeway from the mainland. That was increasingly at risk, so it was almost a relief when we knew that it had been decided to surrender on February 15th. The sudden silence was dramatic. But what was to happen after that?

The Jap troops arrived and began to direct traffic. Soon a few of them entered our building, with fixed bayonets, and motioned to us to get out. A couple of friends and I made for Raffles Hotel and managed to remain there undisturbed for a couple of days. Meanwhile an order had gone out from the Japs that all Europeans were to assemble on the *padang* (playing field) at a certain time.

We in Raffles were too far away to hear this order so did not move until we heard very angry ugly voices commanding us, through an interpreter, to parade outside at once. We were then treated to a tirade by the Jap Colonel who said that as we had disobeyed orders we were liable to be shot. After a further long harangue he said the Japanese were merciful and we would be taken into internment – but as the British had destroyed all the petrol they would not provide transport and we had to move on our feet, at once. So we temporary guests at Raffles started our journey with only what we could carry, and together with all the other captives were marched off all day under the tropical sun, without food or water, a distance of some ten miles, to a temporary place of internment. This consisted of four small houses belonging to the four wives of an Indian Muslim. As we passed along the roads of Singapore there was pity in the eyes of the local people, increased no doubt by the spectacle of women and children in the procession. It must have been doubly hard for the husbands of the women in the march since the men were generally too laden and too exhausted to help them. Few, if any, of us had ever had to make such a long journey on foot in the tropics, without a break. After a week we were marched off again – to Changi gaol. The gaol was in three blocks built to house 640 prisoners; eventually internees numbered 3,000. In this case the men had the worst of it as one whole block had to be given to the women and children who numbered only about a hundred.

About 24 February 1942

Thus began three and a half years of Nippon hospitality!

We spent the first two and a quarter years in the gaol. I shall not dwell on the tortures, such as the horrors of the 'double tenth' – 10.10.42 – but the sound of marching boots along the iron corridors during the night; the waiting for where they would stop, knowing what this would portend – that is something best forgotten. From the gaol we moved to a hutted camp in Sime Road. Food had become steadily worse in quality and quantity and at Sime Road we were told that we had to grow our own food, except for the weevily rice that the Japs supplied, which was never enough. Breakfast was *cungee* (rice and water), lunch was a sort of pig-swill stew consisting of rice and sweet-potato tops with sometimes a little palm-oil or dried (stinking) fish – anything to provide flavour or, more importantly, protein. In 1943 the local Jewish community were brought into internment: they had money (Jap banana currency) and would advance it to trustworthy people against a cheque – to be honoured after the war. This was a great morale booster because it meant that one could buy the occasional egg; a little coffee; cheroots; tobacco, or – best of all – *gula malacca*. These were obtained by a Mr Mordecai who was allowed by the Japs to go out, about once a week, and to bring back whatever could be got on the black market. (Presumably the Japs got a rake-off.) Supper was rice and water or a little cake made of rice, with weak tea, no milk or sugar.

Progressively we starved and progressively we got weaker but still had to work in the garden to grow the precious green vegetable – the sweet-potato tops. For fertiliser, urine was used – and on every anniversary, for me, I declare it was my turn to carry the malodorous buckets!

Our beds were whatever we could get hold of and were crammed in only a few inches apart. Sunday was debugging day!

Rumours were rife, often about salvation at hand, but one could see no real hope in the situation. However, it was not wholly without humour, such as the occasion when, at the showers one day, I looked around and saw a great 'man-in-the-moon' face gazing at me: first, eyes opening wide in surprise, then squinting, winking – a most expressive face – presented by a man's behind with great eyes tattooed over the buttocks! Also, while we were at Changi gaol, the Japs issued an order that whenever any of them approached, the first person who saw them was to shout to all the others 'Kioski!' (Attention!) whereupon we all must bow. The fellow who first had to obey this order, in his agitation could only remember one Japanese word: '*Sukyaki*' (a Japanese dish). It sufficed.

Doctors in the camp after the first few months had declared that we could only survive on the diet provided then by staying in bed. That so many did survive despite hard work and infinitely less food is remarkable. However, by the time the surrender came we were all at a very low ebb indeed and could not have lasted much longer. All the diabetics died because though it was known that there was insulin in Singapore the Japs would not allow it to be brought in.

In Sydney

*For the first eighteen months I did not know whether John lived or not. One feared for the fate of anyone captured by the Japanese! The first message I received was a few words added to someone else's message of the sort permitted by the Japs to be tagged onto their propaganda broadcasts. It had been picked up by a sailor at sea and transmitted to me, I suppose by radio to some reception station, then typed out and despatched. I cannot remember the details – few indeed. It was enough to make me ecstatic. Six months later I received another radio message – John's own message to me – from several sources, and I record now my gratitude to the good people who acted as volunteer listeners, and passed the messages on. I had few communications from John during the whole period of the war.*

*Over the first few months at home I gave some time as voluntary assistant to the almoner at Crowns Street Women's Hospital. (This brief experience proved of value to me later, in Malaya.) It then became obvious that I was needed in my own family. By that time we were without any domestic help; my parents were ageing, and among other members of the family were two infant nieces Mary and Kathleen, whose mother had died when Kathleen was born. So I became surrogate mother, and housekeeper in chief.*

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In Singapore – John's Report

The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was a horrendous event in history – a horror to many people – but salvation from other horrors to many other people. In the Sime Road camp area the Japanese had ordered some of their captives to dig a long tunnel, and that was done. No explanation was given and it was generally believed that in the event of an attack on Singapore we would all have been herded into the tunnel and exterminated *en masse*. Little did we know how close we were to a very terrible death.

The first intimation we had of the end of the war was from a Chinese riding on a bicycle close to the fence of the camp, who *sang* in English 'The war is over . . . the war is over'. That was too good to believe so we waited. Next day an unfamiliar plane came over and dropped leaflets. We rushed for them, only to see that they were in Japanese. Our hearts sank. But later the plane returned, dropped more leaflets – and they were in English, bringing the unbelievable news. It is hard to convey our feelings. We could scarcely accept the miracle of release. But though our rice ration was suddenly doubled we made no attempt to move for, unmistakably, the situation remained uncertain. We then learnt that the local Jap commandant had indeed refused instructions from his headquarters, and did so only when a Japanese prince was flown into Singapore and ordered him to obey. (It must be remembered that the nearest British forces were as far away as Rangoon.)

As soon as the surrender was made known locally and the camp was opened the people of Singapore poured in bringing gifts of food, fruit, clothing, etc., though they themselves were in rags and half-starved.

The welcome was quite overwhelming and very touching. (It was reported that a *dhobi* among them came with laundry he had faithfully kept for his customer throughout the war, returned it to him – and apologised for holding it so long!)

Soon Lord Mountbatten arrived. He then told us that an all-out attack to regain Singapore had been planned to begin a fortnight only from the date of the Japs' enforced capitulation! Lady Mountbatten had accompanied him but went straight to the women's camp. It was a great day when the British Navy came into Singapore. Bread was baked on board the ships and brought into the camp, and there was still butter in the Cold Storage, for distribution. I declare that no one who hasn't experienced starvation can fully realise the glorious taste of fresh bread and butter.

### Sydney

*The Japanese had surrendered on 15th August 1945. Day after day I waited for news of John, reasoning that if he lived I must hear from him. I made all the enquiries I could, from all likely sources of information, without result. And I put it on record here that the Malayan Office in Sydney, established by the British Government for the purpose of assisting people like me – anyone from Malaya directly affected by the war – was of no assistance whatever: the attitude there seemed to be 'I'm all right, Jack!' I knew that several planes each day were travelling between Sydney and Singapore, that Australian staff were in Singapore to arrange repatriation to Australia, so why this agonising silence? The lack of communication cannot be excused. John told me later that early on the erstwhile internees were supplied with letter-cards which they understood would be despatched by air-mail. (John's hasn't reached me yet!)*

*As the weeks went by I became almost frantic and despairing, but hoping and praying and trying to carry on in a useful way. Not until October – after six weeks of waiting – did I know for sure that he lived. That was when a telegram despatched by him from Darwin arrived. I was having a singing lesson when my mother phoned to tell me the good news. At that I dissolved in tears, and Madam teacher exclaimed 'Why, aren't you pleased?' (He was on board Highland Chieftain being fed and cared for magnificently, as were all the passengers, by the wonderful Red Cross personnel.) What rejoicing there was when the family gathered that evening. It was one of the happiest days of my life! John reached Sydney on 12th October 1945.*

*When the ship was due to berth at Woolloomooloo none but officials and medical service people were permitted to meet it. However, my cousin, an ambulance driver, said 'I'll get you there.' At an arranged point in Woolloomooloo on the day, she scooped me up and drove on. Finally we had to walk past a guard at the entrance to the wharf. She had warned me, 'Say nothing – just look straight*

ahead! When he tried to challenge me: 'Press!' she said with great authority. So there I was, wearing my new hat, bought second-hand from the cousin of a friend. John looked very well, suntanned, his hair somewhat fairer through years of sun-bleaching; well-dressed from the deck-rail up, which was all I could see at first. But when he disembarked, the faded and ragged old shorts he wore emphasised the reality of the situation. He had managed to save his decent shoes throughout the internment; the shorts had belonged to a man who had died.

Oh, that blissful moment of greeting, of touching again. But I think I felt something akin to shyness. What do you say to someone 'risen from the dead' – for it was almost like that. By the greatest good fortune I had managed, through a friend, to find a furnished flat at Manly. Travelling there by taxi we just held hands and exchanged quaintly formal pleasantries, I remember. There was as yet too much to say; it was as if we held the book of our experiences, fingered the covers, but in some kind of delicacy hesitated to open it and turn the pages.

The press had been warning us of mental quirks we might expect in people returning from Japanese imprisonment. I must admit I waited and watched – but not for long. He wasn't bonkers at all: just the same John. But what had happened to me? I kept falling asleep! Mid-morning, and early afternoon, I couldn't hold my head up and that went on for a week or more. It was most unflattering to John but I suppose can only be explained by release from tension.

Lying in each other's arms at night was to feel vast peace, and profound gratitude . . . a palpable awareness of safety after our years of anxiety: on my part freedom from the agonising dread of what John could be suffering or had suffered; on his, freedom from the Japanese paranoid suspicion of 'plots'; the vicious, sometimes lethal, beatings (fortunately he was not beaten); the ever-diminishing food supply; the fear of a dreadful end to it all.

And then I scorched his trousers! John had had a suit tailored in Sydney for our wedding so his measurements were on record. A few days before his arrival I went to buy a sports jacket and trousers. The first jacket produced was too horrible. (Not many people now know or remember the severe shortages, in everything, that existed here during the war and for a while afterwards.) When I pleaded that 'he' was returning from Singapore, a very presentable jacket was brought out, and of the right size. But the only suitable trousers were a little too long in the legs. No matter – I could turn them up. So the morning after his return I proceeded to do just that. Following someone's advice that the best way to press men's clothes was through brown paper I succeeded in scorching one of the cuffs so thoroughly that I had to apply a patch before we could go out.

One of the first comments he had made referred to the crowded conditions of internment and his relief at being freed from an inescapable multitude of people. This he followed by saying, 'I don't want to see anyone for a while except you!' Of course, that did not include my family. The two children, now seven and five respectively, when they first met him studied and assessed him solemnly, and after weighing him up pronounced, 'Auntie, he's nice!' I had warned others not to intrude – an injunction they took so literally that soon he was exclaiming, 'Where are all our friends?' After which, the welcoming parties began. Meanwhile he was eager to catch up on the history of the war in Europe, and all that had led to the Japanese defeat – facts to which, of course, he had had no access.

*We were consciously, gloriously happy and ever grateful that apparently he had suffered no lasting damage from his ordeal. But in this awareness of our own good fortune we were deeply sorry for those women and those families who would never see their men or their brave girls again. We also pitied those few returned men whose wives during their absence had decided that 'a bird in the hand . . .'*

*We grieved for the young woman with whom I had travelled from Singapore and who, like me, had hoped and planned and waited for the day of reunion – a day, for her, which never came. Her husband had joined the Volunteers – that's all she knew. Shortly after John returned she received a phone call from a man who told her that he and her husband had been friends during the horrors of the Burma railway; that her husband had died of dysentery. At first she expressed disbelief, believing that if he had died she would instinctively have felt it – and foolishly considered it possible that the man was having a 'cruel joke'. Then he called on her – and handed her a touching memento of her husband: a small square-folded, once-white handkerchief of hers now sad and yellowed – the one tangible link with her he had somehow kept close throughout his long travail.*

*Owing to the good food John had enjoyed on the ship which brought him back to Sydney, his body had regained some weight. The effects of starvation, however, were most apparent in his extremities; it took several months for his hands and feet to fill out to normal size. It was confirmed also that some height was lost owing to two factors: the shrinkage of substance between the vertebrae, and of the flesh of the soles of the feet.*

*As soon as possible after the Japanese surrender a British Military Administration was established in Malaya to carry on until members of the Malayan Civil Service and other Government people were fit enough to return. Within six months they were being asked to resume their official functions there without delay. We went back in April 1946. I continued writing regularly to my mother until November 1949. My dear father had died in 1944.*

### SS Esperance Bay at Sea, 2.5.46

Dearest Mama,

I believe the pilot on board will leave us at Thursday Island this evening and will take mail ashore and in that way you may get this letter sooner than one posted when we reach Singapore. As far as I know we will not be going into any other port. We have heard that my going with John has caused an uproar because, as you know, officially women were not permitted to accompany their husbands back to Malaya at this stage. (They should have protested vigorously as we did.) We heard that about thirty-five women stormed the Malayan Government Agent last Monday. 'Never take "no" for an answer!'

*As the ship drew out I was soberly aware that we sailed into an unknown future. It seemed to me then that Book 1 of my Malayan experience was closed and that I was embarking on Book 2. Privately, my emotions were complex, divided as they were between sadness at the wrench from my family and elation at the prospect of*

*resuming with John our former life. But for me that prospect was tinged with certain apprehension: just what were we going into? We had heard briefly of the mayhem caused by the Communists and their attempt to establish murderous domination. What dimensions of chaos would we find? Would disease be rife? Above all, how would the local people receive us? John, however, with his usual quiet confidence and his deep knowledge of and affection for the people eagerly wanted to be there and believed that mutual goodwill and effort would before long restore well-being to Malaya.*

*So I pondered my concerns, looking down into the racing sea, relating it to the flow of years – the years past and the time to come and at last reached a state of faith in the future – an acceptance of 'What is to be, will be', and that, whatever it was, we would cope.*

#### *At Sea, 8.5.46*

This morning we passed between the islands of Bali and Lombok and now we expect to reach Singapore early on Saturday morning. About Bali: fronting the sea is a cluster of very high, steep hills, not very thickly wooded but in scattered areas showing signs of cultivation. Then, as the ship follows around its curving coastline, a volcanic mountain comes into view, greyish in contrast to the adjoining green, a 'bite' out of the top of the cone, and making the most graceful sweep right down to the sea. It was wreathed in cloud when we saw it. And a big black and yellow butterfly hovered above our heads at one point, though we must have been a mile and a half to two miles from land. (Isn't the butterfly a symbol of happiness?)

#### *Singapore, 11.5.46*

We disembarked shortly after midday and were met by our house-boy, very emotional, tears coursing down his cheeks. How did he know we were due to arrive then? We had not been able to communicate with him and he doesn't speak or read English.

We have just now lunched at Raffles Hotel – world famous Raffles, epitome of glamour and elegance! The Chinese waiters were in the sartorial splendour of old singlets and patched trousers, long, short, or half-way. First we had very weak soup of an indeterminate kind served in an old enamel mug, next the entree and main course: a sardine on one side of the plate and a slice of bully-beef on the other. Finally, the old enamel mug came back, this time full of tea. No liqueurs, I'm afraid. From Raffles we went on to the Sea View Hotel which is now a rehabilitation hostel – we couldn't get in anywhere else – where for supper we again had weak soup out of chipped enamel mugs; bully-beef; and tea without sugar.

#### *Ipoh, 15.5.46*

We left Singapore on Sunday evening, travelling all night in a frightful train without lights and with padding all gone from most of the seats. Fortunately some Army person found me a sleeper after an hour or so. But prior to that, while I had

been trying to sleep sitting up with my head against the back of the seat, I suddenly felt a bite on my ear. 'Bug!' I thought, but no, it was just one of the naked springs that had playfully pinched me. In that sort of discomfort John had to spend the night. Monday, when we reached Kuala Lumpur, was a public holiday. We left there yesterday morning at 9.00 arriving at Ipoh at 3.00. Here we were met and escorted by an extremely English, extremely courteous Air Force young man attached to the British Military Administration. When we arrived at the house, he called to his wife, 'Come out, Peggy, don't be nervous . . . they're quite young!' They must have had a mental image of two old die-hards in strong shoes and pith helmets.

Although I was reluctant to leave home; sad to go from you all, especially knowing well the many problems, I must confess that it is thrilling to be back in Malaya. This remembered 'redolence' of Malaya is unmistakable . . . this blending of woodsmoke, garlic cooking, and the scent of temple-flowers – I love it. Being in Singapore again gave me unexpected intense joy, and the feeling of profound gratitude that we are here again – together.

The shops in the Chinese streets in Singapore were groaning with food, as they say (I never know why they should 'groan' – that should come perhaps after the food). That plenty is not so here in KL, however. Singapore gets the pickings, of course, being a free port. Why worry: eggs, vegetables and fruits are plentiful everywhere – but meat, cheese, butter and milk are only issued on an Army ration card. John gets one, but I do not. There are no domestic animals to be seen – they starved or were eaten during the Japanese occupation – no cultivated flower-gardens; people's clothes are threadbare and patched everywhere; no shoes. We have meals with the young Air Force couple but for the time being are sharing the house next-door.

John's appointment is Deputy Resident Commissioner, Central Perak. Perak again! John chuckled about his previous appointment here. Very soon after his arrival in Malaya, crowned with first-class Honours and with, I suppose, a certain though modest pride in having been of the few selected for the MCS, you can be sure our so conscientious young John wished to use his abilities to the utmost. Imagine his indignation then, when he was sent out as he puts it 'to count rubber trees'! Actually he had a squad of locals to do the initial counting. This job was necessary because, with the advent of synthetic rubber, quotas had to be imposed on estates, to keep up the price of natural rubber. Anyhow that threw him in at the deep end, at least linguistically.

The house that goes with the job is in a place called Batu Gajah (Elephant Stone) which is about sixteen miles from Ipoh. We saw it this morning. Like most others it is denuded of furniture and fittings: no stove; shabby in the extreme; the timber floors stained with grease, as the house more recently had been used as an Indian quarter-master's store. Cleaning, painting and repairs will commence forthwith, and we shall probably move in about a week hence. It is basically a grand, spacious house – still with ceiling fans – and the grounds are reputed to have been beautiful. Three gardeners are provided and were part of the establishment before the war. We can buy a second-hand refrigerator; we already have been supplied with a good car. So, no doubt, life will be comfortable enough.

Apart from general neglect and the effects of looting there is less *outward* sign of the Japanese occupation than I expected. Certainly around the docks of Singapore, and in odd spots at KL, there are bomb-damaged buildings and some conspicuously vacant lots; and the rolling stock and railways generally are in a bad state. Incidentally, we saw Japanese POWs at work around the docks: their arrogant looks, and attitude, would have earned them torture if the boot had been on the other foot. Indeed a boot should have been applied to them, on a tender place!

It has been very difficult for members of the 'stand-by' British Military Administration, untrained as they are in civil administration in this country, to carry on until the permanent members of Government returned to full strength. They took control as soon as possible after the Japanese surrender. But it must be remembered that at that time the nearest Allied forces were in Rangoon, a thousand miles away. The interim period was indeed a bloody one. Communist guerillas, exploiting the hiatus, and having arms, came out of the jungle and established themselves in authority, intending to take over the country. They terrorised the local inhabitants; they slaughtered wholesale all whom they even suspected of any sort of collaboration with the Japanese – or any against whom they had a personal grudge; they extorted money, on old Chicago principles, they looted and burned, and ran riot. They were of course almost all Chinese – and many alien Chinese at that. The British Military had a fairly tough time with them when they did arrive. There is a fantastic, though true, story of the Chinese girl Communist, aged about twenty-five – and still living in the district, I understand – who during the reign of terror was judge of the 'People's Court'. 'Off with his head' was apparently her theme song. She had condemned hundreds of people to death while she had power to do so. These guerillas, as Communists, had been armed by the Administration at the outbreak of the war to harass the Japanese and took to the jungle, and indeed a few of our own people were with them during the war. One of them, a man John knows, was in fact taken off by submarine for leave during that time, and returned a month or two later!

There has been unrest and a degree of gang warfare between the Malays and Chinese, and a number of people on either side have been 'bumped off' but it seems they don't want any quarrel with the Europeans here. What is clearly observable is the distinction the local people make in their attitude towards the Europeans who shared their sufferings under the Japanese, and those who did not. To those who stayed they extend immediate warmth and friendliness; they are reserved with the others. However, that distinction they do not apply to me.

There is an orphanage at Batu Gajah which is at present in the hands of a Red Cross girl. I am hoping to interest myself very actively in this. They are mostly children of coolies who died under the Japanese 'masters'.

Our cookie came to KL station to meet us. We do not know how he found out when and where we would be. However, there he was and he wants to come back to us so I suppose we shall have to take him. Two of his children died but he has another one – the Boy has now four.

Sadly conspicuous is the absence of flowers, and of animals (eaten or dead from starvation) and such signs of normal well-being.

*Ipoh, 21.5.46*

We expect to be moving into our house at Batu Gajah the day after tomorrow. The PWD are doing their best to restore it. We looked in on Sunday to see a squad of about twenty coolies with buckets of water and caustic soda and rags washing down walls. They didn't want the brushes and soap I'd offered them. In one place we saw them washing the lower part of the wall while the upper half was still dirty. Questioned, they said they'd do that later! While they're working they chatter and give each other instructions, and their language sounds to me like innumerable marbles dropping down a drain. They're Tamils. Bathroom fittings and furniture are very scarce; what the Japs and looters left the Army swiped, and what they left no one would want anyway. So this large house will echo somewhat hollowly. We have two iron bedsteads – hospital cots – an office cupboard with some shelves removed, for a wardrobe (always referred to as an '*almira*' – relic of the Portuguese time I suppose), and a dilapidated shoe cupboard hotted up a little will serve as a dressing-table. In the baronial dining-room is an old-fashioned brown-treacled sideboard and the lower half of a large office bookcase; a small dirty-black oval table with spindly legs; and some jaundiced cane-bottomed chairs. 'Ours is a nice house, ours is!' But the house is on high ground which slopes down under groves of coconut palms and green trees to the village, which we haven't visited yet. The drive is an avenue of splendid old trees which form a shady canopy overhead and throw great cool shadows over the ground.

The tennis courts are overgrown with weeds and lorry-wheels have cut furrows in the grass. But all that can be rectified, and the house will always have atmosphere.

*Changkat Road, Batu Gajah, Perak, 25.5.46*

We moved in two days ago but it scarcely resembles a home; it is so enormous for such scant furnishing. The upstairs sitting room where I am at present is about 60 feet long by about 25 feet. In it we have a settee and four chairs. Of course, we only use the front portion of the room where all this grandeur is – we don't need to look behind. Through the full-length windows we see a great stretch of grass that *will* be a fine lawn, and beyond all the greenery, three tiers of noble hills. The sun rises behind them – we can see it from our beds in the morning – and all through the day changing lights and cloud movement transform their aspect. It's an enchanting place.

The big news is that I have a dog – a five- or six-weeks-old puppy. John bought him from a Chinese on a bicycle who came to the house in Ipoh on Wednesday. It has the usual puppy habits, so when I was searching for a name John suggested 'Wee-Wee' – and I'm afraid it might stick. Already puppy answers to the name, so we shall have to explain it in polite society as the French affirmative! John is very rude about puppy and very vulgarly he calls me 'ka-ka's Mamma'. Indeed the little chap is very intelligent – he is fox-terrier type, black and white, with some brown on his muzzle. He caused an 'incident' on the first night. To explain: By courtesy of a police officer we were sharing his house and our bedroom adjoined his. Well, you know how restless a puppy is at night when first separated from its mother.

This was no exception. No sooner had we gone to bed, puppy on a towel on the floor, than he started to cry – and that was repeated about every hour. I had to hop out of bed on each occasion, give him milk, play with him to make him tired, then settle him down again when he seemed sleepy, and return to bed until the next outburst. As you can imagine, there were the odd spots of wet to be wiped up from time to time, but that was all right until Wee-Wee definitely wanted to leave the room. Stupidly I didn't realise why, thought he was just exploring but didn't want him to be running about the house. However he evaded me and got out under the swing doors (they're about two feet or perhaps less, from the floor). I peered under to see where he was and then realized that the worst had happened. So, arming myself with a sheaf of toilet paper – dry paper and wet paper, soaped paper and Dettol'd paper, I pushed open the swing doors to the sitting-room outside. The door screamed and groaned like a banshee and John was 'shushing' beseechingly. Daintily as possible – for a lady in my position – I applied the several handfuls of dry paper, but it was awkward without a shovel. However, when I had accomplished that part, I thrust the foul parcels under the doors to John waiting to receive. 'Oh, thank you sooooo much,' he said, in the most genteel accent – like a clergyman, I thought, acknowledging a generous donation. Well, there I sat on my haunches, literally helpless with laughter, tears rolling down my cheeks, my hand over my mouth trying to stifle the splutters that would not stop. In that insane state I had to propel myself on my shaking stomach, under the swing-doors: I dared not open them again because of their creaking hinges. I laughed and laughed and couldn't stop – and it got me again on the following day.

Our Boy has been with us all the time since we reached Singapore and has, of course, been a gem. He said he had kept John's dress suit, a tennis shirt and a silver thermos jug left behind in the house in Klang. You can imagine what state the dress suit would be in, particularly considering the climate. But it is touching that he made that demonstration of faith in our return. Cookie arrived today so I suppose the wrangling will soon commence – the old rascal.

Yesterday was Empire Day and there was a demonstration as usual arranged for the school children and John had to deliver a speech to them. Being anxious to be helpful I typed out the sort of address I would make in these circumstances – and John used it basically. He laughed at these patriotic outpourings from me. But actually, though my tongue was in my cheek, I sincerely believe that the administrative officers are dedicated to the welfare of the local people.

The black market is a scourge; the rice supply is much below the demand and, as always in the case of shortages, this has given rise to illicit trading and profiteering. Europeans do not get a rice ration; Asians are issued with rice cards upon which they may secure their set portion. John tells me however that his enquiries among people in the *kampongs* did not elicit serious complaints about food shortages, but they do need clothes. The general health of people is improving and in large measure this may be due to the fact that perforce less rice but more vegetables and other foods are eaten to make up the deficiency. The tendency was to consume a disproportionate quantity of polished rice.

Today we experienced a critical reminder, if that were necessary, of the pressing need for greater initiatives, if possible, to find out the degree of damage done by the Japanese occupation to the health and well-being of the local people.

At lunch-time, fortunately while John was at home, an elderly man and a child arrived on the drive in front of the house. Our Boy saw them, went to question them and reported that they needed help. We went out to find that the man was blind and was being led by a boy who appeared to be not more than seven or eight years old. They were Indian, emaciated and in rags. Several ulcers on the poor man's legs were a frightful sight and the little boy's body and legs had patches of vicious-looking yaws. The man said they were hungry and sick. We couldn't discover precisely where they came from but he said his neighbours had given them a little food from time to time in return for any manual work the child was able to do. He had only recently learned that the bad men had gone away and that the *orang puteh* (white people) had come back so they were no longer afraid. We put them in the car and drove them to Batu Gajah hospital where they will be fed and healed, we hope. Meanwhile, as they don't speak much Malay, we've asked some of the Indian staff at the hospital to get what information they can about where these people had been living and what the condition of others there was like.

If this case sounds like bad social neglect on the part of the Government it must be remembered that the scope of deterioration in every aspect of life under the Japanese was astronomical and that it must take a long time to correct. For one thing, the assiduous control of malaria by constant inspections and spraying carried out by our Health Department had been entirely abandoned by the Japanese; there was no free medical treatment for the people; and they lived in fear and without adequate food. They were simply objects of brutal exploitation – Chinese and Indians in particular – the Malays were more fortunately placed. Obviously not all problems can be tackled at once – there are neither the funds nor the personnel as yet to cope with them. But with so much sincere concern and effort to re-establish good where there was evil the worst, I believe, will soon be overcome. One thing is clear, however: unless community leaders will busy themselves to discover and report areas of the greatest need among their people, how can they be reached and their needs known?

We are fortunate in having quite a good car – a 1943 Dodge – and now a reasonably good refrigerator. Last night when we entered the dining-room in the dark I saw a fire-fly. I followed its flight and finally got it to light on a small book in my hand. For a few seconds I had a close-up inspection of it. Its light is bright definite green and is carried in the lower half of the body and radiates just as a minute electric lamp would do. The fly is shaped rather like a large queen ant. And today I saw on one of the trees an Atlas moth with a wing span of about six inches. Most insects here are coloured and burnished like gems, or enamel and metal. Malaya must be an entomologist's paradise. But one small visitor had a bad experience. A few evenings ago while enjoying a drink before dinner in our manorial withdrawing-room we noticed a persistent squeaking from the ceiling fan. John remarked, 'Must have that oiled.' But when the fan was switched off the tiniest little bat staggered out from a hole in the hub – to rhyme with pub – and stayed to recover. I imagined it feeling frightfully sick and saying, 'I'll never touch another drop!'

*Batu Gajah 27.5.46*

The house is already looking slightly more like a home. In addition to the old manilla-cane suite we now have a coffee table and two cabinets with glass doors. The phone has been connected just today. John's office is only about three minutes walk from the house, but the *syce* insists on driving up to the front door just before 9.00 each morning to take the Tuan to his office in the approved fashion. And now we have a flag on our flag pole. It is run up at 6.00 a.m. and taken down at sunset and will not be flown at any time when the master is not in residence. John is going to teach Wee-Wee (Woy-Woy – Woy for short after that large watering place in NSW!) to salute it. The former name was embarrassing to use in company. He sleeps upstairs on a verandah outside our bedroom – that means he can't be a clean dog and go outside when he needs to because he has not yet learnt to manage the stairs. He can mount them but is afraid of the descent. So I tried putting down a couple of sheets of newspaper and, do you know, the smart little fellow actually used one. I did the same thing for him again last night, and again he understood. Mind you, he doesn't always aim straight, but he has the right idea – and he's not a day older than seven weeks. I gave him his first bath a few days ago, and what a fuss he made.

*Batu Gajah, 10.6.46*

We have just heard that the King of Siam has been shot dead in his bed. Flags are being flown at half-mast.

Today being Whit Monday is a public holiday so John is at home all day. This afternoon we have been invited to the Young Malays Club to a reception and tea. I can speak a few words of Malay now but cannot follow very well if it is spoken quickly – so I suppose my conversation will be very limited.

Saturday was a big day – the Victory March in Ipoh, as in London. In the morning was the military parade: about 2,000 troops altogether took part – several Indian companies and some British; jeeps and lorries, and mounted on the embankment overlooking the *padang*, about four big guns. The *padang*, incidentally, is an open reserve in the nature of a large playing-field. It was all vividly green and bright in the morning sun. John had to take the salute and inspect the troops with the Brigadier. The royal salute of twenty-one guns was fired and, believe me, the concussion went right through you. Quite a number of the locals had gathered close to the guns to get a ring-side view of the highlights of the occasion. It was most amusing to watch their spontaneous dispersal through clouds of smoke, after the first report. One gun blew an enormous perfect smoke-ring into the sky. Amid oohs and aahs it curled up until it finally melted away. An acquaintance of ours who was standing beside me said, 'That's a halo for your husband!' I protested that it was nowhere near him so he answered that 'Gabriel [had] misfired!' When the parade was over we were invited to British headquarters for refreshments. There was a wonderful assortment of savouries, beer and soft drinks. As usual, the Army had looked after itself very well. Here in the Officers' Messes is to be seen perhaps the only respectable furniture in the country.

We came back to Batu Gajah for lunch, had a rest in the afternoon and then had to return to Ipoh for the civilian demonstration at 5.00 p.m. This was an assembly – again on the *padang* – of ex-members of the ARP fire watchers, MAS, etc., as well as Boy Scouts – all of whom had been active during the fighting here. Clothes are the worst shortage of all so though they all had turned up in their Sunday best they were a pretty shabby lot – no uniforms of any sort. Again John took the march past and delivered an appropriate speech; some gramophone records for the march had been found, and after much searching a recording of God Save The King. Then the people dispersed, and that was that!

Gopal, the head gardener, is now growing for us lettuce, tomatoes and cucumbers; he's going to sow beans, corn and sweet potatoes. We've had pomelos from our own trees and there are four avocado-pear trees with oodles of fruit; also pawpaw trees. Coconut palms are here also and three *durian* trees. *Durian* is a large rather prickly looking fruit, oval in shape, size of a small football, and inside is divided into big creamy-fleshed seeds. They smell to high heaven; all the Asians love them (they're said to be an aphrodisiac) and one classic description of the flavour is 'like sucking cream through a gas-pipe'. (There is a naughty little Malay saying which translated goes something like 'When the *durians* drop, so do the sarongs!')

Sometimes in the late afternoon we walk through nearby *kampongs* (Malay villages). We create great interest – I particularly because I must be the first European woman – and with such fair hair – that many of them have seen for years – or ever. The *kampung* is a collection of small *atap*-roofed houses built well off the ground, for coolness, and with a flight of perhaps ten or twelve steps to the entrance. Sandals are always removed before entering. Woven mats are on the floor, and there are cushions. Not much furniture, for the people eat seated on the floor, and sleep on the mats. The *kampung* is shady with coconut palms, banana palms and a few fruit trees. It cannot be compared with villages as we know them – no shops. People like to sit and gossip; they may do a little mat-weaving; there is probably a bicycle if one doesn't wish to walk. Many would own, or share, a padi-field to produce sufficient rice for their family's consumption, and during the planting and the harvesting seasons would work hard – men and women. Often there are small fish to be caught in the padi-swamps, to supplement the diet. And for a little cash income, some Malays own a small rubber plantation which often is shared with a Chinese in what is known as the *bagi dua* (half and half) system whereby the Chinese works the holding and the profit is divided between them.

#### *Batu Gajah, 14.6.46*

It has been quite an eventful week, so I'll start at the beginning: On Monday, as I told you, we were invited to a tea party given as a welcome to us by the Malay Community. Malay women until now have rarely appeared at public functions like that, so it was most surprising to see so many of them on that occasion. Despite the sad shortage of clothing in this country they managed to present a lovely spectacle in their sarongs, and *kebayas* which are generally of lace or organdie. Some had bracelets and brooches, some had flowers in their hair. The men too are colourful in bright sarongs which they drape over pyjama-type suits – for best wear these will be of silk or satin – and on their heads the *songkok* which is

like a fez cut short and made of black or dark coloured velvet. There were all manner of dainties: cakes and sweets ingeniously different in taste and appearance though mostly made of rice or rice flour or tapioca. Tea was served as usual complete with milk and a lot of sugar. There were the usual speeches, to which John responded – and then we all left, a nice time having been had by all!

Yesterday we were invited to a garden party at The Residency in Ipoh. The Sultan of Perak was there and a couple of his sons, as well as other Malays, all rather gorgeous looking; Indians also, Chinese, and most of the Europeans of the District. The garden of The Residency is lovely and in perfect condition. (The house was probably occupied by one of the Jap big-shots.) Tables were laid on the lawn under the shady trees; the grass was lusciously green; there was a little breeze – and a band was playing in the open, at a discreet distance. The function was in celebration of the King's birthday. We sat with three Chinese gentlemen – and now I know why the band was engaged, for our table-companions didn't place anything in the mouth; they got it there by suction! One of them belched audibly – it's an old Chinese custom, no doubt. At about 6.30 the Sultan rose and we all rose until he gracefully took his seat in his big cream-coloured car and drove off. All the ladies wore their very best to the party, of course – I immaculate in the shorter version of my wedding dress, and a large white hat. And how do you think I travelled in all my finery? By a 3-ton truck! and, barring bumps, it wasn't too bad. Mounting and dismounting, however, was nothing short of gymnastics. Our car was in dock.

Now today we've been entertained at a tea-party given by the Chinese community, to welcome us. The Chinese in general are not so handsome or picturesque as the Malays or Indians, and they haven't the same innate graciousness as the Malays, though very generous. These people are poor now; those who had money had to spend it during the Japanese occupation to supplement the food supply for their families or to pay for medical attention, etc. After the usual refreshments there were more speeches of welcome and loyalty delivered first in Chinese and then in English – to which John duly responded. He is very good at making impromptu speeches – never stuck for a touch of humour, the right words – and good timing. There were a few representatives of the Malay and Indian communities – just to show good feeling. We left shortly after 6.00 with much bowings, thank-yous and hand-shakes.

Next news is that tomorrow we are moving into The Residency at Ipoh. The Resident Commissioner is ill and John is to act for him – for how long we don't know; maybe only for a week.

I know I have previously mentioned the shortage of clothing everywhere. What cloth there is is so expensive that few can afford to buy it. So people are literally in rags. Sometimes you truly cannot tell the 'mother of the patches'. Indeed some children are unable to go to school because they cannot be clothed. It makes me feel wretched and I give John no peace about it. He is making enquiries now and I shall continue to chivvy him until I know some very definite action has been taken. Conditions generally are improving but there are many problems to be handled. It is said that there is plenty of tinned milk but it all goes onto the black market; the same with cigarettes. These commodities were rationed and provided for on people's rice-cards but when plentiful stocks arrived they were handed over to

dealers in the belief that abundance would kill the black-market; apparently this has not been so.

Next morning: we are bustling about getting clothes and some foodstuffs ready to take with us. Our few bits of silver and other valuables we have put away but, as we are leaving the Boy and Cook here, everything should be safe: they are truly trustworthy. And John said to tell you that for the time being anyhow, I shall be first lady in the State of Perak.

*The Residency, Ipoh, Perak, 20.6.46*

I really cannot let pass the opportunity of writing to you on this official stationery – and I hope you are duly impressed. We fly the Union Jack and the Perak flags on the car – but only when HE is in it. Armed guards are on duty at The Residency all the time. The garden is like a miniature botanical gardens and the house looks directly over the golf course, and the race course, which are in the same enclosure: sounds funny but I don't suppose they are in use simultaneously! There is to be a race meeting here on Saturday and all we have to do for a ring-side view is to look out of the windows. We don't know yet how long we shall be at The Residency, the incumbent is suspected of having developed TB, probably during internment, but there is no definite diagnosis yet. He is over fifty and I understand it is more rare for people of that age to get it, so we're hoping the tests will prove negative.

*Ipoh, 30.6.46*

I'm sorry to have neglected you somewhat. It worries me. We have had a lot of entertaining to do, as is expected of us here, and that does interfere with more personal activities. I do hope little Kathie had a happy birthday yesterday. We thought of her and wished her 'Happy Birthday' first thing in the morning.

Last Wednesday we drove up north about fifty-two miles to a place called Taiping which is in this State. It is much nearer real jungle than any other place I have seen. We had lunch at the Deputy Commissioner's house there and before lunch he took us to the swimming pool which is fed by a waterfall from the hills. The walk to the pool, from the road, was most interesting to me. There were great tall straight trees, straight as telegraph poles but about three times as tall and three times as thick; trees with leaves as large as a good-sized meat dish; palms of all kinds; and the ever-present hungry parasite growths and undergrowth. Many of the jungle trees have ferns clinging in clumps all the way up the trunk. We could hear the sound of falling water and the insistent hum and drone and shrill of innumerable small creatures: insects, tree-frogs, and suchlike. And over all was that humid vital hush in which you can feel the very breath of life. It is an atmosphere with a sort of ruthless urge that is almost frightening. I felt that if you stood still, soon some tendril or tentacle would reach out and cover you, or draw you in.

There was a race meeting here again yesterday. We watched from the verandah outside our bedroom. I am incensed! The racehorses had somehow survived the Japanese occupation, or were imported – I don't know. But they were not in training obviously, for two of them dropped dead.

Our Boy, when he returned from Klang, brought his little daughter with him – she is the one who was due to be born just when we were evacuated from Klang. She is a quaint little thing, named Ah Ta. I noticed she hadn't anything to play with so I got the cook to buy some peanuts and I made her a peanut Chinaman complete with cardboard hat, a pigtail, red shirt and blue trousers. She was delighted with it, in particular the pigtail made of wool. She is the child the Boy told us about, who was on the railway line when a train came through. He witnessed that, in horror, but instead of finding her mangled, she was just dazed and covered in soot – saved because she lay between the lines.

I have started making toys for children in the hospital here. There is a Red Cross almoner attached to the hospital and other Red Cross and St. John's people doing various jobs of welfare work, all of which will cease in August when their term of service will expire. I have been making enquiries about what will happen then. Just as much welfare work will be necessary and unless there is some recruitment soon for a volunteer service to continue the work there will be general neglect, or at least diminished provision for those in need. I want to help fill the gap and do welfare work – so the making of toys for hospitalised children is a small step in the right direction.

Our little dog is a funny fellow. I've discovered that he likes peanuts very much. He very cleverly bites up the shell and spits it out, generally leaving the nut in his mouth. He chews that up with much slapping of lips – then sometimes eats the shell. Of course, he is at the mischievous stage and one can't forever be checking or smacking him – so when he is being naughty and biting things he shouldn't I throw him a peanut and that distracts his attention quite successfully. He is learning not to bite hard, but he does love to chew my hand – and my ear, if he gets the chance. Sometimes he tries so hard to communicate: he makes a noise that is neither bark nor howl nor cry – just a 'wowowowmmm' sort of noise that is really meant to convey something conversational, I'm sure. He is so sweet and I have become inordinately attached to him with his pretty face and nice nature. I can take a bone out of his mouth and he doesn't even try to get it back – just looks questioningly at me without complaint.

I don't think we shall be here for much longer. Another Resident has been appointed, though we do not know when he is due to arrive. The house at Batu Gajah will certainly look bare of furniture by comparison with this one which has, in fact, more than is necessary. I have urged John to write to the Custodian of Property and point out this anomaly. It has been confirmed that the Resident has TB and has to remain in hospital at BG for a month, then leave Malaya. We are sad about that – he's such a pleasant jolly man. However the disease is not advanced so he may in time be able to return.

*Ipoh, 6.7.46*

We expect to return to BG tomorrow morning – the new Resident will be arriving today. I don't mind in the least relinquishing this, except that our own house will look so shabby and empty. John suggests that I make eyes at the Resident and tell him how wretched is our home in BG in the hope that he might part up with a stick of furniture or two – or perhaps just some pot plants. So I am to sell my soul – not

for a mess of potage, but for a pot of balsam. I've told John that accordingly whatever I do is in the spirit of sacrifice – and to uphold the British presence up country. Also it will be for John's own sake; the Resident being his *tuan besar* (big boss)!

If we had still been at The Residency next week John would have gone to Kuala Lumpur to a conference headed by Malcolm McDonald, appointed 'Special Commissioner, South East Asia'. He is a very pleasant man, I believe, and very capable but the general opinion is that he is quite superfluous. Further, he has about fifteen good Malayan Civil Service men on his staff who are really required for more constructive work elsewhere. The conference is about what is called 'The Malayan Union'. This is the mischievous egg hatched by the Colonial Office and a few 'wise guys' of the MCS who were not here during the occupation but have done very well for themselves. Its main thrust is to establish a single strong central Government to replace those of the nine Malay States, transferring jurisdiction from the Rulers to His Majesty the King, and including Penang and Malacca – and giving equal citizenship to people of all races either born in Malaya or resident for a reasonable time. Certainly the Sultans, in their relief at being delivered from the Japanese, did assent to the new treaties, presented though they were in a rather arbitrary manner immediately after the Japanese surrender. But now that all the implications of it are fully realised the Malays – and all our Government people I have spoken to about it – are in strong opposition. They believe that Britain's first duty here is to protect the interests of the native inhabitants of the country – the Malays – as it has always done in the past. The Chinese, who are about 50% of the population, while many have been born here and may never have seen China, still regard China as their homeland and many have no loyalty to Malaya. Moreover the Malays are unable to compete with them in the economic sphere and will need special protection for some years ahead to enable them to catch up with the Chinese, especially when the British Administration has left.

I had another vaccination last week. This time it 'took' and I have a dirty looking sore on my leg and generally feel a little bit off colour. The doctor saw it this morning and pronounced it a 'very nice take'. Pooh! If he'd said a 'very nice leg' that would have been quite a different thing!

#### *Batu Gajah, 7.7.46*

You will be pleased to hear that I didn't have to sacrifice my all in order to win from the Resident something for our BG house: he has given us a tall framed mirror – which incidentally belongs to the Dispensary in Ipoh so is only on loan – and he said we might have anything else out of the house that we like, as he considers The Residency over-furnished. But of course one feels reluctant to take advantage of generosity – John even more than myself – so I don't suppose we shall relieve him of much else except a pot plant.

#### *Batu Gajah, 11.7.46*

On Tuesday we were invited to a luncheon reception to the new GOC Malaya – General Arkwright. It was really the first official function of that nature I had

attended, and as I was 'leading lady' I felt a little self-conscious though somewhat amused. The General was be-monocled which hardly suited his rather baggy-looking khaki shorts. He is a tall, rather gaunt, distinctly 'cartoonable' figure, so English, a bit foppish in impression but a very nice human person withal. I sat on his right, and I noticed with satisfaction that he released his monocle before commencing food. I was speculating on how difficult it would be otherwise if he were served with spaghetti! I think I mentioned the Brigadier's Mess after the Victory March; it is the house with the distorting mirrors – if I mentioned those previously. In case I didn't describe it earlier, it is a very large and very elaborate house which belonged to a multi-millionaire Eu Tong Sen – a tin magnate – who had started as a mining coolie. At the top of a broad curved staircase is a large and lovely room which was his art gallery, but in one corner beside the staircase are five distorting mirrors – supplied no doubt for the amusement of his guests.

I meant to tell you this funny little story in my last letter, so will tell you now. When John was acting Resident in Ipoh a call came through to him from the Sultan of Perak. The call had been put through by a secretary and when John answered there was some 'hold on please', etc., and then the Malay at the other end said, 'I am very sorry – the Sultan wanted to speak to you, but he has gone to the lavatory!'

The house is a little better furnished; thanks to the Resident we are now richer by a settee, a tall mirror and three pot-plants. I have commenced singing practice again, but my dog doesn't like it a bit. On the first day he came excitedly along, made his mouth into a round O, lifted up his head and his voice and howled with my every note. He just begged and implored me not to. When we were at The Residency I sometimes ran him around the lawn and our Boy's little girl would watch, so one day I took her hand and she ran with me, simply gurgling with joy when I threw a stone and we and the dog ran after to try and get there first. After a while I gave her the stone to throw whereupon she threw it *at* him and hit him on the nose – it wasn't malice, just lack of understanding – and good shooting! Another very amusing incident concerning the puppy, while we were at The Residency: in order to teach him how to be clean in the house John took him into the garden each evening before we retired to bed. In order to be sure he had done the 'right thing' John followed his rather lunatic running about. The Guard on duty at the foot of the entrance steps was an enormous turbaned Sikh complete with rifle, and each time John dashed past him, in pursuit of the puppy, the guard, with much heel clicking, presented arms. John, almost in hysterics at the absurd situation, had to tell him to stop.

#### *Batu Gajah, 17.7.46*

We are – or rather, John is – on Army rations for which he pays the equivalent of 5s. 3d. per day. You would be scandalised if you saw what we have delivered – by army-truck each day. It gets progressively worse so you can well imagine that somebody somewhere is making a packet out of this sort of thing. One day last week he got a small packet of biscuits – about eight in all – for the day's ration; the next day a little cucumber and a quarter loaf of bread. John lets it continue for the sheer wonder of witnessing the effrontery. Fortunately we are not dependent on rations. We can buy meat and fish and occasionally we do, at a price, in the market.

It's best to shop at the Cold Storage but the range there is very limited. We can get eggs and vegetables, and some of the latter are from our own garden.

I have been asked to distribute the prizes at the local English school on 2nd August. The prizes will all be food-stuffs – there would be little else to buy and anyhow this is a time of severe austerity for most local people. Chinese shopkeepers are making money of course, charging exorbitant prices for everything they stock.

How thoughtful of the children to wish to send toys for needy children here. Dolls, toy animals – anything that little ones would play with would be most welcome – but not expensive things, for I'm sure they wouldn't be treated with great care. I shall be making a few myself shortly; indeed I have been doing some sewing for the hospital almoner and am at present working on little *bajus*, having finished creating a charming pussy cat – it has button eyes sewn on with green thread, white whiskers, an embroidered pink nose and a little red cloth tongue sticking out of its mouth. Mention of garments reminds me, from frequent and inescapable observation, that lower covering is more necessary for Chinese boys in particular; they run around in little shirts which are just not long enough! But girls are always modestly dressed. Incidentally, the tiny orphan I told the children about is Indian, her name is Letchumy. Though she is well-cared for now, her legs are not much thicker than a broom handle. She was recently vaccinated and has a nasty open sore on her arm as a result. I was at the orphanage recently when the sore was being dressed; the proud flesh had to be touched, gently of course, but many a child would have bellowed at the sight alone. She didn't flinch. It is comforting to see how happy these children are.

We had a discovery made in our garden yesterday. A gardener was digging and unearthed some small sealed bottles. The further he dug the more there were. Of course, our Boy likes to take a leading part in all that concerns the household so there he was, grubbing in the soil, handing out bunches of these small bottles. Again this morning, many were found, along with roll bandages, ointments, and a large bottle unidentified. If they prove to be good drugs they will be very welcome to the hospital, for drugs generally are rather scarce – except in the Army, I'm told. Of course these are mostly Japanese drugs which someone had buried, no doubt marking the spot in his own mind. Wouldn't it be exciting to come across valuables – but I'm afraid we shan't do that. John this morning sent samples of the drugs to the hospital for analysis. The Boy could read what labels remained and described some as headache medicine and some as morphine, I think.

*Batu Gajah, 19.7.46*

I told you about finding bottles of drugs in the garden. The contents of the first lot sent to the hospital were pronounced to be Vitamin B. It is quite early in the morning, just after 8.00; John is playing the piano – and I am ready for breakfast. After breakfast we are going to a place called Tanjong Rambutan to inspect the mental asylum. Tomorrow promises to be interesting – we are to visit a Sakai village. The Sakais are the aboriginals of this country. No one knows how long they peopled parts of Malaya before the Malays arrived, but apparently that invasion drove them into the hills. They are – or were – quite a primitive people,

they use blow pipes and are quite different in appearance from the Malays, I believe, having kinky hair – but I shall tell you more about them after I have seen them.

We have a little more furniture from the pool now, not the best and certainly second-hand: a frightful old dressing-table which I don't intend to use as it hasn't a mirror; a rather battered desk for John; four reasonable lounge chairs.

Later: we returned from the mental hospital at lunch-time. The patients, many of them, are somewhat distressing but mostly are very quiet. The men have a large occupational therapy section where they make rope, mats and matting from banana stalks; cotton thread; and finally, fabric. The cotton is grown in the grounds of the hospital which cover about a square mile. They also do tailoring for the inmates; make model boats and jigsaw puzzles. One Chinese engaged in making matting was a very jolly chap. He was wearing a Netherlands Indies Civil Administration cap (a sort of khaki peaked cap with a red band around it and NICA printed across the front). He had also attached a brass star to this; had a red band of some sort over his shoulder and across his chest; a sergeant's chevrons on his sleeve and other details I don't remember. He was smiling very happily. Doctor in charge who took us around is a very nice person – very kind and interested in the work – and told me, to my comfort, that quite a number of cases were curable! Their insanity is a secondary manifestation of malaria in an acute form; malnutrition; or a certain bowel trouble. When these primary troubles have been treated successfully the patients will regain sanity. He also said that these curable ones tend to be the most violent. We were told that at the time of the Japanese occupation there were about 5,000 patients in all – 2,000 had been brought from Java, I think he said – but when the British administration services returned the number remaining alive was 300! We inspected the grounds which include a farm and an orchard. They are endeavouring now to re-stock and to bring it again to full production.

#### *Batu Gajah, 24.7.46*

We are just back from Ipoh where for the first time since our return to Malaya we were able to buy fresh butter. You can't imagine what good news that is – butter substitute, that is, tinned 'butter' is not enjoyable and has a greasiness that adheres to the palate. We were also able to get fresh meat – I suppose it is Australian frozen – and bacon. So things are looking up.

Now to tell you about my visit to the Sakai village. We set off at 7.30 on Saturday morning. John could not accompany us; we were four in all – two men, another girl and myself, in a jeep. I had not ridden in a jeep before and enjoyed the drive tremendously. Our driver, who is the Major of an Army battery here, ripped her along at about 50 m.p.h. The morning was gloriously fresh and cool – the wind was almost cold. After travelling a few miles we turned onto a road through a rubber estate. That was a real joy: trees, trees as far as the eye could see, forming an arch overhead. There is always a carpet of dead leaves under rubber trees which, unlike other trees in this country, are deciduous. So among the green there are touches of lovely tawny autumn shades. After two miles or so we emerged onto a public road again and soon came to a very rocky, narrow thoroughfare

through a Chinese village. But before doing so, the military truck which accompanied us picked up the *Penghulu*, who is the Malay representative of the area in which the Sakai village lies.

To explain: In Malaya each state is divided up, apart from main administrative districts, into *mukims* (sections) under a *Penghulu* who is always a Malay and a respected sort of 'elder' of the local community. The Government pays him a retainer. Well, to get on with the journey, we rocked and wound our way through this funny little village, much to the amusement of the locals, some of whom laughed quite openly at us and called off the many dogs that resented our trespass. Our driver certainly appeared to take some daring risks but he's an excellent driver so we came without mishap to a little square of land where we parked the jeep and the truck and left both in the charge of a soldier. Then began the trek – three miles – through open, completely shadeless country, along a single track cut through three feet high grass called '*lalang*'. At intervals there were little muddy streams with logs – sometimes just one log – placed across as a bridge. We saw no wild life at all, much to my disappointment. It was fairly early so the sun was not very hot yet. As we approached nearer the village the long grass gave place to banana and rubber trees, and at intervals here the track was cut through hillocks. We had been met at the parking place by a few Sakai guides and carriers to bring along the presents we had brought.

At last our safari ended and we were taken to a little open shed where there was a rough table, and a form to sit on. On the table were coconuts for our refreshment. These were green and complete with all the outer coverings as they grow, except that a slice had been cut off the bottom of each to make it stand flat, and a deeper slice had been cut from the top to make a hole about the size of a shilling, through which one could drink the coconut water. We certainly did drink. We lifted our coconuts to the mouth, with both hands – they are very heavy things – put our mouths over the holes, and tried not to let the liquid trickle down our chins. The liquid in the coconut is pure like water and taken like that, straight from the nut, is deliciously cool, slightly sweet, and most refreshing. Most welcome, as we were all fairly warm by this time. The Sakais had arranged themselves in a rough semi-circle about the shed, and we were able to study them fairly closely. Some of the women wore cosmetics – their own make of course: probably rice flour for powder and for rouge and lip colouring perhaps betelnut; I'm not sure. The younger ones had flowers in their hair. What I found very amusing was to see babies also made-up, quite small babies in arms with bright red cheeks on their dusky little faces, and redded lips, and powder – same as their mothers. Also we noticed that two good-looking lads – probably sixteen or seventeen – were also decorated with rouge and lip colouring and had blackened their already black eyebrows.

There were about a hundred people representing twenty-four families. I learnt that in fact these are not true Sakais but a cross with Malays and they speak Malay. We opened up the boxes of clothing and the *Penghulu* explained that through their head-man they would be called by name. He explained also that their '*Tuan*' could not come but that his wife would distribute the gifts. So yours-truly with a bundle of khaki jackets and trousers etc. in front of her handed out whichever each preferred. One jacket which bore a sergeant's stripes we reserved for the oldest member who seemed to be about seventy-five. They all cheered and laughed when

they saw his stripes, so they're pretty sophisticated, you see. After the men were dealt with we handed out what women's and children's clothing there was, their own headman suggesting what would be the most useful and who were the more needy ones. They were nearly all covered, or semi-covered, in frightful old rags, but in their native state I believe the Sakais just wear a G string! After the clothes came the cigarettes – and what a scramble for those! The people had all been cautioned to thank me politely in the Malay term. Some had been too shy to look at me, much less to thank me, but all shed their bashfulness as soon as the cigarettes appeared. There was a sea of open hands – all ages from five years old upward. The adults got two packets each and the children one packet each. We had also given out a few tins of sweets and six large tins of meat – one tin to each four families. Their headman, as he called up the recipients, told them with which families they were to share. They have a perfectly just, communal spirit, I understand. After the presents were distributed the *Penghulu* produced a vacuum flask of tea and four large pancake-like things filled with a little curried meat, onion and chilli. I have never tasted anything more delicious. I think they had been fried in coconut oil. As we ate we were entertained with a *Ronggeng*: a Malay dance which is the accepted form of entertainment. It is performed by young men and girls, the partners never touching but moving forward and back, with an occasional turn or two, opposite each other; and often they sing national folk songs while dancing. Only two girls here took part – the village belles no doubt – but various young men partnered them in turn. Before they danced with partners these two girls approached our table and danced just for us, singing what I was told was an impromptu song thanking us for bringing the presents. I must say they kicked up a lot of dust although it is not a boisterous dance. We noticed several cases of elephantiasis, all men, with enlarged feet and legs. Apparently it does not cause pain and is I understand caused by an organism picked up by the feet, from certain soil or plants.

After thanking, and being duly thanked, we set off again at about 12.00 noon. It was nice and warm by this time as you can imagine, and I just hoped I could make it. I had wisely carried an umbrella and this gave very good protection. The Major and I made the pace, and the others straggled behind. I always find in these circumstances that it is easier to move fairly quickly. Well, I made it all right, feeling physically quite well but rather red in the face. The Boy had put a thermos jug of iced water in the jeep for me, and there was enough for us all. The others, although not looking as flushed as I, did feel the heat equally I think, which I found rather reassuring. The drive back was quite good though the jeep hadn't a hood. However, its speed created a wind which made the heat tolerable and of course through the rubber plantation it was delightfully cool. We got home in time for lunch and John was much relieved to see me supported by my own two feet and quite unharmed, for he realized that I had taken a risk. Certainly I could not possibly have walked that route under an Australian midsummer sun; the humid heat I can take.

PS: John has just told me that 'Sakai' is an impolite term: it means 'slave'. The people referred to may be primarily Jakun.

*Batu Gajah, 26.7.46*

Every Tuesday evening, there being no clubhouse now in Batu Gajah, the Europeans foregather at the Officers' Mess just to meet each other and talk and have drinks. Last Tuesday one of the men arranged a *sati* supper. *Sati* is prepared by spearing little thin slivers of chicken, pork or other meat – and I suppose anything else you like – onto thin skewers of bamboo stick. The *sati* man brings along his little stove which is an oblong sort of tin box about 3 ft x 2ft with an opening in the top of about 10ins x 6 ins. Inside are glowing lumps of charcoal. Over this he arranges his sticks of *sati* and while one side is cooking he paints the upper side with coconut oil, then reverses the *sati* stick so as to cook the other side. As the *sati* grills – a few minutes in all – he fans the fire, sitting cross-legged on the floor. With the hot *sati* a bowl of sauce is provided and this is a peppery-hot mixture with spices, ground coconut, I think, and chilli. It is very delicious.

*Batu Gajah, 2.8.46*

I must tell you about something that amused me here last week: we moved our beds and furniture into a large bedroom on the opposite side of the house, it being cooler there. The bathroom attached to that bedroom is enormous, but was pretty squalid looking – badly in need of paint; bath and lav. very dirty. The last mentioned was worse than dirty – probably had not been cleaned for the last four years while in use by first the Japs and then by Indian troops. So of course the first thing I did was to concentrate on the lav. I melted soap in hot water – can't buy Vim or Sanpic – and was about to attack it myself with a brush when the boy arrived with a tin of sand and then proceeded to clean the pan with the sand and his FOOT: it did the trick fairly well!

Tomorrow we are going to Cameron Highlands for the Bank Holiday weekend. It is about 5,000 feet up and delightfully cool, I believe.

Evening: well, we're back from a local children's sports meeting and prize giving. The prizes were the usual selection: mostly utility articles and foodstuffs; there were chocolate bars, jelly crystals, tins of condensed milk, tins of cheese, cakes of soap, cotton singlets, a few penknives and two very inferior medals and cups. However, I've no doubt the prize-winners were all happy. It is really thrilling to witness the sacrificial effort people will make to win – flogging their energy until they literally drop at the tape. Some of the tiny contestants were no more than five years old.

Rabies has been reported in Ipoh and there is a warning that all dogs must be muzzled or chained up; dogs found unmuzzled in the streets will be shot. So yesterday we bought a chain for Woy and today the Boy made him a collar from a leather trunk-strap. He didn't like the collar at first but by midday was not making any objection to it. The Boy is very fond of him.

We have engaged a pleasant Indian *ayah* to do lighter laundry work.

*Batu Gajah, 7.8.46*

Well, we duly spent our week-end in the hills. Cameron Highlands vary between 5,000 and 6,500 feet, and the Rest House where we stayed is at the former height.

The journey from here took two and a half hours – it's about seventy-eight miles, about forty of which cover the twisting, winding, ever-ascending road up the mountain. It was raining heavily for the greater part of the time and thus the views were somewhat obscured. Nevertheless it was all very lovely. I felt a personal acquaintance with the clouds, many of which clung to other hillsides at about equal height to our level. On one side of the road all the way are the steep banks of jungle, and on the other, great deep basins of jungle which sheer down from the road. Sometimes the road cuts into the centre of a rise so that the red earth of jungle-covered banks encloses one on either side. Whichever it is, it is most interesting. Particularly in the rain the earth was so vividly ochre-coloured, and much of the jungle is fern and palm of various kinds. Tree ferns, which you love so much, are there in vigorous abundance, the stems so clearly brown and the fronds so vividly, freshly green. And banana palms of all description are of course ubiquitous; the great glossy light-green leaves in many cases must be twelve feet in length. At intervals, growing out from the banks were cyclamen-coloured orchids, but they wisely grow out of reach of possessive hands.

We reached the Rest House at about 4.30, very hungry in the brisk mountain air, so we had a whacking great afternoon tea then went for a walk further along the road for about two miles. There are many beautiful private houses at Cameron Highlands as well as a very expensive small pub called the Smoke House Inn, and two large hotels. All except the Smoke House Inn have been requisitioned by the Army as convalescent homes or leave centres, Welfare, YMCA, Toc H centres, etc. Even the Convent is now a military convalescent home. The Japanese who, I believe, do not like hot climates, were very partial to the hills and the golf course and they took care of the houses there. When we came back from our walk a cheery log fire was burning in the sitting room we used – delightful! Actually one would have been comfortable enough without a fire but it is the kind of luxury people expect in the hills. It is remarkable too that the houses in their design are distinctly nostalgic for the 'old country' from which, of course, most of the owners came. The most luscious vegetables grow in the highlands.

On Sunday morning we set out for a longer walk – to the top of one of the many peaks – this one being Gunong Jasan (a *gunong*, John tells me, is a hill on a hill). We took the car about a mile to where the path begins and then continued on foot. It was a delicious walk, quite narrow from the beginning but thinning into a single track further on. You were in my mind all the time for I know how you in particular would have loved the ingenuity and beauty of the plant life, and been in your element among the luxurious ferns. As John indicated, I couldn't watch the scenery very much for my eyes were all the time searching the banks for the amazing 'little things'. (I wonder why I am so attracted to miniature forms. I suppose I delight in such deft and superb craftsmanship.) All the banks were to some extent 'upholstered' in deep moss, some darker green and close woven, some lighter and more distinctly 'ferny'. I was enchanted to find two quite picture-book toadstools: they looked as though they were made of perfectly baked meringue – the slightly-raised surfaces being pale fawn while the basic form was creamy. There were not many flowers; we saw what were unmistakably orchid plants on trees, but not in bloom. There was ample compensation though in the beauty and variety of leaves and epiphytes. One type in particular was almost

unreal: leaves reaching a maximum size of a very large geranium leaf and almond-shaped, growing rather flat in red earth on a bank, and low-down near the path. They were blue – all shades of blue from turquoise to deep sapphire. I picked several, hoping to send them to you but by the time we were home they had definitely faded. Their surface is not glazed but has the finest possible 'bloom' and the colour is achieved in the same way as with shot-taffeta. Even the deepest blue leaf when turned one way was quite a usual green. Then there were the pitcher plants. You have seen pictures of them, or perhaps seen them in tropical glasshouses. As the name indicates, they grow in the shape of an urn or pitcher, with a lid. Presumably insects crawl in and cannot get out again. We climbed a thousand feet up, and the grade was pretty steep. The view from the top was very fine but the day was not particularly clear. Coming back by a different route I again wished you were there to see the 'birdsnest' ferns. There were hundreds and hundreds of these growing, whether on independent trunks or attaching to other trees, I couldn't definitely tell. Very few birds were visible and there were few calls: the most characteristic sound in the jungle seems to be some type of cicada which drums in a series of staccato notes, commencing slowly and gradually shortening the intervals until the beats are falling in rapid succession – something like having a knife stuck firmly into a crevice and giving the handle a firm flip.

We left on Monday afternoon and reached home at 8.30. This is the fasting month (Ramadan) for Muslims so our driver, being a Malay, would not have had anything to eat until we got back – and it is a very tedious drive. The Muslims do not eat until sundown, and the very religious do not even swallow their saliva. Our driver is named Ishak – he has the dearest face, with a beautiful dreamy smile.

Tonight we are going to dinner at the house of the manager of one of the large mines. There is to be a *Ronggeng* also. The reason for the party is to celebrate VJ Day. (I, for one, should celebrate on my knees!)

#### *Batu Gajah, 9.8.46*

It has been a hot day, and the evening is still very warm in the house. There seems to be a tacit agreement between the various insects in this country that they shall take turn about to invade houses in force. This was stink-bug evening, with flying-ants as escort squadron. The stink-bugs settle on your head, get stuck in your hair, and when you touch them their defence is only second to the skunk. In desperation we have taken refuge on our beds, under the mosquito net, to escape from these abominable things.

I previously mentioned the invitation we have received to a Victory Day celebration at the home of the manager of a large mine. The house was brilliantly lit all around the outside, and a wooden platform had been erected for the *Ronggeng*; the dancers engaged were professional. At one end of the platform was the orchestra – two Malay drums and a violin. Three Malay girls were there to perform. (I believe the Malays consider this type of entertainer 'not quite nice' – probably only because it is traditional for Malay women to remain inconspicuously in the background at any public function.) The dancers were certainly not pure Malay. They were quite nicely dressed in *kebaya* and sarong but in the good old days I understand they would have been much more elaborately

adorned. The rhythm of the drums was very interesting, with subtleties of variation; the violin played the tune. It would be difficult, I think, to write down these Malay tunes: there is some element of Oriental quarter-tones. The girls' voices are very reedy and rather unmusical. They move forward and back with an occasional turn around, in small steps, with a sort of left-foot-to-right-foot, right-foot-to-left, a quite simple motion, and sing from time to time while they dance. It was about a quarter of an hour before any of the young men guests had the courage to get up and partner the girls. Partners don't touch but advance and retreat in agreement. The rhythm was measured and quiet at first working up to a very vigorous performance, some of the men displaying very agile variations of footwork. As the evening wore on and the guests had imbibed a little there were some hilariously funny impromptu exhibitions by them when they partnered the *ronggeng* girls. The Asians present loved it; they whooped with joy and were more entertained by the antics of the Europeans than by the more usual dancing of the Malay men. While we watched relays of servants brought trays of savouries and cakes for our refreshment. The staffs from two mines, complete with their families, were also spectators, some only babies in arms. We left about 11.00 p.m.

Our garden is beginning to flourish and flower. All week we have had a steam-roller up and down the drive, rolling in the tar and gravel with which it is being repaired. Altogether the house, outside more particularly, is beginning to look cared for. We are considering giving a garden party next month to entertain some of the Eurasian and Asian communities. We don't invite them to dinner or lunch, not through any feeling of superiority but because neither they nor we would be completely comfortable; our foods and ways are different.

#### *Batu Gajah, 15.8.46*

A memorable day for John and me – the anniversary of our engagement – and it was the day of the peace declaration last year. I arrived at the church just after 6.30 a.m. – too early – by mistake. At 7.00 some of the Chinese congregation, mostly children, commenced their chanting. They chant endless litanies, everyone in a different key. I find it appalling. And they *will* sing every mass, in strident or nasal voices, and one kid – a boy – has the most penetrating reed of a vocal organ I have ever heard. When he approaches a high note I almost clutch the seat. I feel, 'He can't, no he can't . . . oh, he's done it – or nearly!' and I breathe again. I find it most distracting.

We have been invited to luncheon at The Residency on the 31st, at which HE The Governor, Sir Edward Gent, will be present. There will be a garden party there in the late afternoon to which we are also invited, which is rather awkward as I will want to change.

#### *Batu Gajah, 16.8.46*

The children are very kind to send their toys and I am sure they would be more than gratified could they see how bereft of such things the local children are. I bought rubber balls to distribute recently but really they're not much more substantial than inflated balloons. Like all children of course they find things to

play with – such as threading small flowers on a strong thread-like grass; just a tin with a stone in it – or anything else that will make a noise.

I was just now giving Cookie instructions for dinner. We have a section of leg of lamb. Cookie asked me something about 'loaf': loaf, loaf – I couldn't think what he meant until he mimed the action of putting it in the oven. Then I realised he was trying to say 'roast'.

Our dear old Gopal – the head gardener – called me over today to show me that he had planted some mint; where he got the root I don't know – but I could have kissed his dear old ebony face.

The Red Cross members are to go home at the end of this month so the orphanage will be left without a European as a direct permanent head. Therefore I am arranging to act myself in a supervisory capacity and as liaison – and perhaps as intercessor – between the remaining staff and higher authority if need be. The orphanage moved away from here today – about twenty miles out – so I will probably only be able to visit weekly.

#### *Batu Gajah, 20.8.46*

I have commenced making a doll and it is turning out so much more successful than I expected that I think now it might be too good for the way kids would treat it, so I might raffle it to raise funds for the orphanage. I'll tell you about the face which of course presented most difficulties. To begin with, the Army Officers Mess had given me a few discarded woollen socks; I used the toe of one and filled it into a ball for the head, then put stitches for the eye sockets, pulling a depression in each place, another depression for beneath the mouth and under the chin. Then I moulded on a nose with tiny scraps of sock; sewed on lumps of kapok to increase the cheeks and chin and smeared these lumps with paste to smooth them down. Then I took a piece of silk stocking on the bias, wet it and wet the mould; pulled it down and again applied the gum and when nearly dry I put a second layer of silk stocking over the head; put a little paste in the eye sockets and drew stitches through them – from one to the other. Strips of red felt off the seams of my sewing basket make the mouth; snippets of brown felt, and white, make the eyes; a touch of lipstick colours the cheeks; inked on eyebrows. The face is quite charming but the hair will be my problem. I have a pretty georgette hankie for the sari.

#### *Batu Gajah, 23.8.46*

I want to get rid of the cook. He gets progressively worse. We had four people to dinner a few nights ago and I planned to serve chicken fricassee – you know my special dish, with cream sauce, peas, etc. Well, I spent a long time in the kitchen making explanations; put the right quantity of powdered milk in a basin so that he wouldn't use liquid milk (which isn't fresh cow's milk anyhow) because that would dilute the liquor. I told him to mix the powdered milk with the flour, salt, etc., etc. The mess that was brought to the table horrified me: he had forgotten to put the flour in with the milk-powder, so the sauce was just a liquor with curds. The chicken was tough and in big ragged lumps (he'd probably had to resort to a *parang* to dismember it). I was furious and ashamed. One explanation for the toughness of meat he serves I realised when I was in the kitchen with him later; he

was about to put chickens into near-boiling, salted water. When I stopped him he said it made no difference! John shouldn't have let him get away with bad cooking for so many years past. He said he had often threatened that if he didn't learn to cook he would sack him – but the old villain knew he was safe. He wouldn't think so now if he could read my thoughts. John lets me rave on about the cook, but will not agree to pay him off. So next time John suggests a dinner party I'll say 'Yes, I don't mind, but don't expect me to arrange it, you deal with the cook; he's yours!'

We have been promised a screen of blue embroidered silk and carved wood – Chinese style; and six black carved wood and mother-of-pearl chairs, to help furnish the house. I presume they are from the Custodian's pool, and the original owner has been banished or has vanished. I hope the promise will be fulfilled; it would make a vast difference to the great echoing spaces.

The rice ration has been further reduced this week. Europeans are not entitled to buy rice at all, but Asians have their rice cards; men now get  $\frac{3}{4}$  *kati* (which is only about 1 lb.) per week, and as they are accustomed to regard and use rice as their staple diet you will realise how little that is. There are various causes for this cut, one being wharfage troubles in Australia which have held up the promised despatch of rice and flour.

#### *Batu Gajah, 28.8.46*

Tomorrow is the Malay Festive Day – today ends their month of fasting. For the past twenty-seven days orthodox Muslims have abstained from food or drink throughout the day, having one meal only, after sundown. So tomorrow they celebrate. We have been invited to breakfast at the Istana – the Sultan's palace – tomorrow morning at 9.00. I will tell you in my next letter all about it.

Saturday is to be a social day indeed: we go to lunch at The Residency, as I told you, to meet the British Resident and his lady; to a Garden Party there at 5.15 – and *now* we have been invited by the Chinese community to attend a dinner at night in the Governor's honour. That means three changes of dress for me.

Our Boy announced this morning that he must leave us for two months as his wife is going to have another baby – the fifth – next month. They have a little farm in Klang and he must keep it going presumably until his wife is able to manage it. But the cook – that menace – told John *he* wouldn't leave him *on any account* and hoped to be with him until John retires. What a threat!

#### *Batu Gajah, 1.9.46*

'What a day was Yesterday' . . . first lunch at The Residency where we met the Governor and Lady Gent. He is quite a 'funny little uncle' as John put it; Lady Gent is very pleasant and natural, and was innocent of any make-up (so I surreptitiously wiped off some of my lipstick). The Sultan and his heir-apparent, the Raja Muda, were also guests and there were a few others, making twelve in all. We came back to BG for a short rest before changing in preparation for the garden party. I wore my white linen suit and white felt 'plum pudding' hat at the luncheon, and for the garden party that very elegant light navy dress with the pink-lined tailpiece, and a navy light-straw hat. There were about 400 guests at the garden party which started at about 5.30. A few marquees had been erected in case

of rain but it was a fine afternoon and we all sat at tables on the lawns. We were received by Their Excellencies and the Resident and his wife. A brass band concealed in an arbour played pretty tunes but twice during the afternoon emerged to march right around the drive – it was an Indian Military Band, very picturesque. It all ended at 6.45 with 'God Save the King'. I might add that the Sultan would not attend the Garden Party because it was an official function to welcome the Governor: the Sultans are displeased with the Government about the new constitution which I explained in an earlier letter.

At a friend's house we changed for the dinner at night. This was given by the Chinese community in honour of the Governor and Lady Gent, and sixty-three other Europeans were also invited. About three hundred people in all were seated at the dinner which was given in the Town Hall. As table implements, only chopsticks were provided – the food being all Chinese – so it was bad luck for anyone who had never used them before. The Chinese gentleman who sat between John and me was named 'Dr Wu' something or other. He told me his name meant 'Five United Virtues'! So there!

I have not yet told you anything of Thursday's celebrations – the Hari Raya breakfast at the Istana. We arrived at 9.00, after driving nearly forty-five miles. There were about 150 to 200 guests. As soon as we arrived the ladies were ushered into a sitting room on the right of the entrance hall and there the Sultan met us and introduced us to the Malay ladies of the Royal household. They are gentle but not beautiful, and I was a little shocked to notice that one in particular showed large teeth stained pink with betelnut. Their clothes were most colourful: the *kebaya* and sarong I have previously described. These ladies had added lacy spangled scarves either over the head or around the shoulders and displayed quite a lot of gold and diamond jewellery. In the dining-room were four very long tables from which we had curry puffs, various Malay-style cakes and cookies, and coffee. (A cow just came into our garden through the bamboo hedge and has started eating our new flowers. There is a hullabaloo, in Tamil language, between the gardeners and the owner of the cows in the street.) To get back to the breakfast, we were all invited to the garden after breakfast to watch a tennis match. While the match was in progress one of the Sultan's relatives asked if we would like to see over the Istana. John and I and a few others accepted.

The Istana from the outside looks very much like the picture-book Sultan's palace; the outer walls are of a deep dusty pink shade, with some matching marble, and its skyline has the traditional domes. Inside it is not really grand – the Sultans in Malaya have not the wealth of their Indian counterparts. But it is cool and spacious as one would expect and with handsome staircases. We were taken into the throne-room which is indeed gorgeous: about 100 feet long, with a bright green figured carpet up to the dais on which stand the two throne chairs under a fringed and tassled canopy. It and the chairs are carried out in yellow-gold velvet with gold embroidery. From the third floor we went out onto the roof and there, from a room used for *gambling* (so we were told), we started to climb higher. Up and up, by spiral staircase we went until we reached a circular room about twenty feet in diameter with small windows all round. This was in fact the interior of the highest dome. It looks out onto a lovely vista of river, hills and palms.

It is obvious that the Malay royal families have not the traditional aristocratic inheritance of the Indian Rajahs – and are much more lovable because of that. One feels that when the visitors go they take off their shoes, sit on the floor and eat rice with their fingers as other Malays do. Indeed I'm certain of this because we caught sight of the private dining room where a long table-cloth was spread on the floor and plates and dishes were laid out. Malays generally, however, have inborn gentility and unflinching politeness.

At home on the eve of Hari Raya we received a large tray of Malay delicacies: small cakes so light they literally melted in the mouth; savoury little strips of soft paste – made perhaps from tapioca flour – with curry stuff inside, each one wrapped very neatly and daintily in a piece of banana leaf cleverly pinched and pointed at either end. The big brass tray was covered with a yellow satin cover something like a pointed Chinese hat. Next morning another trayful arrived, this one from the *syce* and his wife. We had already made them gifts of money; a shirt for Ishak, some flour, and a cute teddy bear for the little girl – the bear I had made out of an unwanted woollen sock. (There are no toys in the shops here.)

Next week we start celebrating the reoccupation of Malaya by the British forces. Never a dull moment! The celebrations continue from now until the 12th.

We have had good heavy rain for the past two days and it has been beautifully cool. The surrounding hills are blue and fresh again and the rain has been most necessary for the padi. My dog, in exuberance of boyish spirits, chased one of the *syce*'s white rabbits on Sunday and was so delighted with the game that he 'playfully' killed it – he's not a bit vicious but apparently played with it too boisterously! We then learned that he had some weeks previously treated a duck belonging to the cook in the same way. I always give him a scrap of my breakfast egg with a piece of bread in the mornings and the Boy said that this is what makes his teeth 'itchy'!

The Boy will be going off tomorrow for two or three months so I have engaged a local Eurasian girl, just for two weeks, to try her out. If she's good we will keep her on until the Boy returns. She is half Chinese, her name is Mary, and she is a Catholic. But poor Mary has a Japanese baby – a little girl now fourteen months old. Mary 'couldn't help it'! It wasn't that she 'didn't understand what the gentleman said' – her story is that she had appendicitis and therefore had to have an operation. As no free treatment was given to civilians in hospitals Mary had to get her fees somehow – and the baby is the price she paid. It is unfortunately an ugly little soul; must be like Daddy!

The orphanage, which I previously mentioned, gave a farewell party to the Red Cross girl who had been administering it. We were invited, of course, and all were photographed in a group – the children, staff, 'Uncle Tom Cobby and all'. And when we were all seated for the photograph, garlands of flowers were presented to the retiring 'aunty', the Welfare Officer and a few others including me – not that I've ever done much for the Home – not yet, but I have elected to be the new aunty.

*Batu Gajah, 6.9.46*

Recently I managed to persuade one of the hospital sisters to let me accompany her on a visit to an outlying district where it had been reported there were several

cases of leprosy. It turned out to be a rather horrifying experience; there was quite a young woman – Chinese – living in a sort of lean-to attached to a squalid little timber dwelling occupied by a family. I don't know whether she was blind or not but her face was lumpy and swollen and her eyes scarcely visible.

Her body was wretched, and she coughed. She was supplied with a little food by people around but they wouldn't go near her. Another similar case, not far away, was a mother, also Chinese, with a child of about twelve and another of five years. She looked even worse than the first one, so I won't describe her. There was said to be a third case, but he had disappeared. The sister told them that next day the hospital truck would collect them and take them to the hospital for treatment. She didn't sound very sympathetic – but Chinese speech is never exactly 'cooing'. Well, it remains to be seen whether these unfortunates will agree to be removed when the time comes, but as it is a notifiable disease I suppose they could be compelled to go. I hope they will not oppose the move, both for their own sakes and for the sake of others. One can understand that after years of suffering resignedly, of 'lying low' during the Japanese occupation, these people are bewildered and apprehensive, not quite trustful of expressed intentions of helping them. And surely the mother's question would be, in effect: 'If I go away, what will happen to my children?'

And so I come to the purpose of my request to be included in this visit – I hoped it might be a first step to establishing, if I can, a voluntary welfare liaison – a sort of almoner's service connected with the hospital. Such a service could assure the mother that in one way or another the children would be cared for, and so relieve that kind of anxiety.

John tells me that a Welfare Committee has been set up, funded by Government and including leading members of the various nationalities here. Those community heads should be the best means of finding out where their most needy people are, and of spreading the good news of available aid, encouraging the people themselves to come forward.

#### *Batu Gajah, 8.9.46*

We have had some rain again today so the afternoon is pleasantly cool. This morning we drove to Kampar to the Children's Home to see how they are getting on now that they have lost their Red Cross administrator. Coming back we brought with us two enormous decorated pottery flower pots – they're quite three feet high, and when stood upon their bases they are quite five feet. We shall place them one at each side of the front doors. We also got a couple of green glazed pots of a round, rather spread shape. They are only four of literally hundreds of pots just lying idle in the grounds of the Home. The explanation is that the house belonged to a very wealthy Chinese, Eu Tong Sen – a millionaire who had once, so the story goes, been a mining coolie. He has, or had, quite six houses in the State of Perak and this is explained by some rather obscure fear of being murdered for his money. Whether he moved from one to the other erratically I do not know, but this Kampar house and another one I have visited in Ipoh – the one with distorting mirrors which I referred to in a previous letter – are lavish indeed. The house at Kampar had been furnished in the most luxurious fashion. There are in fact a few pieces of

furniture left and these are a splendid example of the general standard. Eu Tong Sen was, indeed, robbed in his own home of a very large sum of money so left the country promptly, and returned to China with his family. He is dead now but I believe he was a most philanthropic man. So the garden at Kampar which was once a picture with its lawns, flower beds and path-ways lined with decorated pots is now sadly overgrown and neglected.

The children are very well fed and cared for. They are, I am sure, much better off than most of them would have been with their own parents. They are most kindly treated and really have quite a happy life – and they learn to read and write and do simple forms of arithmetic – all that they will need. Any extra-bright ones will be given opportunities to follow a career.

I have nearly finished the Indian doll I told you of; I have learnt from our *ayah* how to arrange a sari and what her blouse should be like; am dressing her with material from the top half of a chiffon nightie (I gave the skirt of it to the *ayah* for a dress for her daughter).

I would love you to see the local children – many of the Indians are very beautiful; the Chinese so comical. On the day of the farewell party at the Children's Home the Almoner from Ipoh Hospital arrived with a little Chinese boy of about two years, perhaps a little less. He had the appearance of a bandit thug, in miniature: shaven head, very small slit black eyes; heavy build (but no pants on); altogether the toughest-looking young customer you could imagine. But throughout the afternoon during the children's party and all, he held on to a yellow flower – a 'stinking William' too – and from time to time held it ecstatically to his snub nose. Poor wee man, I wonder what his past was – and what his future will be. I was told that he was taken from his parents – or parent – to save him from being sold. (Children thus bought are usually used as servants/slaves.)

My wicked pup killed another white rabbit yesterday, this one only a kitten. But he didn't bite it or try to eat it – he was apparently just having fun and 'worried' it as he does my old slipper which is his toy. Anyhow, he mustn't go on doing this sort of thing, so I took him along to the *syce*'s quarters, asked them to produce the dead rabbit, showed it to him and then beat him with a stick. He goes thoroughly 'mad-dog' on these cool days and doesn't know how to work off his excess of buoyant spirits.

Yesterday we went to a place about eight miles from Ipoh to see some boiling springs and mineral baths. The place is situated right at the foot of very high and abrupt limestone hills, and honeycombed through the hills are caves, nearly every one with a Chinese temple at the entrance – and a refreshment shop! We went into one of the temples behind a shop; couldn't examine it in detail as it was dimly lit but could see several small altars and one main one, all with effigies of gods and goddesses – Buddhist I suppose. It was an official visit for the purpose of assessing the possibilities of a Government development project. I found in the place an atmosphere rather sinister, and as it could serve as a hide-out for bandits John and the DO with him – and I – went nosing around. We looked into an adjoining hut whereupon a Chinese woman came out, slightly staggery – either through sleep or illness – or drug – an evil-looking character. (The place would make a gripping setting for a story or film.) Steam was rising from half a dozen natural hot springs – much favoured by the Japanese, I understand. There was the macabre smell of

sulphur, and the land lay hedged in on two sides by these vast watchful, echoing cliffs.

It is a lovely rainy day again – steady ceaseless rain of the kind I think of as continuing absent-mindedly. It makes everything in the house quite damp to touch, but also makes the atmosphere delightfully cool.

Cookie wasn't well this morning – obviously had rheumatic pains due to the damp weather. He said the trouble was 'wind' – every ailment of his is pronounced to be 'wind'. So he went to the hospital and when he returned and I asked him what his complaint was said to be, of course he had but one reply: '*Angin!*' (wind). It is surprising how superstitious some of the local people are – even Eurasians. Mary the half-Chinese girl we have is teaching me quite a lot about local beliefs. She is talkative and amusing sometimes. She told me that Chinese always like to have some alum in their possession: if a child is considered to be upset or sick as a result of a fright, then a piece of alum is burnt and the ashes will form the shape of the offending animal or other object. Or if a child has 'wind' (here we go again), meaning any sort of discomfort, the burning alum is placed in a glass and the glass held on the child's stomach, and that draws out the wind. Cookie, you see, asked Mary for a piece of alum to place on his stomach, no doubt. She also told me of another painful but allegedly effective treatment for fever and pains: the flesh is pinched wherever the pains are, and is also rubbed hard with something fairly sharp, like the edge of a spoon handle. When this is done sufficiently the fever leaves the patient. So . . . 'Very painful, Madam,' said Mary, 'but the Chinese can bear it!'

We went to the Victory dance on Saturday night – funds to go to charity. I donated the Indian doll I had made: she looked really beautiful in her colourful sari, and jewels – all made of different weights of foil backed with paper. I was proud of her – would like to have sent her home, but that would have been ungenerous. She was auctioned and brought \$50 which will go to the Children's Home, to buy toys or provide a swing or see-saw.

### *Batu Gajah, 13.9.46*

Yesterday evening we went to Ipoh for some of the celebrations – anniversary of the British re-entry into Malaya. There were the usual fireworks, bunting, flags and decorated arches, and a procession, sports matches, etc. Many children had been brought in lorries in the morning to share the fun. We spent the evening first at a dinner, then enjoying once again that enchanting film *Fantasia*.

During our weekly visit to the Children's Home this morning one little Malay boy – an epileptic – had a fit. I learnt that he had not been getting his medicine as the doctor had not visited. I noticed one case of whooping cough; there is no medicine for him either, as the hospital is waiting for a consignment of drugs. When we called last week we were concerned about a child with a swollen cheek and a discharging nostril (this little one was found abandoned by the roadside). He was today in the same condition as last week. Matron said she had been waiting for the doctor to call; I discussed these cases with him at the hospital and he says he instructed her to send the children to him. So! There will be no further delay – they will all go to hospital. And the doctor said worms, teeth, or bowel-trouble could all

be aggravating factors in the epileptic child's condition. The wee fellow with the antrim trouble is painfully thin and cannot walk without assistance: he's the size of a one-year-old but is considered to be three years. The Matron is a very good woman, I'm sure, and with good food and medical care her charges will be all right in time.

*Batu Gajah, 17.9.46*

We are very happy today, thank God: our first wedding anniversary spent together in five years. John gave me a lovely Burmese silver bracelet. Your air-letter of good wishes has just arrived, and adds to my happiness. It is only 9.00 a.m.

The snap enclosed is of the Children's Home; the mats and pillows on the grass are airing. Each child has his or her own and they sleep thus, on the floor. That is their way. I have marked little Ibrahim, the epileptic, whose partial recovery, at least, we hope for. It is a strange thing about this child who is considered mentally subnormal, that he is passionately attracted to music. When he hears it he cannot stay still but moves and sways to its rhythm seemingly without control over himself.

When I arrived at the Home today I was horrified to see one of the children – an Indian boy – standing with his ankles and his wrists tied together with rope. Immediately I questioned the Matron who explained that this had to be done to prevent his running away again. Three times in the last fortnight the police had brought him back. His name is Muniandy: he has the body of an average ten-year-old but is believed to be about thirteen or fourteen. He looked utterly miserable, so I sat down in front of him, put my hands around his poor skinny little arms, and, through the Matron, told him that people only wanted to be kind to him, and asked him why he ran away; what was it he wanted? That opened the floodgates of his misery and he wept uncontrollably. He said he didn't like having to do lessons; didn't know how to play games; said he wanted to be a man and get a job. So we promised that if he would not run off again he need not do lessons but could work in the vegetable garden, and help to look after the little children, and when he was bigger and stronger we would find him work with a kind boss. He had had no schooling whatever and Matron said he couldn't adapt to it. Bit by bit, we learnt about his life . . . The Japanese told his father that they would take the family away to a nice place where he would have a good job with pay. But it was 'bad place' and soon his father went away and didn't come back. His mother tried to get food but they were always hungry. Soon all the children died but himself and the baby. One day his mother took them away from that place and they walked a long way. Then the baby died and they dug a hole with bamboo sticks and buried it. They only had little, little to eat. Then his mother gave him the last of the chipatties and she died and he was very frightened. He walked on and next day some Japanese soldiers caught him though he had tried to run from them. They gave him rice and took him to a place where there were other Indians. After a while the soldiers went and everyone left that place and he went with them to a town – Ipoh, presumably. There he was found begging a month ago and was brought to the Home, by the police. He seemed comforted by our assurance, and his shackles were removed. Now we shall see!

You will notice in the photograph a pretty little Indian girl with a bandaged foot and ankle. The bandage is probably covering the ulcer, but the foot is permanently in that position because of a broken ankle which was never set. Presumably it happened during the Japanese occupation when there was no free treatment for civilians.

*Batu Gajah, 19.9.46*

I have just finished anti-damp precautions, and de-moulding things, necessary because of so much recent rain. All the leather goods and books have been well rubbed and all the clothes are out to air. The Boy takes care of our clothes in this way, quite unbidden. At all times books have to be varnished as soon as we get them, to protect the covers from silverfish.

I must tell you more about the ceremony in Ipoh when some of the local people were honoured for services during the war in Malaya and the Japanese occupation. Fifteen from the Ipoh/Batu Gajah district received cards and personal letters from the Governor and these were presented on a Reserve opposite the Town Hall. There was a guard-of-honour, etc., and before each honour was presented the Secretary to the Resident Commissioner read out the citation, summarising the service for which he/she was being honoured. Bravest of the brave was a Mrs Kathagaisu who was most brutally tortured by the Japanese. She bore her martyrdom and would not betray. I do not know the full story about whom she was protecting, but this magnificent Eurasian lady is now in Scotland undergoing medical treatment. She may not recover. Mrs Kathagaisu was awarded the George Cross; her young daughter accepted it for her. This child was also ill-treated, but because she was so young was able to convince her tormentors that she knew nothing. She was awarded a Certificate of Commendation.

The old Sikh we took with us was a picture. He wore four or five campaign medals on his khaki tunic, wore a khaki turban, and carried a cane. He is about sixty-five I should think. His grey hair was all neatly housed within his turban, but what completely fascinated me was the way he had 'dressed' his beard: he had a piece of string extending, it seemed, from the crown of his head, down the cheek, across the point of the chin, and up the other side, and his ample beard was exquisitely wound around this so that the string was all covered except for a couple of inches between cheek-bone and the edge of the turban. He had a squarish face and wore glasses but what intrigued me in particular were the kind-of 'drake's-tail' tufts of hair growing from the outer edges of his ears! On our return we congratulated him of course and John asked to see the Card and the Governor's letter (which was in fact just a covering letter). I prompted John to say he would get the Card framed for him if he would like that. His answer was that he would like the Card – and the letter – framed. 'Now', said John to me, 'Now are you satisfied!!' What was more, the old chap asked John if he would write to the Governor of Lahore and tell him about the honour.

Later . . . We've just had a minor scene, principal actor our sweet old gardener Gopal. We went along to discuss some planting with him and, that dealt with, he started excitedly to relate that Missy – that's Mary the house-servant – had been angry with him. It was all about taking fruit and/or vegetables from the garden for

the sick *ayah*. Yesterday I told Mary to take some of these for the *ayah*, and old Gopal, naturally, feeling responsible for the produce of the 'farm' had asked questions, and I suppose Mary was peremptory with him. Anyhow he ended up in tears, taking off his head the towel he always wears, to wipe his eyes. Poor old darling, we told him not to worry, and I said that in future I would ask *him* for any fruit or vegetables that were to be cut. Oh dear, if he only knew what a soft spot I have for his dear old ebony self he would feel mollified, I'm sure.

Quite often one sees boys – even to the age of eight or nine years – without any covering. Girls are more often a little more modest: baby girls, in the absence of other apparel, wear around the waist a silver chain with a silver heart – just large enough – at the front. I find it very amusing.

*Batu Gajah, 24.9.46*

This afternoon we are having a small tea party in the garden but it is not a full-scale garden party – just ten people. Mary is very good – much cleaner than our regular Boy, though in many ways he is a gem. However, she is somewhat gossipy; no doubt all servants are, but since she is half European and speaks English, I hear the gossip.

Yesterday afternoon there was an excited shouting in the garden and Mary calling 'Madam, Madam!' Then she came running upstairs calling 'Puppy was chasing a wild boar through the compound'. Alas, he didn't bring home the bacon. And just as well he didn't seriously try. When I went down people were looking across the golf-course near the back of the house, so presumably the pig went that way. Wild pigs are quite a menace in this country. Actually, we heard subsequently that it was a sow with half a dozen little ones, so if 'Puppy' had been able to catch her he might have been dealt with very roughly. Mary said 'he fell over when he was running after the animal and that is why he didn't catch her'. He would! – the fat little chump. Everyone spoils him and he's full of the joy of life. He loves paw-paw and often goes nosing around the grass under the avocado pear trees to find a fallen fruit which he eats or rolls in. Bananas also he delights in, and Mary says he is very fond of coffee.

Yesterday we visited the Kampar Children's Home again. I have already told you that it had been a palatial home belonging to a millionaire Chinese. On this visit for the first time I was able to wander around the garden by myself and at my leisure. That meant I could examine its ruin in detail and reconstruct it mentally as I had never been able to do before. One interesting thing I discovered was a figure, in itself quite twelve feet high, mounted on a short stone pedestal which in turn stood in a raised circular garden bed about four feet from the lawn. The head of the figure was that of a Chinese god, I suppose: big prominent eyes, some sort of helmet on the head, long curling moustache. The head was of glazed coloured ceramic as were the two hands and the gorgeous boots. As I looked at it I thought what fun it would be to have that pair of boots, each about two feet (no pun intended) long and about twenty inches high. The rest of the figure is merely a wire frame – three dimensional – and is in the shape of a three-quarter length robe with trousers below – the robe-edging in large peaks which stand stiffly out. It all has meaning when you know that two bougainvilleas were planted behind the figure,

close up to each leg, and the branches had obviously been trained to weave through the framework of the figure, thus giving it a floral robe. It must have been gorgeous when this was achieved. But the trees are dead now and the frame is rusted; a dead, dry tendril protrudes from one of the god's nostrils. Fearsome and magnificent his aspect must have been in his heyday, fearsome in a comical way he still is, but desolation has laid waste his glory and flippant grasshoppers mock his impotence. On the same terrace as this figure are two once-poetic fish ponds, now used by the children to bathe in, and at one end, railed in, is what remains of a little grotto; it stands about six feet high and is perhaps ten feet in length; is artificially constructed 'rock' with caves and tunnels and numerous little stairways only about four inches wide leading at intervals from one part of the 'cliff' face to another. All this is to give a setting to the miniature Chinese temple which clings, as in reality they do, to the rock-face. The miniature temple is of cement with panels wrought in lattice of fancy design. But, alas, this too is crumbling; its forehead, as it were, has caved into a deep furrow and its many bits of pretentious moulding, like youthful conceits, have fallen from it. Small trees have, according to design I think, grown through and around the grotto base, but roots and branches have found out the tunnels and insinuated into many crevices. They break into leaf over the top of the grotto and there as one unit, like a little old man, it dozes in the sunshine. But its dream is a poignant one I think I understand. It is an essay on the transience of material ambition; a reminder that the great man who, in high hope and some pride, spent so much time and wealth and energy in planning these proud pleasures, is now even less than the smallest element of them. But he was a kindly man, the story goes, and I declare that this present mockery seems to have no spirit of malice – there is just a feeling that nature shakes an admonishing finger, but gently, as to a foolish child.

*Batu Gajah 27.9.46*

We are to go to The Residency for lunch on Sunday to meet the Archdeacon, by name Rosenthal!!!

Recently I was amused at some little girls and thought how much alike they all are under the skin. John had gone to play tennis and after a while I took the dog on his chain for a walk which led past the tennis court. As I came along John was sitting on a seat at the side of the court awaiting his turn. He was absorbed in the game that was in progress so didn't notice my approach. I had a bamboo stick in my hand with a feathery bit on the end, so from the back I lightly tickled the top of his head with the stick. He thrust his hand up to brush away the 'creature' that had descended upon him, moving quickly as if he might be stung. Then he saw me. There were four or five little girls on the opposite edge of the court – different nationalities – who had been watching this. Oh, what peals of merriment and prolonged giggles, hands over mouths, it caused. An enormous joke – and I suppose the fact that it was the Tuan Besar on whom the joke had been played made it all the funnier to those little chocolate dollies.

*Batu Gajah, 1.10.46*

Tonight we are going to the 'club' and an Indian magician has been engaged to perform – having been given time to observe his week of prayer, in preparation!

We have temporarily, and without any choice, an addition to the household. She is a Chinese – or probably half-Chinese – girl by the name of Annie Lee, a friend of Mary's. She has the sweetest child's face which quite belies her nineteen years. On Saturday we saw her at the back, with Mary, and here she is still; she helps Mary with her work, and I suppose she eats our food and no-one has asked may she. However, that I'm sure is not due to insolence. I asked Mary a little more about her and the story is that she could not get her rice ration card because she hadn't money to bribe the clerks! That may be true, probably is not. But the fact is she should have got her card twelve months ago or more and now cannot get it as simply as she could have at the proper time. She is another foolish, or unfortunate, one who had a baby but no wedding ring. (I couldn't blame any man for wanting her!) After the Japanese surrender, when the Chinese Communists were creating mayhem, some of them, the story goes, broke into this girl's house and demanded money. As she couldn't give them any they ransacked her house and tied her up, leaving her thus for three days during which time she gave her baby to a woman to care for – still tied up presumably! Now she wants the baby back, but the woman will not return it. All this *may* be fact, more like fiction – we don't know. But I feel she couldn't be a minx, with a face like that. Anyhow I know a woman who wants an *amah* so I'll try to get Annie Lee a job. Really I should like to keep her but we don't need another girl. John jokes about having such a sweetie in the house, but I've said I'd give him free rein and promise even to 'take the che-ild!' Another chapter to the story is that Annie became a Catholic during the occupation. She was sick and unsupported when Father somebody befriended her – thus adding another convert to his belt. So, because of her religion, so Mary said, her parents and relations have rejected her.

There was clear evidence that a rat had been gnawing our bathroom soap – in fact, the second night, the soap disappeared altogether. So, reluctantly, the boy was told to set a trap. During the night I heard a 'clop-clop-clopping' on the tiled bathroom floor, and guessed that the trap had caught the rat but not killed it and that the poor creature was hopping about. I looked across to John . . . blissfully sleeping . . . I looked down at the dog on the mat . . . blissfully sleeping. 'Men!' I thought, pulled the dog to his feet and shoved him into the bathroom and shut the door. 'You're a terrier,' I said, 'Now, do your duty'. But the clopping continued. When I opened the door a minute later there was Woy still half-asleep, slumped against the wall and the poor rat still alive and dragging the trap about. In desperation I picked up the trap, put it into the lavatory and flushed the pan several times hoping to drown the captive and end its misery. In the morning when the Boy came up with tea I told him to remove the trap, and with a dismissive gesture to my wide-eyed John and the dog, reported what had happened.

*Batu Gajah, 9.10.46*

Last night the magician gave his performance at the 'Club'. He was a thin little old Indian with very vital eyes. He wore a once-white turban, a khaki coat and shabby

trousers. He made nuts disappear out of his hands and then he took them from people's trouser-cuffs. He took a reel of thread, asked a guest to hold the reel, pulled out about five feet, broke it into little pieces, broke these again, rolled them into a ball, burnt part of the lot, rolled it again in his hands – and then asked a guest to hold one end of what remained – and from that pulled a continuous thread again about five feet long! He showed us a mango seed, put it in earth on a piece of paper on the floor, covered the whole thing with a cloth, eventually removed the cloth – and behold, there was a mango tree about fifteen inches high. How it is done I cannot imagine. Then his assistant brought in a sprig of leaf and buds from the garden, broke it into two and put the pieces on the floor. Again, these were covered with a cloth and soon the cloth was removed revealing some lovely fresh flowers. Then we discovered that these, in fact, were two leis – one of which was given to me and one to John. There were various other less spectacular acts but it was his patter even more than his performance that I enjoyed. He started by saying, 'Gentlemen, Ladies, God bless you, God help you,' and rattled off a lot more. Then while he was preparing or performing his tricks his 'magic' words were to count from one to five in Malay, English or German – to say 'Parlez-vous français', 'Ich spreche Deutsch' – just parrot prattle of course, but so incongruous from the ragged old fellow. Then when he was mysteriously producing nuts from under cups, or making them disappear, he would say, 'Come on Mary, Come on Charlie', or 'Come on Mama, Come on Father' – and another was 'Mama drinks whisky, Father drinks water'. His show lasted for about an hour.

#### *Batu Gajah, 18.10.46*

Today I have been painting – no glamour, just covering dirt. I applied myself – and half a tin of white enamel that I was hoarding – to the improvement of an old double sort of shoe-cupboard. At a pinch, and in the absence of anything better, it must serve as a dressing table. It was dirty and battered but another coat of the enamel will make a big difference to it. I am now debating whether to spare some of the enamel for the lavatory seat.

Later: I have painted the lavatory seat; there won't be a more beautiful throne in all of Perak.

I wish you could see some of the mangoes on our trees; one we got today is as big as a baby's head. I'm afraid the staff get most of the fruit though.

The hills are fabulous these days. They lie to the east, running north – so they are changing face all day from dawn-light to midday haze, to reflected sunset in the late afternoon. Towards sunset yesterday they looked quite unreal – they lay all green under an ethereal aura with their peaks literally wreathed in garlands of cloud. A little later the brilliance of the light had gone, leaving them mysterious and biblical.

There are squirrels in the trees and every evening one or more must come under the roof – perhaps it, or they, have a storehouse there. No one would mind that. What we do resent is the fact that they use the holes of the lattice man-hole as a lavatory and almost every evening either on our bedroom or our sitting room floor, or both, is a nasty little mess. It may not be squirrel but *musang* – which is a civet

cat, I believe. Whichever animals they are their noise above the ceiling is incredible – like people running about there wearing football boots.

An amusing incident reported to me by one of our acquaintances: For her husband's birthday on the following day she asked her cook if he could manage to make a cake. He agreed. Proudly, in due course, he showed it to her – all duly iced in the approved fashion – and complete with lettering on top. Cookie, knowing nothing of English, or even the alphabet, but knowing there was always something inscribed on a cake, had turned over a spoon and copied the initials on it – EPNS!

*Batu Gajah, 25.10.46*

The gardeners had their Deepvali (Indian) festival in good style. On the preceding evening three of the children came to the back door to ask Mary for dishes on which to place their gifts. They returned a little later and as we came down the stairs they entered the dining room, one of the girls with a chocolate-covered cake, one with a leg of goat! And the boy with an enormous bunch of beautiful bananas, whereupon we thanked them and I gave Letchumi the frock I had made for her; gave Monicam hers, but Sarasue was sleeping, so I gave her sun-suit to her sister to carry. John gave the boy a couple of dollars. Then we sent for the gardeners themselves and presented them with flour and oil and some money. That night old Gopal, having had a few swigs of toddy, went singing around the compound. At dawn on the following day we were awakened by sounds of fireworks and that form of celebration went on all day. It is in fact a festival of lamps and is, or should be, a time of purification starting with an oil bath.

*Batu Gajah, 29.10.46*

Next Tuesday is a holiday here – Hari Raya Haji – the day upon which Muslim pilgrims pay tribute to Allah at Mecca if they can. (It is obligatory for every Muslim to do this once, if he can. He then becomes a Haji.) We have arranged to go to Penang for a long weekend, leaving here on Saturday and returning on Tuesday night. I have wanted to visit Penang and John always praised the beauty of the place so much.

Yesterday we took the dog with us when we went to Ipoh, to have him inoculated against rabies. There were thin dogs and fat dogs, big dogs and little dogs, hairy dogs and sleek dogs, proud dogs and humble ones. There were coolie women with their lean and rat-tailed mongrels (whose progeny they probably eat) leashed on string or rope, with home-made muzzles of diverse kinds; and people like us with their more fortunate pooches. One coolie woman, with gap-toothed good humour, had to chase her fleecing hound which didn't like the sound of things; the sight of this meek creature muzzled against the possibility of a sudden brainstorm of fighting ferocity sent me into near hysterics. It was a little, cringing, dirty-blond, weasel-faced, no-tailed poor thing that looked as though it could no more than bite a grape, but attached to its head was a miniature wire egg basket, the 'handle' of which went round behind the head and was tied on there to a rope around the neck. An Indian coolie had a black, long-haired, shaggy little-bit Scottie dog which would *not* move along in the queue, stubbornly sitting whenever it should walk. So it was hauled along, in a squatting posture, again with

the aid of a rope around its neck. The howls were awful, but were really not yells of pain, only of apprehension when the patient was forced to lie or sit still while the injection was given. Woy behaved very well – he sat quietly while the vet took a pinch of skin beside the ribs and inserted the needle. He didn't flinch at all which certainly proved that the injections are not painful.

A little girl came to dinner with us last week with her parents – she is one of the 'wise' ones, eight years old and a sweet child. For her amusement, in advance of dinner I sat Keefie my chimpanzee nightdress case in Alison's place, with his arms on the table and his head resting on one arm. So when we entered the dining room there he was, much to the child's delight. When we went upstairs after dinner I saw what I hadn't witnessed before: a *chichak* running up the wall suddenly dropped its tail and continued on its way as if nothing untoward had happened. What astonished us all was to see the tail – about an inch and a half long – continue wriggling and twisting on the floor for quite seven minutes. Alison in particular was most intrigued. Later on, unnoticed by her I recovered the tail and made a little paper cone into which I put the tail, presenting it to her as she was leaving. Despite being in entirely adult company I think she had had a grand evening, thanks in part to an obliging *chichak*.

Mary our Eurasian house-girl is leaving at the end of the month. She started well but became slack and unreliable. I had had to scold her. Now she says her health won't allow her to do her work properly – that did not excuse her absenting herself and behaving in other ways that could not be tolerated. A pity!

We have beds of beautiful flowers in the garden now: zinnias in a glorious variety of colours, balsam, cosmos, etc., etc. all grown from Yates seeds.

At present a gang of prisoners from the gaol are chunkling up the ground where the tennis courts were. They will do the levelling and then we will have to get the courts turfed. I don't like to see those men there – many emotions tangle up in me, though to be sure, they work with leisurely strokes and seem not to be interfered with at all by the police guards. I think how different are the fates of humans – and animals: There was I happily cutting flowers this morning with my blessings all around me and there were they – despised, un-free, working in the heat of the morning upon ground that I might play on. What their offences were I do not know, of course, but people are largely the products of their environment and circumstances – and how widely these differ. John says he doesn't feel sorry for them; he had to work like that all day under the Japanese, in order to grow enough food to keep alive – and he hadn't committed any crime at all. 'Anyhow,' he said, 'it doesn't feel so very bad!'

#### *Batu Gajah, 6.11.46*

We returned from Penang yesterday evening. I had enjoyed it all wonderfully. John had talked so often in the past of Penang and even in internment had daydreams of taking me there, he told me. So it was altogether a longing fulfilled. Now to tell you about it: Penang is an island about forty-five miles in circumference, lying about two miles off the northwest coast of Malaya. We left home soon after midday on Saturday, travelling much of the time through driving rain. The roads are very good generally so we sped along, with that 'slick' sort of

sound of tyres on a wet road, through lovely thickly covered green country of rolling hills, passing on the road local peasants, mostly Chinese, who either trusted to their wide, pointed straw hats to keep off the rain, or as a last expedient, those without hats held a big banana leaf over the head. We passed through Kuala Kangsar where the Sultan lives, crossed the Perak river; travelled through Taiping and came into great padi-growing areas where the land is flat and water-soaked and is a bright green checkerboard with narrow raised footways that intersect the fields. We passed through native villages which all seem alike in Malaya with their masses of naked or semi-naked Chinese children; people sprawling in shophouse doorways; foodstalls and shops with their displays of mysterious-looking edibles, chief among which – if they are Chinese – is always a variety of stinking salt fish hanging from the ceiling or glaring balefully up from boxes; the flattened out carcasses of fruit-bats; smoked-looking rolled-out ducks and chickens.

We said hello and goodbye to the scene of John's near tragedy, the evidence of which he still bears, as a scar on his forehead. (I think I told you how some years ago the car he was travelling in at night was hit by a truck from behind and knocked into a deep water-way where it joined the river. It is at a place called Sungei Bakap. The car was upside down and the door was jammed and he heard the water gurgling joyfully as it found its way in through small apertures. Fortunately, as on the films, at the psychological moment Marie Hartley who was in the front seat was able to wrench open her front door, and they scrambled out – just in the nick of time. (The car had stalled and Charles, her husband, had got out to clean the plugs.) John reached home in the early hours of morning, from the local hospital, with a black eye, a patched forehead – and wearing a surgical coat. Later he returned to the scene to find the car totally submerged.

Penang is certainly beautiful, with splendid sandy beaches almost all around, fringed with leaning coconut palms all in the scenic tradition. We had to wait two hours to drive onto the ferry at Butterworth; reached the old E & O Hotel at about 7.30. I didn't mind the wait – it was glorious to see a great stretch of sea again and smell the tang of it.

On Sunday we drove all around the island and called on a Chinese family whose musical children John had encouraged when he was stationed there. They gave us COCOA, something special to them – but in the tropics! On Monday we window-shopped and shopped and feasted eyes on ivory, trinkets, silks, embroideries, enjoying that seductive, soft ambience of precious Oriental imports.

There are two remarkable temples in Penang to which we paid brief visits. Most extraordinary is the famous Snake Temple. Inside there are snakes everywhere – live poisonous ones, twined around the multitude of gods and carvings; clinging almost invisible on branches of potted plants or coiled on the earth underneath. Nasty! Especially in a place of spiritual purpose. Monday afternoon we spent on Penang Hill. We took the car to the funicular railway station and there got into a funny little carriage and off we went up the side of the hill – a tremendously steep ascent in places – 2,600 feet to the top of the hill, 2,300 to the hill-top station, and the journey is completed in half an hour. There is the most breathtaking view: palms, more palms and huge outcrops of rock at intervals beside the line – then away and away to the right are hills and more green hills, and to the left, the green rather flat stretch to the coast – the vast sparkling expanse of the sea; the toy ships

lying at anchor; the tiny sails, and beyond, the mainland with its hills and miles, many miles of green whose fresh brightness the haze and distance do not diminish. We had tea at the little restaurant when we alighted, and loved the fresh coolness of the air at that altitude, and filled our eyes with the vista below and beyond. On the top of the hill is the Governor's hill resort, Bel Retiro – no one was in residence. It is not really beautiful, but solid, and the garden must have once been splendid. I noticed a monument – a stone pedestal with a bronze plate in memory of a 'favourite terrier' with an appropriate verse. Which Governor had buried his little friend there I do not know. After several hours we took the carriage for the descent and I was delighted to see monkeys in the trees quite close to the line. We also saw them in the Waterfall Gardens where we went on Tuesday morning. These were half-tame, coming down to catch peanuts thrown to them, or just milling around on the grass. There was one old-man monkey in a tree, I went and stood under the branch looking up at him. He was perfectly polite until a group of small boys approached, then he made a flying leap along the branch towards them in a most menacing way. I'll bet those kids are running yet!

*Batu Gajah, 8.11.46*

As I told you, the bed and its drawer contents arrived safely but there is no word of the piano yet.

Anarchy seems to have taken hold in Australia, but I don't know where one could go for real peace and harmony. Here it is not too bad but strikes are happening too frequently. Of course it is a good thing to know that erstwhile perhaps undervalued or underpaid people are organised now to demand better, but it doesn't end there – one evil seems to have given place to another. A rubber plantation manager told me recently of his personal experience in this connection: Every day his coolies are taken by lorry to their work and are brought back to their starting point in the afternoon, by lorry. One afternoon the lorry broke down and was delayed by an hour or a little more. When he and the lorry finally arrived to collect the workers they had poured their day's collection of latex away.

*Batu Gajah, 15.11.46*

I have a vase of roses on the desk where I am writing. It is quite a breath of home, or at least something distinctly un-local.

We went to a Chinese dinner on Tuesday night – it was wonderfully good. We were goggle-eyed in the first instance to see in the reception room such a display of first-class whisky as they had, when we have not been able to buy any for weeks. We were invited into the dining room at about eight o'clock and were divided up into parties of about ten at each table; there were about a hundred people in all. First we had birds nest soup with shreds of chicken meat and cooked egg – excellent. Then came the sharks-fin, also a sort of soup with gelatinous strips about as thick as a matchstick, which are the sharks-fin substance. That also was delicious. Next we had thin slices of slightly tough shellfish from California – clam perhaps – which had a thickish light brown sauce with it. In addition we were provided with little bowls of soy sauce and chilli sauce. After that, sucking pig, the

crackling all cut into small pieces but still in shape along the back of the animal. First the crackling was to be eaten, then the meat had to be carved. We only had chopsticks so each member helped himself from the central dish and put his portion in a little bowl. After the meat came jellied chicken with asparagus and half-cooked strips of carrot. There were a few speeches at this juncture while the next course arrived – large mushrooms, the undersides of which cupped a sort of paste. These again were in a brown sauce. Before we had finished with that a whole fish was brought – a flat steamed fish into which you prodded your chopsticks and picked up as much as you wanted or could. Then a jelly-mould and quartered oranges which were served simultaneously. Lastly we were given each a hot damp towel scented with eau de cologne, to wipe mouth and hands. After another speech or two we were thanked again for coming, and said, 'Goodbye, and thank you very much!'

*Batu Gajah, 23.11.46*

We are rather worried about Woy. He has been very listless for the last two weeks. On Friday I took him to the vet. hospital. They suspect a worm in the heart – quite a common complaint in dogs here – but a blood test didn't confirm the suspicion, so I have to take him again today for a further test. Thank goodness he was a little livelier today and yesterday. He has become very nicely mannered and intelligent in the last month or two and is very sweet-natured, a good watch-dog and companion. The suspected disease can be treated by a series of injections but it is quite a long-term course of treatment. Sick or well, however, he adores the car. As soon as it draws up to the door, if he senses that he might not be allowed to come, he approaches John or me and gives us a long harangue and a lot of cheek in a 'woo-ooow-ooow' sort of language and as soon as one of the doors is opened he dives in and takes his place on the seat, and if we don't want him to go we have to prise him off. John went to Ipoh without me this morning but still Woy was determined to go. I held him for about five minutes after the car left but as soon as I let him free he was off up the drive and in the direction that the car had taken, so I went after him. Then I saw that the car had drawn up outside John's office, and Woy must have known that, for it is only about two minutes' drive from our gates. He reached the car very pleased with himself. I could see his tail wagging from where I was on the road. The *syce* opened the door and in Woy jumped, so the *syce* brought him back, and picked me up on the way. Of course I smacked Woy and scolded him and he sat in his corner with his head hanging and his feelings much wounded, and when we reached the front door instead of bounding out as usual – 'me first' – he just stayed on the seat sulking – or else he knew darned well that the car would be going back! Usually in the car he sits at the end of the back seat with his head and shoulders out of the window, or else on the floor with his front paws supporting him against the door where the window begins, with as much of him out of the window as possible.

Sometimes he puts his paws on the back of the front seat – and gives the back of the *syce*'s neck a playful lick. (Rather surprisingly Ahmad tolerates that, because to Muslims dogs are supposed to be unclean.) You can tell Mary he reminds me of her when he is punished; he's a terribly injured dog, just the poor little soul that

nobody loves, and either sulks in a corner with his eyes rolling or flies away 'scared to death' with his tail between his legs . . . all *gamin*, of course. But, like our little Mary, 'when he is good he is very very sweet', and very very sensible.

*Batu Gajah, 29.11.46*

Woy, I am pleased to say, seems very much better: a second blood test was still negative so he might mercifully be free of the worm in the heart. The vet thinks it may be roundworm that he has – and judging by his predilection for scavenging I would guess that he must have swallowed every possible wog in his time. He is as cheeky as ever. Indeed he made a monkey of me a few days ago. John again went to Ipoh alone in the car, and again Woy wanted to go. I knew that he would follow the car if he could, so I held him for some minutes after it went and then played with him to take his mind off it. He pretended that I had succeeded but when he saw his opportunity, off he scampered up the drive. I made a short cut across the lawn, hoping to head him off before he reached the road. He won, of course, and immediately made his way in the direction of John's office – as he has done before. Every now and then he'd look around with a mischievous 'grin' on his face and a 'shucks, she's after me' sort of expression; his tail well up and jolly well pleased with himself. He reached the offices all right and immediately paid a call at the downstairs office which has about twelve clerks. Diffidently I went after him, full of embarrassment and apologies, and the little devil got under a desk where two clerks were sitting, and hid behind their legs. I said I would go home and get his chain, and when outside I called him. Well, he came but the game wasn't over yet. He seemed to say, 'Ah there, Mum!' and trotted jauntily over to the Forestry Office, I, still trying to maintain my dignity, in his wake. In he went, the regular Tuan Besar, sure of his privilege. I, much less confident, timidly entered, full of explanations and 'excuse me's', about twenty pairs of dark eyes upon me. But Woy had crossed and gone out of the opposite door. I went round on the outside of the building to intercept him. There were a policeman and a messenger at the opposite door. 'Ah,' they said, 'he's just gone back again.' I ventured back to the first door and met him half way, well pleased with his tour of inspection but still not ready to come home. I coaxed and wheedled and scolded. I even got a stick, such as he likes to chase, to tempt him near enough. Fine! He would catch the stick in his teeth but whenever I made a grab for his collar he'd slip away. A small car drove up then, with two Chinese in it. Woy had to investigate, for he thinks he knows all about cars now. The Chinese, quickly appreciating the situation, very much amused, encouraged him so that I might be able to grab him. After several near-misses I succeeded, whereupon he lay down, hulking little brute that he is, and would not budge. By this time the Mem Besar was on her haunches on the road, firmly clamped to the collar of this recalcitrant pooch and wondering what the hell to do next. All this time I had a small audience of amused locals including a ricksha coolie sitting on his machine outside the Forestry Office entrance. I got an inspiration to beckon him over but he indicated that he had a passenger for whom he was waiting. However, the Chinese in the car persuaded him to come, which he did, laughing fit to burst, and between us we lugged the miscreant bodily into the ricksha. Thus we returned, I and my

embarrassment, to the front door. I scolded him roundly, slapped him and chained him up, and so he stayed all Dismal Desmond, lolling against the wall, ears down, brown eyes tragic, until lunch time. The principal point in all this is that on account of the prevalence of rabies any dog found about the streets unmuzzled is likely to be shot. Well, I've spent a lot of space on my naughty dog but there isn't much else to relate today – except perhaps that Cookie has boils on the back of his head – nowhere else I hope!

It is a lovely day with a pleasant, slightly cool breeze blowing – and I look out right onto bamboo and light-green foliage, and further to the darker green of rubber trees, fleecy white clouds and blue sky. To the left are the hills, quite blue now with clouds moving slowly in a tumble over their peaks – and there is a vivid blue kingfisher sitting on a branch quite near where I am. I have felt days like this in Sydney: dreamy sweet-tempered early summer days . . . and part of me is back home.

### *Batu Gajah, 3.12.46*

Cookie is in hospital 'with his boils'. I had a hectic time last night cooking the dinner. Oh, the sensuous delights of a smoking fuel stove on a tropical night, in a tropical kitchen! Jauntily, but with appropriately amused condescension I advanced toward the vegetable garden, basket over my arm, to cut spinach and a few beans. As a queen might visit a soup kitchen did I inspect the washing of the spinach and request clean saucepans. Daintily did I accept the new potatoes handed to me, request the boy, 'Pandak' by name, to skin a couple of onions and produce the steak from the frig. All the while his wife and his mother and two kids gawked at me, and two of the gardener's kids also came along for the show. Up to that point it was too, too amusing, my dear. But by the time it was over I was a red-eyed smudgy rag doll. First I discovered that you can really only cook one pot at a time on this old wreck, for there's only one usable hole in the top of it. With the fire roaring up through this I recoiled and then tried to juggle two pots and a frying pan over the hole. Clouds of acrid smoke rolled out from the fire chamber, searing my eyes and throat. Soot covered everything. Pandak and I heaved out big chunks of wood to reduce the fire, then had to put them back again, for there wasn't fire enough. So we struggled through, cooked the veg, then grilled the meat on the wire gridiron. Fortunately, I had a fortifying drink on a nearby table. I needed it! All the while the gardener's kitten mewed around and menaced our dog in his own kitchen, alternately running into the house and daring him to follow. He did follow of course and I was yelling to him to leave her alone or she'd scratch his eyes out . . . all this plebeian pantomime, yet the only pictures you see of European women in the tropics present them as immaculately gowned, lissom ladies idly seated before a luxurious backdrop of white venetian blinds and palms and with long glasses of something with ice. 'Fuel stove? My dear . . . what is a fuel stove?'

### *Batu Gajah, 6.12.46*

I am actually writing this letter on the balcony of the Station Hotel in Ipoh, and the atmosphere is very Eastern. This balcony must be four hundred feet long and thirty feet wide, tiled in red and cream and there are green blinds down its entire

length – the blinds (*chicks*) made of strips of split cane. Below, there is a very well-tended lawn intersected by straight paths of red gravel and beyond that an Oriental-looking building of white stone; a Chinese ricksha coolie in pointed hat is pedalling his vehicle past at this moment. At the near edge of the lawn are coconut palms at frequent intervals and to the left is a short stone monument surrounded by beds of bright red canna lilies which are a picture against the vivid green of the grass. An Indian woman in a saffron-coloured saree is walking along the central path and a Chinese woman in black jacket and trousers is holding in her left hand a semi-transparent paper umbrella and with her other hand she is holding the hand of a little Chinese girl dressed in pink. It is a mild, slightly dull morning: The semi-circle of hills are bluish with clouds banking on top. There is the incessant chirruping of many swallows which have their nests at the tops of mouldings and columns all along the inside of this balcony. John is having his hair cut by the hotel barber, which explains why I am sitting here writing.

Tomorrow we are motoring fifty miles to attend a luncheon given by the Sultan at the Istana at Telok Anson. There is to be an agricultural show with attendant fun and games to which we shall go in the afternoon. Cookie is still in hospital.

We had a couple of people to dinner on Wednesday evening, so the washing *ayah*, who said she could cook, came and prepared the meal, under my instructions. That required nearly as much of my time as if I'd done it myself but this time I escaped being kippered. The house 'Boy' we have now – a Malay aged about fifty – is a lazy individual and thick from the neck up – amiable though.

Now I am in the dentist's waiting room – and it is interesting to watch the feet passing along the pavement beyond the half-way swing doors. Sandshoes are fairly popular, but wooden clogs, which are just shaped wooden soles with a piece of leather across the top, are the most common footwear for simpler people. Everywhere you go you hear their tick-tock, tick-tock, like a wooden clock. Many sandals are made entirely of rubber, and the dentist himself is wearing natty tan shoes with snakeskin trimming. There goes a pair of big black bare feet with tan-coloured soles. On the road, bicycle wheels follow bicycle wheels in rapid succession, and if that black-and-tan dog whose bottom only I see isn't wearing a muzzle on his other end, he'll be for it if the dog-shooters see him. Pedlars are calling their wares; lorries whirr by; there's a baby crying somewhere and a handbarrow is squeak-squeak-squeaking along. (The Chinese never grease their axles, for the sound chases the devils away!) Strange! I just saw a mouse fall to the pavement and lie there on its side, kicking. Several pairs of feet passed, apparently unaware until a pair of tiny feet paused, and a shrill voice piped the alarm, whereupon a be-clogged pair of larger feet moved the mouse to the edge of the pavement and crushed its head, mercifully, for the little creature was in distress. Ah, there go two pairs of black and silver 'mules' and the ends of the gaily coloured trousers above are beautifully ironed and stiff with starch. I'm sorry this letter is all froth; truth is there seemed nothing of substance to relate.

*Batu Gajah, 9.12.46*

The Army boys have started work on toys for the orphans at Christmas. They're all enthusiasm. I went along to their workshop yesterday morning and saw six

beautiful red trains with open trucks for loading; one lad was working on a tiny table for a doll's house; another was starting on a toy jeep from a cardboard model there. There will be blocks, skipping ropes, picture books and brown-paper-with-tissue drawing books, wheel barrows, dangling dollies. It should be the most exciting collection and the boys, as you might expect, are enjoying the task immensely. I must certainly try to arrange for them to see the children receiving the toys.

We had a grand day on Saturday: left here at about 10.30 to drive to Telok Anson to lunch at the Istana Raja Muda – the residence of the Sultan's heir-presumptive. We arrived punctually at 12.30 and were ushered upstairs to be received by our hostess, the Raja Muda's wife. There were the Sultan, Sir Edward and Lady Gent – he's the Governor – and Mrs Aston the Resident's wife. Lunch was served at one o'clock. The Istana is not palatial like the Sultan's residence but the dining room is large enough to hold a table which seated about thirty people. We had a most excellent Malay curry – the rice was locally grown and not too finely polished, perfectly cooked so that each grain was separate and all perfectly dry. There were bowls of curried foods generously supplied along the length of the table: bowls of curried meat, chicken, vegetables of various kinds and curried pineapple – each in its own delicious slightly hot, brown curry sauce. The Raja Muda's wife who sat opposite me was apparently much intrigued with my glass-bubble necklet and asked me what it was made of. I took it off to show Che Puteh as she is called, and she obviously enjoyed fingering the beads, saying they looked like fish eggs. She said she'd like to wear them so I said I'd exchange them for her ear-rings which were gold and diamonds. She is a very pleasant woman, much more vivacious and talkative than the average Malay woman one meets at these functions. After the curry we had little individual dishes of steamed custard sweetened with *gula malacca* – a liquid brown sugar extracted from coconut palms. Then came the grande finale – enormous dishes of *durian*. I've told you of this fruit that smells like a drain, is said to be an aphrodisiac, and of which the local people are inordinately fond. It is said that most of the smell is in the skin; here, they were brought to the table in covered dishes and were accompanied by *gula malacca* and coconut milk, to help the uninitiated accept them. I quite like the flavour – after I've eaten it: the after-taste is pleasant, and the texture is rich and creamy.

After the lunch was over and the guests of honour departed we also departed – for the Agricultural Show. You know how I love strange things: here there were all manner of unfamiliar fruits and vegetables that even John had never seen. There were exhibits of handicrafts including embroidery. The ordinary kind, and their knitting, are by no means remarkable but their very fine work with gold and silver thread on velvet is excellent. My eyes practically oscillated at one knitted abomination, however: it was in lolly pink and bright green, intended as a tea-cosy perhaps – or to be worn on a baby's head – the latter I think, for it was accompanied by a pair of nice warm cosy woollen booties! Although John doesn't know it, I bought him a walking stick which he saw and admired; he always takes one when we go walking. I secured it secretly, by a ruse, and am keeping it as a Christmas present for him. We shall be going up Maxwell's Hill for the holidays. Incidentally, a parcel arrived for him yesterday from Glen and the wretch will not

open it – he said that if he were to do so now he shouldn't have any parcels to open on Christmas Day.

*Batu Gajah, 15.12.46*

I am writing this at intervals in the car outside an office in Ipoh where John is in conference. We intend to leave here on 21st for our ten days holiday at Maxwell's Hill. We are invited to a dance at the home of the Deputy Commissioner, Taiping, on the night of 21st, and as Taiping is at the foot of Maxwell's Hill we are able to accept.

The concert and Christmas tree at the Children's Home will be given on the afternoon of 20th.

There was great excitement around the back quarters yesterday when a monkey came into the back of the house and then out and up a tree. I saw it: a grey monkey with a funny face. I had to go out then but I was told that it soon went away to a group of trees opposite. This may be the last letter to reach you before Christmas. I will be thinking of you all the time and wishing we were there. As I told you, we are going to Maxwell's Hill, to a bungalow called the 'The Box'. I have had a frightfully busy week and I expect it's likely to be still more hectic by the time we go. I must arrange for the gifts and extra food for the convent orphans here and probably do more shopping for the children at the Home. The Army boys are still working on toys; I believe they have even made rag dolls, and one indeed was making dolls' clothes.

When returning home from Ipoh on Saturday, about a mile from home the car ran over a dog. The poor little thing howled and rolled over and ran limping and hopping into its yard. I was terribly upset, got out and ran back. The owner of the dog, a Chinese woman, came out. I asked was the dog badly hurt and she replied that its leg was broken. Being Saturday and nearly one o'clock, the veterinary hospital in Ipoh would have been closed, so I told the owner I would come back for the dog. I was determined that the poor little thing would have as much comfort as possible and was afraid its owner might not be kind. One of the gardeners, hearing about the accident, volunteered to come with us when we returned, to carry the dog, in case it was savage or troublesome! He is our second gardener, Pavaday. After lunch he turned up wearing his best sarong – snowy white with a green edging – and had a bath-towel thrown over one shoulder (they nearly always wear a cloth of some sort thrown over the shoulder). His head was bare and his long black half-curly hair was wound into a knob at the back of his head. (It's amazing how Indians keep their hair up without hairpins!) We drove to the house – a little *attap* house in a *kampung* – and John spoke to the Chinese woman: she happens to be an *amah* at Batu Gajah hospital and said she could have the dog's leg bound up there. So the poor little thing was carried out, its tummy all grazed and its leg dangling. Naturally, being brought to the hospital by the Tuan Besar it had the best of attention. A dresser splinted the broken limb and bound it up very well. Yesterday we took it and its owner to the veterinary hospital in Ipoh. We were told the leg was broken in several places. It was put in plaster and now we must hope for the best. How brave the little creature was! She didn't flinch or murmur. John had to go to Ipoh again today so called in to see the patient, for if the leg swells she

must go back to the vet. hospital. Anyhow, I shall remember dear Pavaday's kindness. I try by example to teach the local people how to treat animals – not that they are cruel at all, but often thoughtless. Actually, Woy loves old Gopal the head gardener, and I think Gopal is rather proud that we put the dog in his charge when we went to Penang. I said to him recently, 'Oh, the dog likes Gopal.' 'Yes Mem,' he said, 'Wherever I go he wants to go!' (Of course, the exchange was not in English.) And Gopal's little white bitch Rosie is Woy's sweetheart. He shows his affection by taking her whole head between his jaws, lovingly, and I've seen him dragging her small body along the grass, by the ear; she gets all girlish!

*Batu Gajah, 21.12.46*

This is a very busy time. There have been last-minute arrangements such as collecting and delivering things for the orphans at the convent and getting other things together for the party at the Children's Home. The Army boys had arranged to take the toys themselves and stay for the fun. Included was a doll's house of about eight rooms, fully furnished, including bathroom – and half a dozen of the most ferocious-looking rag dolls dressed, and with wool hair sewn in and sticking out each side like a balding mop. There were twelve trains, ten fire-engines, three lorries, a fortress with guns and soldiers, an aeroplane, skittles, five toy jeeps, forty-two drawing books, blocks with pictures. Some of the other women in the district and I made the drawing books: we stuck pretty pictures on the outside covers, and with these went coloured chalks and crayon pencils. The Manager of Boh Tea Estate supplied a Christmas tree which must have been 18 to 20 feet high – so high that several feet at the top had to bend under the ceiling. On this were hung festoons of silver and little parcels. First, the children were given their party – 110 of them – and the guests assisted in distributing the goodies to them and helped the smallest ones sticky themselves up with custard and jelly. All the children were wearing new clothes, even the four-months-old baby who cut a dash in a bright pink silk dress with lace-trimmed bonnet! There were about thirty guests, and when we had been served the children commenced their concert. Like any kids' concert, it was enjoyable more for what wasn't programmed than for what was. The staff at the Home are exceptionally good. Perhaps it is the children's misfortune which awakens what is best in them, but all, Indian, Malay or Chinese; cook, *dhobi*, teachers – all could be seen taking a real parental interest in the children. The cook, for instance, was nursing a new addition, a Chinese baby of about twelve months, and later giving the four-months-old baby its bottle. Their teamwork as a staff and as a group of human beings is an example – fortunately for the little ones.

*Maxwell's Hill 23.12.46*

On Saturday after lunch we left home by car for Taiping which lies at the foot of these hills. We stayed at the Rest House on Saturday night in order to go to a dance given by the Deputy Commissioner Taiping at his house. It was a wonderful party: coloured lights strung all around the outside of the house illuminated it for miles around, as it stands on a little hill. It is a fine, big house and grand for entertaining. There was quite a good band and about twenty-five couples could comfortably be

accommodated. We were served a sumptuous buffet supper. It was a mixed company of Asians and Europeans.

The beds at the Rest House were dreadful – hard as boards – and no covering was provided. As it was a cool night we decided to share one bed – the more comfortable one, with the only mosquito net. During the night John fell out onto the floor. He said later that he was surprised that I hadn't laughed – but I remembered then that in my stupor it seemed quite the usual thing to do. Fortunately the dog wasn't on the floor underneath, for we'd brought him with us – he usually sleeps beside my bed.

Next morning a jeep was sent to take us part of the way up the hill. And with the jeep came a note from the Deputy Commissioner saying, 'This is an experience you will never forget!' And so it was. We arrived safely, but I would say that where a fly can go a jeep can go. It climbed and turned along that crazy path, which cannot be called a road, and sometimes over boulders standing about two feet high. It took us about four miles and from there could go no further so we got out, had tea at a sort of rest-house, and there mounted ponies, only small things but very sure-footed. Bearers took our luggage, and the Hill Superintendent who accompanied us went on foot with a butterfly net in one hand and our dog's lead in the other – dog on the end of course.

The butterfly net was for catching specimens which he provides to the Museum in Kuala Lumpur. The Superintendent started on a short cut, and when we met him next on the road Woy had 'dug his heels in' so to speak and would not budge. There he was, slumped on a clay bank, dogged (no pun) resistance written all over him. Mr Oliver said he had stopped short and bitten his chain, clearly indicating 'take this damn thing off or else!' Also, I think he wasn't happy to be separated from us. But even when we reappeared he stayed slumped and though the chain was pulled he wouldn't budge – and he's quite a heavy dog now. So we agreed to taking him off the chain. Obviously that's exactly why he'd 'struck', because then he was up like a shot and was as sensible as any experienced dog could be. And didn't he love the excursion! The ponies walked only, and the climb was very steep in parts, and often they had to pick their way over or between great boulders. Woy ran ahead beside one of the bearers, looking back frequently to make sure that we were coming. We reached the Superintendent's bungalow in about forty minutes – our retreat, The Box, isn't quite ready for our occupation yet but should be by tomorrow.

We shall have an extremely quiet Christmas, I expect. There are no other Europeans here except the Superintendent, and even he will be away on Christmas Day. We are the first to use a Government bungalow on this hill since the war.

#### *Maxwell's Hill, Boxing Day 1946*

Well, Christmas is over and I suppose you're all feeling a little tired today. We had a very quiet day. I felt exceedingly lonely on Christmas Eve night, which I suppose sounds uncomplimentary to John, but I missed the bustle and goings-on of our family. Instead, John and I and the dog sat before a roaring log fire, and the hissing of driving wind and rain outside added to our consciousness of isolation. We played cards until about 11.00 and then went to bed – with *blankets!* When I

woke there was a parcel on the foot of my bed, so I sent John out of the room 'to put the dog out', and quickly slipped his parcels under his bedclothes – so of course there he found them. I think I told you about buying the walking stick. I certainly had fun getting it right here without his knowledge. First I had to give it to the *syce*, at the Showground at Telok Anson where I bought it, to put in the boot of the car, impressing secrecy. Then primed the *syce* before we left the Rest House in Taiping to give it to the driver of the jeep; next I had to ask the Superintendent who came with us to get it from the driver of the jeep. Finally, on leaving his house I made an excuse to go back, asked his cook to get the stick from his master's room, then wrapped it in my overcoat and carried it to this house.

We spent a very energetic Christmas morning walking right to the top of one of the adjoining hills. We knew there was a bungalow there and on arrival found to our surprise that it was occupied by a Military wireless unit. Several of the men invited us in and gave us a much-needed drink. They had decorated a Christmas tree for themselves with fairy lights and baubles and cottonwood snow . . . English boys away from home! The descent back was much more rapid, but still there was our own hill to climb. It became very heavy going indeed, but it probably has taken an inch or two off my behind. After lunch we slept.

This is a glorious spot. We're about 3,500 feet up and look down on an uninterrupted vista in front to miles and miles of flat country in the distance, and right out to sea, including the island of Penang. It is just like being in an aeroplane or looking at a topographical map with bays, inlets, rivers and sea in silver, and solid ground marked dark green. The Box is quite a large wooden bungalow surrounded by perfectly laid-out lawns and gardens and all around, below the hill, is dense jungle. There are a good Indian cook and a boy as staff and when we call the cook to ask him to do something he comes at the run. We tell him that is not necessary but he still does it, with a smile. His name is I think Muniandy but for fun we call 'Sugar-and-Candy' or 'Andy Pandy' – as long as it ends in 'andy' he comes. We feel really invigorated in this cooler climate . . . we are very happy.

#### *Maxwell's Hill 29.12.46*

This place offers all the right conditions for a holiday; if we want to leave the house at all we have to walk, and the grades are very steep. The late afternoons and nights are quite chilly – cold enough for a fire from about 4.00 p.m. by which time every day the hill is shrouded in mist. Although there is jungle around we see no wildlife, and hear none except monkeys which thickly populate the trees. We hear them in the mornings calling and echoing down the valleys: a somewhat primitive rather flute-like 'Woo' or 'Waaaa' on an ascending and then descending scale, somewhat like the sound a human makes when imitating the sighing of the wind. From the distance we have seen occasionally, and heard, hornbills. But for sure there *are* tigers in the jungle. Before the war two missionary ladies staying in this house were visited by one: it entered by the wide verandah – apparently just on a social call (or perhaps seeking salvation), as the ladies were unarmed. But now a lattice protects the verandah from further big pussy cat intrusions.

*Maxwell's Hill, December 1946*

MORNING CHORUS

Early ere the day's begun  
 The gibbon chorus wakes the sun  
 With paeans of exultation hurled  
 Bursting from their tree-top world.  
 From the dark valleys all around  
 This strange primeval virile sound:  
 oo! WAH, oo! Wah, oo! WAH,  
 Calling, calling, rising, falling  
 oo! WAH, oo! WAH, from near and far  
 oo! WAH, oo! WAH, oo! WAH, oo! wah, . . . wah

MISTS

What are you seeking, faceless ones  
 Who trail your shrouds of floating mist  
 Like groping, grave somnambulists  
 Lingering, fingering as you move,  
 These contours you so seem to love?  
 Is it for some lost heritage  
 This ritual evening pilgrimage?  
 Is it a vigil that fulfils  
 A promise to these ancient hills?  
 Gath'ring your ghostly hosts around  
 Embracing all your hallowed ground  
 You stay in seeming transport there  
 Like choirs of angels lost in prayer  
 Folding our tiny world into  
 A still white reverie with you . . .  
 Till with the sun some call you hear  
 Then break, disperse – and disappear.

*Batu Gajah, 2.1.47*

We're going to have our real Christmas celebrations now that we're back and have your cake and lovely presents. Many many thanks for everything. When we returned yesterday we found two live turkeys – a cock and a hen – left by the erstwhile head schoolmaster and his wife who have now left the district. It is rather embarrassing. Government staff do not accept gifts – that is termed 'illegal gratification'. There was no reason why they should have made this gesture – we entertained them only a couple of times, and that is our privilege anyway. What are we going to do with two turkeys? Neither of us would condemn them to death – they're such a happy couple! So their fate is unsettled. I suggested we might keep them and just eat their eggs. John said turkey eggs are sweet as hens' eggs.

More about Maxwell's Hill: I think I explained that there is no proper road up the hill. So yesterday we had to walk down. I could have got a pony but it isn't

much fun on horse-back down steep slopes of quagmire, and there isn't much flat ground anywhere there. In any case, I decided to walk with John, and the dog, of course. We left the bungalow at about 8.00 a.m. and reached the foot of the hill by 11.00. It was a lovely walk really, though a little trying on the knees and calves, for we took short cuts sometimes – 150 to 200 yards of steep steps. The paths were shady and the sounds and sights so pleasant. Yesterday I saw more enormously tall trees than I had ever seen before. I don't know what they are called, but at ground level they are vast in circumference and ripple into big deep sinews which sometimes stretch right across the path; these have had to be chopped off to make progress possible. But a few feet above those sinews they slender down a lot and then straight as an arrow, high, high, high into the blue sky sometimes appearing to have a mere mop of foliage on the top. Some trunks are trimmed in fantastic ways by parasite growths: spikey 'birds' nest'; fluffy, fine, very light green mossy stuff that hangs in drapes like so many scarves; sometimes the whole trunk is sheathed in a cover of pretty little waxy green leaves. Always I look for wildlife; yesterday all we got to look at until the end was a caterpillar about three inches long with a head and body that looked like Japanese red lacquer, this covered with red hairs quite an inch long. Next was a small snake devouring a large dark-brown velvety spider. Snake and spider were in fact the same colour and sheen. It was only a very small snake and when I poked it it dropped its lunch and wriggled off. We had to kill the spider, which was injured. When we were quite near the foot of the hill we heard a very odd noise coming from the trees which flanked the path – it was an extremely guttural, rather staccato sound which we thought must come from some big ugly bird. Then, what a thrill! From one of the lower branches of the trees which interlocked overhead we saw a monkey swing over to a tree bordering the path. It was the most impressive monkey – smokey-grey soft-looking fur in beautiful condition; rather fluffy bunches of hair standing out from each cheek (like old Mr Barrett of Wimpole Street), white rings around its eyes, and it wore all its front teeth outside its face (that's *not* original). We had a thoroughly good look at it before it swung its way to higher branches where it was almost hidden from our sight.

Our piano has turned up at last; it does not appear to have suffered in tone but the case needs repolishing. Conditions in the go-down were rough.

#### *Batu Gajah, 14.1.47*

I've just come back from sitting in at a local Welfare Committee Meeting. I've been making John's life a misery telling him what should be done to *find out* the destitute in the district. So he said 'All right, we'll put you on the Committee and then you'll have a voice.'

I am at present making a doll for a little Chinese girl in the Orphanage. She is mentally deficient and a little slobbery and has a bad catarrhal breath – but seems so much to want petting and to look for affection. The other day when I went there she came running up to me, making a whimpering babyish sound, so I duly patted her head and such. I am ashamed to say I find it difficult to fondle her. Then when John came along she ran to him and threw her arms around his legs. In any case, if one were to establish a close relationship with the child, the inevitable withdrawal

of that relationship – when we are moved away – would be painful for her. So I decided to make her a great big doll, nearly as big as herself, that she could cuddle – she is about nine years old. I'll make it as realistic as possible, and with the help of the Army boys it will have movable arms and legs.

We went to the Orphanage's first wedding last week. A Malay girl of sixteen was married then to a Muslim Indian. It was my first experience of a Malay wedding but I knew what to expect. It is a strict custom that both bride and groom remain absolutely inert from the commencement of the proceedings. They are actually married sitting side by side, rather slumped in their chairs, motionless, eyes cast down. Although this girl has no one of her own, the local Malay DO and his wife and other Malays and Muslim Indians in the district all rallied around, with the result that she had as fine a wedding, after their fashion, as any more fortunate Malay girl would wish. The actual marriage was over when we arrived but I believe there is little to it. The *Kadzi* (priest) just asks the girl three times, 'Wilt thou'. When we got there she was seated in one room with Malay women about her; the groom was in another room with the 'bucks'. Jeriah, the bride, was dressed in a lovely green silk sarong and *kebaya* – material like a thick corded taffeta embroidered in silver. She wore a sort of petal headdress from which hung a veil of orange georgette. She had three gold and ruby brooches fastening the *kebaya*, a bangle and a ring – the gift of the groom – and earrings, also his gift I think. In accordance with their custom, her face was powdered and her lips rouged, and her eyes edged with kohl. Her fingertips were hennaed and, for the first time in her life probably, she wore shoes – white with red trimmings. She didn't look up when I entered the room but sat slumped in apparent despair – in accordance with the custom. After a while they were brought from their respective ante-rooms into the ceremonial room again, both of them being heavily supported as though incapable of free movement – all according to custom. In the ceremonial room was a little dais within a decorated arch, and raised about nine inches from the floor. On each of the throne chairs was a small cushion of black velvet embroidered with gold. Paper flowers lavishly adorned the surrounding arch. They were almost bodily lifted into their chairs, the bride on the groom's left – and there they sat motionless for the part of the ceremony called the *bersanding*; which means sitting-in-state. On a stand about eighteen inches high which stood on the floor in front of them was their equivalent of a wedding cake – a mould of *pulut* rice, yellow in colour, from the middle of which rose a spray of paper flowers. I forgot to mention that as bride and groom approached their chairs one of the attendants on each side held a fan of red velvet, gold embroidered, before their faces. These were withdrawn when they were seated, and then the 'happy-couple' were fanned in a graceful, gentle way. The groom, by name Lal Khan, wore pale grey linen trousers, a biscuit-shade jacket (slightly too small), and a sarong draped around from waist to knees in the Malay fashion. He also wore the Muslim *songkok* on his head. Well, to get back to the *bersanding*, the 'old wives' fussed about the girl like mother hens; one would move her face a little to the right; one would gently urge it a little up, or down; one would move her fingers on the arm of the chair; one pick at her veil – not all at once of course. The actual *bersanding* commenced with the women taking small portions of the *pulut* rice mould and pressing these onto the fingers of the couple and then the rice portion would be

transferred from one to the other. The idea I'm sure was symbolic of sharing. The guests all sat around, interested spectators. At last seven men in turn, firstly John, were asked to sprinkle into the laps of the couple, brown rice, white rice, flower petals, and water. These were all supplied in silver bowls on a little tray held by an attendant. Then seven women guests, including me, were asked to do likewise for the girl. That over, the couple were assisted from the dais, the man leading, his wife behind him, the small fingers of their right hands interlocked. It is significant of perpetual union. They went together into the anteroom and then the guests were invited to the feast; the couple emerged again still with eyes downcast, and were seated at the head of the table. But they didn't touch any food or even drink a cup of tea. All the guests – as usual at Malay weddings – were given what are called *bunga-telor* (flower-egg). So we each got a hard-boiled egg wrapped in coloured crepe-paper and hanging on a spray of flowers. It is a symbol of fertility no doubt. Finally, after a few suitable speeches a group photograph was taken – and we all dispersed. We liked the appearance of the young man; he's twenty-nine, much older than the girl, but probably that's a good thing. He is caretaker at a mine, and has his own little house and a few cattle. She got some nice jewellery presents and about \$30 in cash.

Yesterday we were guests at a tea in honour of a young Sikh couple married the day before. The reception was held in a hall quite near our house. The bridegroom is the son of a local schoolmaster. We did not witness the marriage ceremony, unfortunately. When all the guests had assembled on the verandah outside the hall a family procession started from the house a little way up the street. This procession was led by the bride and groom who were so bashful-looking that they literally did not raise their eyes from the ground. The bride was a sweet-looking girl with skin the colour of milky coffee, a rather pointed chin, and her lips were slightly rouged. She was dressed in palest green satin in the Sikh fashion of draped pantaloons – *salwar* – ankle-length, and a hip-length loose-hanging jacket with short sleeves. The hems were embroidered with coloured silks. Over her head and draped across the shoulders she wore a scarf of very fine green organdie. This was fastened to her hair with a jewel, and around her neck and falling to the chest were two gold chains with a gold medallion on each. As the young couple reached the steps leading up to the verandah, the four-piece band in the hall struck up – what do you suppose? – 'Don't Fence Me In'. John and I chuckled over that. They mounted the steps like two lambs being led to slaughter. I sat next to the bride at the table, but I could not make any conversation with her; she probably does not speak English or Malay.

#### *Batu Gajah, 20.1.47*

I am in the car again waiting for John outside an office in Ipoh. It is a lovely morning, not too hot, and the buildings look white and cool in the clear sunlight. Three bullock-carts are ambling lazily by, laden with large stones. A Malay girl rides past on a bicycle; how these people manage it in their long sarongs is a mystery to me. Groups of Indian women and children, from time to time, come along the road and turn into a shady street opposite. There must be some ceremony or festivity for they are all obviously dressed in their best and some have flowers in

their hair. The local people love bright pinks and orange.

22nd January will be the first day of the Chinese New Year and the Chinese shops are gay with merchandise for celebrating the occasion. There are big grotesque *papier mâché* masks to wear right over the head; there are paper lanterns, crackers, toys and balloons. The Chinese are very vital and full of interest in whatever is going on; they love any excuse to celebrate and this occasion for them is the most important in the whole calendar. Since this morning and right through their two-days holiday, crackers have been, and will be, heard. In the past they customarily made such a din everywhere that a time-limit was imposed on the firing of crackers.

It is definitely arranged now that I shall act as voluntary almoner at Batu Gajah hospital – what I have wanted to do since we arrived here. I have a grant of \$200 per month from the Welfare Council. When I first suggested that scheme to those in charge I was not encouraged, but the new Medical Officer Dr McMahon is all for it. There is much tuberculosis and quite a lot of destitution and no one to investigate cases of hardship. So I believe I have a real job of work ahead.

The very large doll I am making is taking shape. The Colonel of the Army unit here is going to carry out my plan for swivel arms. I haven't started on the face, so I suppose the worst is yet to come. This very pleasant young man is Turkish but was reared in England to where his parents had fled when he was a child – the father's life being in danger because he had been one of the 'Young Turks'.

#### *Batu Gajah, 25.1.47*

My time seems very fully occupied but in the afternoon usually the heat renders me unable to accomplish very much until 5.30. I rarely sleep all the afternoon but generally have an hour's rest.

There is so much to be done in this country now – so much welfare work which, if the various community leaders had cared sufficiently, should have been established years ago when there was more money to spend. After all, Governments are relatively impersonal bodies not in direct touch with the day-to-day lives of the people. All races have been represented on the several councils; why could not these representatives have urged the requirements of their people? Of course, social problems before the Japanese occupation were infinitesimal compared with now. Probably there was no real poverty then. Hospitals looked after the sick, without charge, malaria was kept under control, there would not have been malnutrition with all its consequences. But TB sanatoria should have been established; institutions for deaf children, and probably old-people's homes though it is traditional for Asians to take care of their aged family members. For those without families there are for the Chinese what are called 'Decrepit Homes'. And the convents have always succoured unfortunates – particularly children. But the wealth of the country has been great – no income tax was necessary in the past – so I suppose welfare needs were not very obvious. The convents still have their orphanages. The Children's Home with which I am connected is said to be the largest in Malaya, yet it has only 113 children. Every day in Ipoh you can see beggar children clad in tatters, half a coconut shell in their hands held out for contributions. If only the police were empowered to gather up all these children

we could find out where they come from and what homes, if any, they have; help and protect them generally. But in any case the police are too busy dealing with crime. Do you know, people, many people, are being kidnapped in Malaya and held to ransom. Usually they're Chinese criminals and Chinese victims.

Our lodgers above the ceiling are *musangs* (civet cats), not squirrels. They're so noisy, as I told you, but worst of all is their smell. It permeated the bathroom we use for nearly a week, and began to have quite a nauseating effect on me. You know that 'sharp' smell of fox – it is something like that but more so. You don't mind the first whiff much, but how it grows on you – adversely – it seems to get into your very hair!

*Batu Gajah, 27.1.46*

Still another wedding; yesterday afternoon we were guests at a tea-party to celebrate the marriage of two Christian Indians. The couple were married at a Nuptial Mass at 6.30 am and as far as I can gather, various receptions had been going on all day, for the bride belongs to about the best-respected Indian family in Ipoh, where we were entertained. The saree the bride wore was perhaps her wedding gown – it was fabulous. Her blouse was of crisp gold open-work lace, and the saree was of sapphire-blue silk like heavy taffeta, but slightly less stiff. This was thickly embossed with gold thread in a fine ferny patterned border. Jewellery consisted of a gold and diamond necklet, a matching brooch to hold the saree on her shoulder, and a diamond star in her hair near the forehead, over which was a tiara of orange-blossoms. She was not exactly beautiful but tall, willowy and elegant. The bridegroom is a doctor at Singapore hospital. He, we're told, is brilliant – came first in each year's medical exams; was presented with a medal from the Pope by the Bishop of Malacca, as he is the product of the Brother's School, Penang. His parents sat opposite to us and are obviously of a much humbler stratum of society than the in-laws. The old lady was clearly out of her element – very dark-skinned and plainly dressed, and after eating her ice-cream noisily gave a good hearty belch – the only contribution she made to the general conversation. But the bridegroom her son: what a splendid young man! He responded to the toasts in perfect English, in a voice soft and cultured. He wore a fine cream suit. Just before speeches a girl and a young man approached the couple to make floral presentations. Garlands like thick ropes, of sweet-scented creamy buds entwined with silver thread, were placed around their necks; the bride also received a sheaf of arum lilies grown in the hills, and the groom a little posy of cream and red small chrysanthemums.

A Tamil religious festival – *Thaipusam* – takes place on 4th February. It is then that fire-walking is performed. John is going to try to get us an invitation to watch it; it's usually done on big rubber estates where many Tamils are employed. John has witnessed it several times. He tells me that he has also witnessed levitation – though very few people will accept this as bona fide. In the first instance it was demonstrated on a stage, so deception was possible. But in the second case, no. This was during an Agricultural Show at Batu Pahat where he was Assistant Adviser. At the showground he was approached by two Indians – simple people, could have been labourers – who said they would like to perform their act of

levitation and where would they do it. John pointed to a spot nearby and said 'just there!' Then one of them lay on the ground 'just there' and held a stick, vertically, in his hand; the other man then arranged a low sort of tent over him and in a few minutes when he removed the cover his companion's body was suspended, horizontal, at the height of the stick – about 2½ feet – from the ground, the palm of one hand resting on the end of the stick which reached the ground. His eyes were closed and he seemed to be in a trance. John walked all around the suspended man, making a thorough investigation of the phenomenon. There was no explanation. The other man then removed the stick, substituting his own hand for it. A few other spectators watched and marvelled but could not doubt the evidence of their eyes. After perhaps ten minutes the cover was replaced and when removed the tranced man was on the ground and spectators were invited to try and move his limbs. John tried and found them absolutely rigid. Unfortunately he did not wait to find out when and how the man came to.

*Batu Gajah, 31.1.47*

I spent yesterday morning and this morning at Ipoh Hospital with the almoner learning something of her work. I expect to devote three mornings a week to the work at BG Hospital – but I'll probably find myself so deeply involved that I will not be limiting the time spent. I know it will be fraught with heartbreak on account of some of the poor unfortunates but 'an ounce of help', etc. You really haven't any idea how some human beings live – I suppose I haven't yet, either. No doubt I shall get pretty savage about a system that permits squalor but I must try to remember to maintain a quiet balanced outlook.

John is practising a lot and is again playing very well; my voice is getting back into form too so sometimes we give a little concert – to ourselves. We applaud like mad.

*Batu Gajah, 4.2.47*

I had hoped to describe to you an exhibition of firewalking but alas, no one could tell us where it would take place, if at all. In fact we hear that the more educated Hindus are discouraging it. However, there were various small processions around Ipoh this morning. Each one was led by a man, semi-naked, holding a decorated arch upon his shoulders, his head through the centre of it. The arches were decorated with coloured paper flowers; one had bells on it, and the man who carried it swung and stamped as he moved along, in much the same manner as tribal dancers. His face was whitened, and covering his lips was a disc of some sort tied on by a cord fastened on top of his head. Men, women and children followed and seemed to be chanting one word only, and someone was banging a gong. The leaders of two other processions I saw had each a skewer through the tongue, the mouth was half open, the tongue a little forward, and the skewer was silver and seemed to have an arrow head. There was, as you can imagine, some fanaticism about each leader but the followers were certainly not frenzied. The whole ceremony here was on so modified a scale as scarcely to resemble its counterpart in India where, I am told, priests and penitents parade for hours at a time, as full of skewers as a porcupine has quills. But not a drop of blood is shed. Yesterday was

Mohammed's birthday and a public holiday. The year is peppered with religious festivals for the various races/denominations.

Also in Ipoh, John opened a new public restaurant. Public restaurants, or canteens, were inaugurated about the middle of last year when there was such a black-market racket going on, and food was very expensive. The Government financed or sponsored one then another, all over the country, providing good nourishing meals of rice with fish, meat or eggs, and vegetables, first at 30 cents and later, as it became possible, at 20 cents per meal – and some even lower than that. In Ipoh alone over 3,000 meals were served every day from these canteens. Patronage is falling now, which is expected, indicating that people can now purchase their food at reasonable prices and cook at home. However the canteen opened today is in a different district from others. I cut the tape at the entrance, saying, 'I declare this canteen open!' Isn't that funny! But it was taken seriously; I was presented with a really beautiful bunch of flowers and led our little party of officials in to take the first meals there. John duly bought the 'meal tickets' for the rest of the party and in we went. Had a very good lunch and were, inevitably, photographed in action. How I would have liked to be a little mouse in the wall – well, there isn't a wall; it is a large open *atap*-covered shed with forms and benches and big brick, wood-burning stoves, with serving equipment and counter at one end. How I'd love to walk around, observe but not be observed, to look closely at the people – most sub-strata of Asian humanity, good-natured in the extreme, absolutely unselfconscious, conspicuously vulgar. Some unused to sitting at table eat, *squatted*, their feet on the form, their knees well up above the table level. Many got up, went to the edge of the shed and blew their noses, with the aid of finger and/or cleared throats and spat into the drain which runs alongside. Some didn't bother with chopsticks but ate with their fingers; some lifted plate to mouth and shovelled the food into the gaping tunnel as fast as possible with chopsticks. Most were very poorly dressed. (Many coolies one sees here today are literally covered with patches, but usually they are clean.) A free cigarette was provided with each meal-ticket. One old coolie in such a Joseph's coat as I have just described, having finished shovelling, belched loudly, got up from his place at the next table to ours, cigarette between his lips, leant across, picked up the box of matches on our table, lit his cigarette, returned the box and trotted off.

#### *Batu Gajah, 7.2.47*

Last night we were invited to a preview of the film *The Bells of St Mary's* – an excellent picture starring Bing Crosby and Ingrid Bergman.

Welfare work is gathering impetus so that in addition to the Orphanage, Government has now established a Boys' Home, for delinquents; a Salvation Army Young Women's Home; a Police Boys' Club; additional homes for the aged; either just opened or about to be opened. Shortly we shall be on our way to the Mental Hospital to find out how well mentally-handicapped could be cared for there; we want to see such children given the opportunity of developing fully whatever potential they have.

(In the car): We have just passed a sort of picture-book character: an Old

Chinese in faded blue tunic and short-long trousers and pointed hat, leading his pig to market.

Later: We have had lunch of our own lettuce, cherry-tomatoes and sweet corn. And this morning John had for breakfast one of our turkey's eggs. There are also some set under Pavaday's (gardener) hen and nearly ready to hatch.

*Batu Gajah, 10.2.47*

Tomorrow I start almoner's work at Batu Gajah hospital. It will keep me very busy, and I am sure it should be vastly interesting. This morning I was with the Ipoh Hospital almoner who was investigating the case of a small boy found sleeping in the Cold Storage doorway at a place not far from Ipoh. He was believed to be an orphan, was in tatters and had many sores on his legs. He was sent to the hospital by one of the Cold Storage staff who had befriended him, and there the sores were treated and healed, and the boy was ready to be discharged. So the almoner was asked to investigate. After talking to him a few times she extracted the information that his father drove a lorry but that he was not good to the child. So she and I accompanied the boy to the father's home, the child directing the driver – and there we found that he had a mother as well. Apparently he had been missing from home for two months and the mother said she had travelled about looking for him. To me she seemed a nervous, rather ill-tempered woman, but probably quite good. We were told that the boy and his brother had run away on other occasions. Then we discovered that the woman was not his mother but his aunt who had married the man after her sister died – the child was then three years old. They are Malabar Indians. We don't know where the fault lies, but it was decided to put him into the Children's Home for a few months to see how he behaves, and if he is good to send him later to an Indian boys' home in Penang where he will be educated and taught a trade.

I talked to my first case at Batu Gajah hospital before going on to Ipoh. She has TB and five children, the youngest two years, and has been in hospital two months but should remain another four months. She is determined to go home now, and I think it is because of her children. She will not believe that if she goes home now before she is cured she may infect the children, and also probably have to return to hospital a little later. So it is my task to find some way, if I can, of putting her mind at rest. I can put the two younger children in the Children's Home for the next four months, if she agrees. It's going to be hard to convince her of the risk to her family if she goes home now. TB sufferers should be compulsorily isolated while they're capable of infecting others, but there aren't any sanatoria to put them in.

I'm still working on the big doll I told you about – and getting awfully tired of it. It would be easier if I had a sewing machine, and a workroom with tools. Anyhow, I've done the face which is surprisingly life-like – the eyes particularly – which are brown coat buttons reversed, with white felt almond-shaped pieces behind, sewn along the top edge with black buttonhole stitches to represent eyelashes.

*Batu Gajah, 14.2.47*

I have spent all this morning at the hospital and am just beginning to feel useful. For the first two days I wondered if I was not an unnecessary appendage though

the doctors and matron assured me I should soon have plenty to do. Now I have talked to a good many long-term patients and must investigate the cases of alleged hardships. They are all TB whom I am likely to help – women without husbands and with small children; men with wives and families at home – the wife unable to earn sufficient, etc. TB is a terrible scourge here, but I think the knowledge of how it is spread is being recognised by the local people, so that increasing numbers of sufferers are reporting to hospitals for examination in the earlier stages and can therefore be cured. For many years BG hospital has had the reputation of specialising in TB treatment and has been fortunate in the quality of its doctors.

After being so long without a piano (not provided among the Japanese amenities!) John is finding it necessary to practise diligently. And that he does. It's 'tiddle-iddle-iddly um-tat' or some such phrase, over and over again, sometimes. Well I can bear it *but*, while he's at that there's a little bird that day and night practises its *numerals*, calling 'one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven' . . . 'One two three four five six seven eight nine ten eleven', repeated endlessly. I'd happily teach it the rest, if I could catch it . . . I tink I go crazy!

#### *Batu Gajah, 18.2.47*

It is mid-summer here now – if there are any seasons. Anyhow, the days are longer – John says only half an hour, but it seems to me much more. The afternoon sun is so relentless and I feel that it pours out all its remaining strength from about four o'clock until nearly seven o'clock. And the weather is very dry. So, altogether, I do not like very much where I am at present – not in the afternoons, anyhow.

Through members of the Gurkha unit at BG we have met some of the commanding officers. Last Sunday we were invited to the main Mess in Ipoh to meet native Ghurka officers. A couple of them spoke some English but most were a little shy with us. The European officers have great admiration for the Ghurkas and say they are unfailingly faithful and loyal to the regiment; that lying and stealing are unknown among them – and they will obey orders unquestioningly.

#### *Batu Gajah, 21.2.47*

I have been to Ipoh this morning, visiting destitutes with the almoner and gaining experience. It is very often difficult to find the homes of the poor – they are usually shanties literally no better than the sort of fowl-house we would build in Australia, except that the roof is a little higher perhaps and the house a little larger. And no address can be given for they're tucked away off the main thoroughfares, and are approached by rough paths through grass or trees or, like one we saw this morning, are sitting at the edge of a mining pool on a spot of arid sandy land. The people almost without exception are Chinese illegal 'squatters'.

The locals, Chinese in particular, are inordinately inquisitive. If you call at a home or shop to enquire about or to interview someone, all the immediate neighbours drift along right into the room quite frankly to listen to what is being said, chipping in here and there if they feel so disposed. And there are always swarms of children – little boys clothed from the waist up; hair close-cropped. The women of this class often have the hair cut in a long bob, often have big prominent teeth – God-given to display the much-favoured gold fillings – are flat-chested,

wear black trousers and a *baju* of printed cotton or black – always clean though amply patched. They're either bare-footed or go clip-clopping along on a pair of wooden slip-ons. If they're under forty, generally there will be a baby strapped on the back, its legs spread astride, or 'one in the basket'. It seems that every child over the age of about four years, in a poor Chinese family, shares the responsibility of running the home. You see very small girls with baby sister or brother strapped to their backs, and particularly in rural areas such a young child can often be seen carrying great pails of water or other heavy loads on a pole resting across the shoulders; others go tin-washing with adult women. As for child-bearing, the women think nothing of it. One of the sisters at the hospital told me that the married Chinese nurses are quite often known to deliver a patient and immediately afterwards go to bed and deliver themselves. Birth and death are accepted much more fatalistically by these people than by us.

Tonight we are going again to the Gurkha European Officers' Mess where they are giving a farewell party and supper. I'm sorry they are going – they are a jolly lot. The Gurkha Mess orderlies look spanking in their national dress which is a fingertip-length tunic, white, fastening close to the shoulder in front and with a broad swathe belt which holds a *khukri* – their renowned knife. It is nearly eighteen inches long and very broad and curved, and worn in a scabbard, I suppose. The trousers are tight from ankle to knee and much fuller from knee to waist. They wear on the head a velvet cap with flat top somewhat like the Malay *songkok*. The Gurkhas come from the independent state of Nepal. Although one regards them as Indian they are definitely Mongolian in feature; small of stature too, but are capable of incredible endurance, we are told.

#### *Batu Gajah, 25.2.47*

I have been flat out all day, at the hospital all morning and out on a trek this afternoon. The trek I will tell you about: this was in connection with a patient – a Chinese woman of fifty-seven who was in hospital with some skin trouble. She was considered ready to be discharged about ten days ago but cried every time her leaving was proposed, saying she had no home, no money, couldn't get a job for she has only done labourer's work – as so many of them do: grass-cutting, tin-washing, digging, etc. However her bed was required so it was my job to get her out of it. I told her I would take her home but would look after her. Nevertheless she cried and was utterly miserable. I got some cloth from the welfare store, had a hospital seamstress run up a pair of Chinese trousers and jacket for her and at two o'clock this afternoon off we set in the hospital truck – the old soul snivelling still. We took along a young Sikh who speaks Chinese to act as interpreter. We drove for about fifteen miles to a place called Tronoh and stopped at a point indicated by the woman, alighted and went to a small shop and started to explain about a supply of food for the old girl. Immediately countless faces popped up all around us, like bubbles in a porridge pot. The elder ones listened to all that was going on; the younger – faces, stomachs, and worse – gazed up in frank curiosity – at ME, exhibit No. 1. They were mostly Chinese, with a sprinkling of Indians. Their dark eyes were solemn and unblinking – all, from toddlers to teens. I took time off at last to take them in thoroughly: they were so comical that I just had to laugh openly

at them, whereupon they all laughed heartily. At first, you feel inclined in our Western way to take umbrage at such unabashed inquisitiveness but (a) it wouldn't change anything; and (b) you're not in the West. I bought a supply of food for the patient: dried salt fish, yams, eggs and a vegetable called bitter gourd. She hadn't a rice ration card, which is suspicious, so we could not get rice for her. These goodies she wrapped in a large turkey-red cotton handkerchief, or scarf, which she normally ties around her head. Her feet were shod with pieces of rubber tyre fitted with a loop for the middle toes, to hold them on. She is nearly bald as far back as the ears: that commonly happens to working class Chinese women and I understand is the result of drawing the hair too tightly back, over many years. Having secured the food, off we set along a sort of cart track, on foot, toward her home. There were just a few *atap* houses to begin with, then for a mile or so nothing but stretches of white sand sparsely covered with scrub and grass, with a single track across. It is old tin-mining land and the white sand is the deposit of silt that has been drawn up from the water-filled excavations. We passed several mine pools, one particularly large one which is now an artificial lake, very green and pretty, and as we went on we left the dry sandy land behind and walked through dense long grass. Remember, this is heat-allergic Jean – without a hat, on a tropical afternoon. Fortunately it was a fairly dull, cool one.

At last we came in sight of a small cluster of *atap* houses, huts rather, set in clumps of palms and trees, or settled well down in a nest of long grass. Here we met a young Chinese man wheeling a bicycle. He greeted us and the old soul, and after an unmusical exchange of verbal hieroglyphics ran into his house and brought back her front door key. Just prior to this we were joined by another Chinese man on a bicycle. They both accompanied us to Old Soul's hut which was approached by a scarcely perceptible track through the long grass. The hut was about ten feet square and contained bedroom, sitting room, dining room, kitchen – and ballroom, no doubt – all in one. The remains of a scrappy vegetable garden were outside. I told her she must cultivate this and help herself: she is quite strong and used to this sort of work. I also told her friends they must help her. They said they were sorry for her but had families of their own and had little time to spare. But there was much chuckling and good nature withal, and the old soul had grown increasingly more cheerful after receiving her bundle of food and as she approached her home. There is another hut very close to hers and the occupants of that came out to hear all the discussion and chip in too. I forgot to mention that during our rather long walk she would insist on holding her pointed straw hat over my head to shield me from the sun. I persuaded her at last that it was not necessary. Well, with many interpreted thank-yous off we went, with the young man bringing up the rear, but before we got very far the old girl appeared again, just wanting to see us off as we had been so kind. Now she will get a parcel of food each week from the shop-keeper – as long as seems advisable – and he will send his monthly bill to me for payment. Strictly speaking, as a completely discharged patient she should not be the almoner's responsibility but until I can get the Welfare Committee to look after her I'll continue this arrangement.

On our return walk back to the truck I remarked to my young companion, the Sikh boy, that I would love a drink of cool coconut water. When we reached the village I saw him gazing up at some coconut palms, talking to one of the locals, so

I hurried over to assure him that my wish wasn't really serious – and it was by this time 4.30. So he said 'very well' and off we drove. Our plan was to make another call on the way back in connection with the children of a TB woman in hospital who will probably not recover. When we reached the next village the truck stopped, the young Sikh got out and went into a Malay house and was talking to a man there whom he seemed to know. As I suspected, the subject was coconuts, for in a minute someone was pulling himself up a palm and throwing big green tanned nuts down. Quickly the top was sliced off a couple of these and a glassful of the coconut water poured for me. I had that and another. It was delightfully 'thin', slightly sweet, and most cooling. The Malay showed me some sprouting coconuts which were tied to a palm. The green shoots were a foot high through the old nuts, and small roots had penetrated through the underside. The old nuts were hung not directly straight up but on the diagonal: if the green shoot goes straight up through the top, that is good, if it comes out sideways at the natural top of the nut, that is the tree the lightning is most likely to strike. Well, I couldn't see the children I had planned to see, but they will be there next week when we will go again. I hope all this is interesting to you. I didn't get home until 5.30, very sticky and somewhat pink, but I feel much more lively this evening than on those days when I have long sleeps in the afternoon.

We went to The Residency on Sunday evening to meet Malcolm McDonald – son of Ramsay – and his Canadian wife. They are very pleasant, she particularly charming and attractive. His function is as a kind of roving ambassador to South East Asia, to keep the British Government closely informed about all that is happening in this whole area.

I must 'dry-up' now. It is nearly bed-time and, incidentally, the mosquitoes seem intent on devouring us tonight. We can now buy Citronella, thank goodness, and that is quite effective, but as the scent wears off the wretches bombard again.

#### *Batu Gajah, 28.2.47*

Our driver Ahmad went into hospital about a week ago, with a fever. After three blood tests, ST malaria was diagnosed. The night before last he was very bad and the doctor suspects blackwater fever – often fatal.

Woy is deep in his first love affair – with Rosie, Gopal's little white bitch. He can hardly bear to leave her for a minute and creates a fuss even when he's brought into the house at night. He grumbles and spends his time looking out of the windows, hoping for a sight of his beloved, and from about 5.30 am until the doors are opened at 6.30 he's whining and pushing at the back door. And this morning I heard a dainty feminine whimper, in response, calling to him – through the crack under the door I suppose (it reminded me of that Pyramus and Thisbe bit in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*). It is, for all the world, like a callow human lover affair: nothing else matters, except that in Woy's case it seems to improve his appetite – or else, the sooner it's eaten the sooner he can get back to her.

I was out again yesterday afternoon, in the hospital truck, looking for the mother of a boy patient. He is seventeen but only as big as one of twelve or thirteen, and I could span his upper arms with finger and thumb. His mother, he said, is a beggar

and has a hut at a place called Papan, a few miles from BG. We had difficulty in locating it and each time we descended from the truck were literally hemmed in by a throng of Chinese kids – you could see them actually running down the road from all directions to be ‘in it’. I didn’t find them amusing on that occasion. I am sometimes revolted by their insanitary habits: the children perform their private functions not even in the drains but on the road or roadside – and some adults do the same. Anyhow, we found the woman. What a talking machine! She is not too badly off, but we will give her some help, have her other son checked and if he’s all right, probably arrange for him to attend school. The sick boy is a heart case – he’s improving but will never be able to do ordinary work; we’ll try to get him into a home where he will learn basket-making, weaving, etc.

### *Batu Gajah, 3.3.47*

I have told you about the *musangs* which invade the space above the ceiling. Just now I got a sudden, powerful, insalubrious wave which persisted, then I discovered that one of them had wee’d through the lattice manhole in the ceiling down onto our bedroom floor, narrowly missing a rug. We had a gang of coolies up there searching for these dirty little devils recently but without any luck. The *musangs* come in at dusk and depart for the trees at dawn. They have the advantage of discouraging rats – ‘tis said – but we have a rat also. And thereto hangs a tale! Another episode exactly like the first but this time when I put the trap into the loo and flushed the pan, rat and trap disappeared! I expected a blockage, but all’s well.

Last Saturday night the boy killed a snake which was entering the house, up the back steps. (At least, one might say, it ‘knew its place’!) We weren’t here at the time, and anyway I don’t think it was a dangerous kind of reptile.

This afternoon I found a bright pea-green lizard in a bedroom; it was about seven inches long in the body, with a tail that began green and continued to a total length of about fourteen inches, thin and brown like a dead stalk. As far as I know, it’s still there.

We went to Ipoh this morning in a borrowed car with borrowed *syce*. As I mentioned, our *syce* has had blackwater fever, and the sister at hospital told me that he is a lucky man to have survived. He is very depressed today and says he is ‘very tired’. Poor lad looks very ill too – he is having liver injections twice a day. We send nourishing dainty foods up to him, but he will eat but little. However, I believe the danger is past and have no doubt that he will be all right.

We are to entertain the Sultan on Saturday week. He is coming up for tennis and will have lunch with us. I don’t know how many people will be with him: his Aide, I think, and a few tennis players to match against people here. He is a very good player himself still, though he is fifty-seven. He is easy to get on with; I have met him several times already, so this luncheon need not cause me any concern. We shall probably serve cold chicken and salads. It would be an awful faux pas to give him ham with the chicken: Muslims don’t eat pig, as you know.

Woy is now a rejected lover and cannot understand that. The lady just snaps at him as he tries to persist in his wooing, so we’ve brought him back to the fold and have him chained up in the house. He’s thin and wretched, dirty and scarred,

doesn't want his food – not after the first big day has he had any appetite – and his coat is dry and falling. It's a week now since he learnt the real meaning of 'luv'; apparently he's not over it yet, and it appears to have ruined him. However, we'll give him a bath tomorrow and see if that will cool his ardour and restore his spirits.

You certainly do see some sights around the hospital – in one ward especially, the principal women's ward. Here the ladies in waiting ponder their delivery sitting on the stone floor of the adjoining verandah, sometimes surrounded by their entire families all having a picnic meal. Others may be seen washing their clothes; drying their hair, or more commonly de-lousing family members – or I suppose each other.

About a sewing machine: no, I think I'd better not get one because I should then be taking on more work still; generally I'm reluctant to ask people to do things so end up doing jobs myself. I did approach one of the leading Chinese in Batu Gajah to see if he could persuade a few Chinese people with machines to undertake a little sewing for the poor. He said they were all working people who made their living by sewing. But these simple *bajus* and trousers that the Chinese wear could be run up in a very short time by those experienced. Finally he said his wife would do the job I wanted at the moment – a shirt and shorts for a very poor, sick Chinese boy in hospital – the one whose mother is a beggar. Later I was explaining that the European women regularly arranged sewing bees, and few have machines, to make some of these garments. Then he asked me, 'Haven't you got one?' Can you believe it! Here I am giving up nearly all my time to help the local people and he coolly asks me haven't I a machine – so that I could do their sewing too.

The green lizard I mentioned has, incidentally, migrated to our bedroom where I hope he is busy catching mosquitoes in the darkness under the wardrobe. John has named him Wilfred. Oh! He's just skedaddled across the verandah, with his stick-tail half arched over his back.

### *Batu Gajah, 7.3.47*

We have just been to the Residency in Ipoh; it is likely that John will be acting Resident when we return from leave and while the Astons go on leave. Anyhow here we are, somewhere in Ipoh: it's 'turned out nice again' and a stationary car in the tropics is always cosy. But here I sit, feeling beads of perspiration running down my chest. The battery is flat, and the crank-handle has lost something off the end so won't grip to start the engine. John and the driver – and the crank-handle – are away somewhere, and unless they can get the necessary adjustment made and return soon they'll have to scoop me up. If the worst comes I suppose we could borrow a car to take us back to BG but we've quite a few calls to make around Ipoh yet.

I really should always take a camera with me in this country; there are often amusing, or delightful sights which can't be described adequately: A little old Indian has just passed walking at terrific speed – in itself remarkable for no one hurries here. He was tiny, and very much bent, was wearing a khaki turban and white clothes to match his white beard. Off he went, like Father Time at the double, but without scythe. His brown birdie legs sprouted out of two outside brown European-style shoes and flowered into a just-below-the-knee *dhoti*, like a

longish white-cotton petticoat, over which he wore a white shirt – tail out – as is usual. How I delight in so much that I see!

*Batu Gajah, 14.3.47*

There is a gang of Tamil coolies in the house at the moment, with long ladders enabling them to reach the ceiling of the sitting room. Some of them have climbed through the manhole: it has all to do with the *musang* again. They came yesterday evening with a comical-looking trap which was heaved up and put under the roof and baited with pineapple. We certainly didn't hear any sound up there during the night so I don't think the men will find anything in the trap. I believe the Chinese will pay \$7 to \$10 for the carcase of a *musang* as they like to eat it; they'll eat *anything*. (The trap only captures, does not injure the animal.) I paid the Tamils \$2 to let the poor animal go in the jungle if they caught it – or when. John says I'm potty!

*Batu Gajah, 22.3.47*

Yesterday we 'opened' another People's Restaurant, this one at Kampar. I think I've told you previously about these restaurants and canteens inaugurated by the Government Welfare Department. They are proving enormously popular. The scene – or ceremony – attached to the opening of these places is funny. The contractor (appointed by the Government) gets together a group of guests as distinguished as possible, and we arrive in stately cars outside a large open *atap*-roofed shed, all immaculately white-washed new wood, and decorated with floral streamers and festooned, and furnished with tables and benches and a radio with a loud voice. But immediately outside those snowy railings there's mud and slush and scraps of food; dirty kids and ducks; stray dogs and the odd goat perhaps. But for a short time we mill about thinking of nice things to say about the region inside the railings, while conscientiously we remain aloof and unseeing of the squalor without. Yesterday we were first invited into the office and there plied with cigarettes. When the tape had been cut and we entered the restaurant our table bore plates of grapes and cut oranges – both expensive here – and a bottle of whisky was produced. It was only about 11.30 a.m. and only a complete toper drinks whisky at that hour. Nevertheless, in true Chinese fashion Mine Host insisted that the men, at least, have *sikit-sikit* (that means 'very little'). He poured John about one third of a tumbler before he could be halted. Needless to say, John passed some of it on to someone else. It was a very good lunch of rice with mushrooms and vegetables. The railings were lined with spectators, two deep in parts and many others had come in to take a meal.

One of the boys from Kampar Home whom I had settled in apprenticeship a month or so ago came to see me this morning. He says he is very happy and spends his evenings learning English. Also from the Home two Indian boys have gone to Bo Tea Estate; a big Malay boy is accepted into the police force; and wheels are being turned on behalf of several other boys. It gives me great satisfaction to see these lads launched satisfactorily on a career. They are all nice youngsters and are worthy of a little effort, but it becomes increasingly evident that their own people

will do mighty little for them – I mean the people of their own nationality. They make me furious.

A little later: Mrs Stevens, Matron of the Children's Home, just came up to see me. She told me the children in the Home refer to John as '*Bapa*' meaning father – though she translated it as grandfather, so I don't know. I just now told John that they all call him *Bapa*, and his reply was that he 'must have had a motor bike!' Corny, but still amusing!

Our driver Ahmad was discharged from hospital today. He is well now, but will need to convalesce for a further week at home before he is fit to work.

It is a blessedly cool afternoon. We had strong wind and rain beginning shortly after lunch: it gives respite from the rather wearing glare and heat.

### *Batu Gajah, 25.3.47*

On Monday when in Ipoh John and I drove to a shop where sometimes we buy groceries, as our last call before returning to Batu Gajah. I remained in the car. It was fortunate we stopped there then for I saw a Chinese woman with a big baby on her back and another by the hand, begging. That is the sort of thing we particularly want to check, for the small child held the begging bowl and one feels that with such an early training the child will always be a beggar. So I got out of the car, the idea being that if the mother had no other livelihood she would be assisted by the Welfare Department. Then I discovered that she was blind. We got a Chinese shop-assistant to talk to her and to tell her she could be helped, and he eventually persuaded her to go with us to the Welfare Department. She was rather frightened that we would take her away somewhere and not let her return to her home where a third child was waiting. Eventually she was reassured and we left her at the Welfare office where she would receive food and clothing and from where she would be taken home by truck. I have her name and address and will go some day and see for myself that she is being looked after all right.

Welfare work is vastly interesting. I mentioned a sixteen- or seventeen-year-old boy – a heart case – who will always be an invalid and unable to live a normal life. I didn't know what to do about him quite, but wanted to put him in possession of a means of livelihood. I spoke to the Area Welfare Officer about him and he suggested weaving. So he will himself make a small loom which he can rest on the boy's knees and on which the boy can make things like tablemats. I believe when he is proficient he should be able to turn out about six mats in a day. Hand-woven goods fetch quite a good price. This Welfare Officer is himself keen on weaving and is enthusiastic to use his knowledge to assist disabled people.

We have regular self-entertaining concerts now and my voice has much improved on its rather disappointing form when I commenced again to sing after the piano arrived – the regular practice has done immense good and I am now in very fair form. Woy has got used to it – or suffers in silence.

Our garden is looking well, with large beds of canna lilies surrounded by cockscomb – the plume type – both flourish here. Some of the cannas are in shades as delicate and pastel as gladioli. Also dahlias do well, and antirrhinums.

We still have not been advised about our leave. The Resident thinks we may be going in May or June and hopes that when we return John will act for him while he

goes on leave. Normally John would get leave only after 2½ years, but as the rest period after internment was curtailed it is considered wise to shorten the period of this first post-war tour of service. Whatever happens, I will be most sorry to leave my hospital work; I am anxious to find some other woman who would be willing and able to take over from me. There aren't many of us European women here, and as three of them are pregnant the possibilities are reduced. Probably no local woman would be willing and competent. The poor among them seem to help each other somewhat but the community leaders are indifferent. We are trying to make *all* responsible people welfare-minded; the women are more likely to help than their menfolk.

There is an epidemic of mumps here. Two small boys from the convent orphanage are in hospital in a cordoned-off room in one ward. I stopped one day this week and looked in at them. Each was sitting on his bed, very solemn. I asked the nurse how they were getting on and she said they were very naughty – they had just been fighting. Imagine that! Even sick in hospital, apparently, male aggressiveness will out.

Included in the news from Australia in one of our newspapers recently was a rather brief account of Mr McKell's swearing-in. It was reported that some people invited boycotted the ceremony and that a newspaper reporter present remarked that surely, as McKell represented the proletariat, red carpet was inconsistent. The official referred to replied, 'Oh, the path's slippery and he might break his b. . . neck!' That was not nice!

At last the big doll is finished. I took it to the Children's Home today and presented it to that poor slobbery little girl. At first she looked slightly apprehensive for it has indeed a surprisingly human look; then I encouraged her to fondle it and feel that it was her special companion. A poor substitute for human love: fate is cruel to many innocents!

### *Batu Gajah, 31.3.47*

We took a Chinese boy of thirteen to the Children's Home on Saturday – went and collected the little wretch and took him in our car, along with his mother – and this morning he ran away from the home. His mother is a widow, a beggar. So what do we do with him now? The first thing I'd like to do would be to arrange for someone to thoroughly kick his useless backside. The trouble is he's never been to school or subject to any discipline, and hasn't much chance of growing into a useful citizen, the way he has been running wild.

Woy is very bored. He feels nice and cool and therefore mischievous, but no one will give him a game. It's quite amusing to watch his ploys to attract attention. He always commences by biting the carpet or the furniture – he knows someone will come to scold him for that and tell him not to; then he can jump at them or think of something else. He has an old shoe of mine to play with and he picks that up and brings it right up alongside John or me and if we don't take any notice he gives one or the other a nudge. He's quite spoilt but very sweet-natured and a jolly good watch-dog withal; he will let the *dhobi*-man in to collect the linen – but he will not let him carry anything out of the house.

## EARLY MORNING

Day wakes early and is bright-eyed straight away  
 And seems to take its breakfast on the run  
 For the sun's a lively riser  
 There's a rhythm and a rhyme  
 In sounds and voices:  
 Old Gopal like an ebony Father Time  
 Already scythes in ample swathes  
 The slopes of emerald grass  
 Clearly I hear the gabbling babble  
 Of his Tamil fellows as they pass  
 And picture once again  
 An avalanche of marbles  
 Falling down a drain.

*Batu Gajah, 4.4.47*

It is Good Friday, so a public holiday. Strangely, it happens to be also a Hindu festival, and a Chinese festival. I supposed both festivals have something to do with the moon. Anyhow there is to be a Hindu procession around the town, I believe, and already the temple bell is ringing (yes, and our Indian corn is springing) and there is sporadic beating of drums. Despite that, it is somehow a very quiet and lovely day, undisturbed by the sounds of hawkers or carts or other audible reminders of labour.

I went to Mass this morning and as you know there is a communal kissing of the Crucifix. I got rather alarmed when the priest removed his shoes and the congregation did likewise, to think I might not remain an exception. Asians are accustomed, many, to walking barefoot, also their footwear is usually only open sandals or clogs, so to slip their feet free is nothing. But the priest wore socks under his shoes and proceeded in them. A few seats behind me sat the Eurasian doctor's wife. I cast appealing eyes back to her and she had such a twinkle in hers that she must have guessed my dilemma. She and her daughter made no attempt to remove their shoes so I kept mine on too. My heart is humble enough, I think, but it would have been too much for me to have bared my tootsies and walked down the aisle and back, thus.

*Batu Gajah, 5.4.47*

I mentioned earlier in this letter that the day was a Hindu festival day also which culminated in a procession. It was their day for distributing food to the poor. The procession was to commence at 6.30 in the evening, and no doubt it did, but by midnight we were awakened by the noise of it passing along the road in front of our house. We got up to see what we could see. Even the little we saw was rather grand. Canopied altars were borne aloft, all very bizarre. (They were drawn by bullocks I think). The way was lit by a dozen or more flaming torches on tall poles, and there were electrically-lit torches also, so that the whole procession was as bright as a comet tail. There were about four altars drawn along and several

hundred people walking behind and between these, chanting, shouting, enunciating. All the while the strange piping of a reed instrument and the beating of a drum accompanied the exotic Eastern scene in sound. You may remember that when we were in Klang, before the war, we witnessed a Hindu festival when from the bullock-drawn daises bearing figures of a god, priests distributed salt and rice to all and sundry. John tells me this is a similar festival, and the fact that the dates differ so widely is because it is held every twelve moons, not according to calendar months. I believe the procession stops at intervals to pray, and that is why it takes so long to complete its route. Men, women and children were there – in fact, I heard the children's voices first.

*Batu Gajah, 7.4.47*

It is now Monday and the last day of the holidays. We will have a guest staying for two nights this week – a member of the University Education Commission which is touring the country; and on Sunday the Sultan is coming to play tennis and will lunch here with us. Our house boy who is a Malay is very interested in the proposed visit and says he must wear his Malay garments. We shall have to borrow the services of another boy and maybe the help of another cook.

*Batu Gajah, 8.4.47*

An Infant Welfare Centre has been opened in Batu Gajah, which is a further step in the right direction, though it is not a new innovation. Infant Centres were operating in all towns before the war. The nurse in charge tells me that a great many children are suffering from malnutrition – not from insufficient food but from an unbalanced diet. The Chinese, in particular, will have rice and more rice, polished for preference.

I have just seen a little brown squirrel run across the drive, holding his reddish tail well up, like a beacon. Woy gets very excited if he sees or hears them. The other day he jumped right into the fork of a tree and tried to scramble up a limb after a squirrel – real or imaginary.

Our neighbour at the back is a French woman – very capable, as Continental women are in household matters. She sacks her cook every week – in three languages her husband told me. However, her cook remains. He is very efficient but spends too much money. She says he's mad: recently she found him hanging from a rafter – by his feet (to amuse his children). I remarked that I should be very happy to find our great clod hanging by his other end! His incompetence makes entertaining an added strain on me, and it annoys me that John put up with him so many years.

I have endeavoured to convey visual aspects of life in Malaya; perhaps I should tell you more about the lives of the people, so:

Chinese lower-income workers are employed on tin mines; are self-employed in small shop-houses where a strange miscellany of their own kinds of food are sold; do tyre-repairing or have roadside coffee stalls, and such. At the other end of the scale, Chinese represent the wealthiest members of the population, with capital invested in rubber, tin, real-estate or imports. Chinese are also among the cleverest professionals in law and medicine.

Indians: Tamils are in the majority of labourers employed by Government – Public Works Department – and on rubber estates. They are housed in what are termed 'coolie lines' – each family with its own small living quarters; and larger rubber estates are often equipped with a hospital and a school for the children of the workers. At the higher end, Tamils are also engaged in the professions – principally law. Sikhs are in the Police . . . Chettiahs are in the money – they lend.

At the levels in between there are, of course, the shopkeepers, servants, hospital staffs, clerks, etc., among all races – not forgetting the admirable Eurasians.

Malays are not labourers, not much represented in commerce but hold the majority of posts in Government. The Malays have grace and charm; the Chinese have energy; the Indians are religious and Eurasians are reliable, loyal and eminently self-respecting.

#### *Batu Gajah, 11.4.47*

I am feeling quite depressed today: On my visit to the hospital I went first to see the boy for whom the loom was being made. I reached an empty bed and was told that he had died only an hour previously. It was a heart-sickening shock. I realise I shall have to get used to my 'patients' dying.

Our University Commission member left this morning. We enjoyed his visit. The Commission is studying conditions in Malaya for the establishment of a modern and complete university, and great interest has been stirred in the eventual site to be decided. Some want it to be in Singapore; some say Kuala Lumpur; some say Penang, etc. But since the Commission estimates that 1,000 acres will be required as a site, these big cities may not be able to offer as much spare land as that.

Tomorrow morning another girl and I are going out investigating reported cases of destitution. This represents our first real bite at that local problem. We have at last got lists from community leaders, and each case must be individually investigated, which means visiting the home of each applicant for relief and getting correct – if possible – answers to specific questions. We have to take interpreters with us as many of these Chinese people cannot speak Malay. We shall have to walk some distance to reach these houses, from the road, but we have large sunshades and can take our time. I'm sure it will be interesting. The Chinese especially have a keen sense of humour and take even their troubles light-heartedly – or so it seems.

Our Woy came home last night; he'd been on the loose because we had visitors. He was in a dreadful state, his legs bleeding, and altogether somewhat upset. He had obviously got into a fight – which he probably sought – and got the worst of it. We got to work with a dish of warm water and Dettol and bathed off the blood to see the extent of the damage. He certainly has some ugly punctures where his opponent's teeth had perforated the leg muscles. He has been a sore and sorry dog today with two bandaged legs and a limp, but this evening he's fairly jolly again: he always reminds me of a sweet but naughty little boy with plenty of mischief but no badness. Even his propensity for fighting arises more from exuberance of spirits than bad temper. I was interested yesterday to watch action and reaction between him and some chickens and a hen. Mother hen – a little red one – brought

her half-feathered chicks over to the kitchen area to pick up scraps. Woy rather resents the intrusion of anything there and he hurried along rather menacingly. Had they been fully grown fowls I know for sure he'd have chased them, but you could see him look a little indulgently, all things considered, and took no action. But Mum chook wasn't sure so, do you know, the dear little thing, very little bigger than a bantam, challenged him. She didn't touch him but advanced, her wings rather spread and head forward. At a word from me, for once, he walked away.

*Batu Gajah, 14.4.47*

I am making an early start on your 'Tuesday' letter this week as it is a public holiday and we won't go into Ipoh as we usually do on Mondays. The number of public and semi-public holidays in this country is almost a joke – the reason being the various nationalities whose special days have to be respected.

Well the Sultan's visit is over and was most enjoyable. He's nearly sixty but is very agile. John was playing remarkably well and I believe HH used to be a very good player, but is not so expert now. So I'm afraid he lost most of his sets, but he's very sporting and after an hour or so of rest he would be up and ready for another. I addressed the Sultan as 'Tuanku' – my Sultan – but one of the European women present asked me, 'Why do you call him "Uncle"?' At about midday I came home to supervise the luncheon preparations, and about half an hour later John and HH arrived. (His Highness has a white saloon car with his coat of arms neatly emblazoned on the back doors.) He came upstairs and admired the view for a few minutes – as all our visitors do – and then went to bath and change. He reappeared in a Malay costume of pale-pink silk with jade and gold studs, and a pink and grey check sarong.

I have previously described the Malay male dress: high-neck, long wide sleeves falling from deep armholes, and instead of buttons, the *baju* fastens at neck and half-way down the front with studs. The trousers are fairly wide and the sarong is draped around the middle to knee-length. It is a very elegant, cool and decorative dress. With it the Sultan wore light brown suede shoes. He apologised for not wearing his *songkok* (headgear) which I have previously described. (A Malay gentleman in national dress is not in order without it.) We had invited our neighbours from the house at the back, Dr Ingham the geologist, and his French wife who partnered the Sultan, and their daughter; also the DO. They all arrived at about 1.00 when we had a round of drinks – HH a fruit juice only.

Lunch was very successful. We had mushroom soup – tinned, of course, with added cream. A very good, fried chicken with corn fritters, etc., followed by ice cream which I had made the night before. It is excellent: made with egg custard, coconut milk and whisked egg white. With it we had tinned apricots, scorched almonds and hot chocolate sauce. HH said, 'I must send my cook up to ask your cook how this ice cream is made!' John and I looked at each other and chuckled, knowing how much our cook knows about making sweets. His only 'pudding' is precisely like sponge rubber; I'm sure if we dropped it from the balcony it would bounce.

For this occasion our Malay boy was dollied up as never before, in Malay dress

of white cotton with a pink check sarong. We 'borrowed' the DO's Chinese boy to assist him.

I had gathered flowers in the morning; was a little concerned about the floral decorations as I felt obliged to join the tennis party, but when I returned I found a bowl beautifully arranged, of the loveliest yellow flowers all ready for the dining table – yellow being the royal colour: dear old Gopal the head gardener had gone and got these flowers from a tree in the village and arranged them with a sort of maidenhair fern so that they looked simply gorgeous. One of them, either Pandak the boy, or Gopal, had endeavoured to repeat the State colours in flowers – black, yellow and white, in another large vase. In this were yellow canna lilies; a snowy white kind of lily and very dark green, *almost* black, leaves. All that effort was quite unbidden and suggests the sweet goodwill that exists between us all. The Sultan went home at about 3.00.

On Saturday morning I went out investigating reported cases of hardship. Much to my surprise I was able to deal with eighteen cases as they were all concentrated in a comparatively small area, and the people concerned had been told to assemble at a certain point, and lead me to their homes. I got to the meeting place at about 9.30 with a Chinese interpreter. We called the roll from a list that I had, and off we set in procession: the halt, the lame, the blind, rags and tatters, red handkerchiefs and pointed hats, bare feet and feet shod with pieces of rubber tyre. To the accompaniment of ceaseless sing-song chatter in loud high-pitched voices we tramped across the railway line and in through poor scrubby land of white sand that always characterises disused mining areas. First we called at the house of a nearly blind woman – she is forty, looks fifty. Her husband, during the Japanese occupation, went to Ipoh one day, and never came back. That was a common occurrence in those Japanese-bedeveled days. Her house was the most incredibly tiny shed of paling walls patched with bits of tin, and an *atap* roof. There she lives with an elderly woman and her own ten-year-old daughter. She gets the food remnants from a mining *kongsi* nearby and the child gets free food by doing odd jobs here and there. We will definitely assist these people, and make provision for the child to go to school. Of the remaining seventeen cases, all except three I have recommended for some sort of relief. Most of the houses I saw were extremely poor – all had earth floors and all would let in some rain. However, these people I am sure are not conscious of discomforts to the same extent as those used to better amenities. (Being illegal squatters from China, they probably came from worse.)

It is amazing how the locals – Chinese in particular – can turn on the tears when they wish. Many of them burst into floods, quite unnecessarily, so I indicated they were being absurd. And reviewing it all, it was mainly those in least need who did the weeping. There was a widow with two daughters whose ages were given as sixteen and fourteen. Through the interpreter I asked could not the elder one find work. Oh no, she wasn't strong enough! 'Where is she?' 'Over there!' And there she was, overcome with grief – a big girl, her hair well permed. 'Surely there's nothing wrong with this girl. What is she crying for anyway?' After blowing her nose, volubly, on the earth floor and stamping on the result, she said she was crying for the loss of her brother. (How, she didn't say.) But two minutes before that as we passed the side door of the house I'd seen her sorting vegetables, without any sign of distress. What is suspicious is that their rice-card had two extra

people provided for on it, and there was no explanation for that. I'm not recommending these people for anything. Another case was that of another 'widow' whose children I discovered were nineteen, eighteen and seventeen years, the elder ones boys. None were present and I wondered why. I said I would enquire about jobs for the boys – but there is something fishy about that lot. Most of the others, I believe, genuinely need some help, even though it is only a free weekly ration of fish and vegetables. That in addition to whatever else they can get should help prevent malnutrition.

There were cases of yaws, ulcers, obvious TB and blindness probably caused by malnutrition during the Jap occupation – and the inevitable malaria. Most of the sufferers agreed to go to hospital so the hospital truck will soon be sent to collect them. I forgot to mention one dear old Chinese woman of seventy who walked behind me all the way, holding my sunshade over me and always dusting any chair or stool offered me to sit on. Recently, at another place there was a man who obviously was a leper. He agreed to go to the hospital next day for observation. When I went to collect him – and his two children – they had gone away. How dreadful: he'll probably infect his children.

*Batu Gajah, 18.4.47*

We went out this morning again to investigate hardship cases but could not get very far as the pathway into the *kampong* was knee-deep in mud. (That nice Army Major sometimes drives me on these missions.)

I feel very unsettled in mind with the thought of all I would like to get done before we go on leave. There are so many welfare matters still to be completed and so I want to finish what is on hand.

*Batu Gajah, 29.4.47*

We have now been advised that we are booked to sail on the *Strathnaver* leaving Singapore on the 19th of next month. That means we'll leave Batu Gajah on 16th.

This afternoon the garden party in our honour is to be held, but the day so far is dull and threatens rain, which may spoil the programme, as tennis was to follow tea.

The Superintendent of Maxwell's Hill will take Woy, so on Sunday week I am to convey the little chap to Taiping where Mr Oliver will meet us and accompany us up the hill to his bungalow, for he would have a dreadful time trying to get Woy away from me if I were left behind. Poor little fellow: I told you how last time he went up, after losing sight of us he slumped down because he was on the chain and just would not budge until we reappeared. However, if he spends a day in the company of Mr Oliver while I stay there too, he'll feel a little less unhappy perhaps – or I may be able to slip away unnoticed. I am really very sad at the prospect of leaving here, of parting from Woy and my interests. I'll be glad when we're back – and a little later I can go and stay with you awhile. I shall be thrilled to see England again, but I could do without it. The air is full of excitement at the prospect of our departure. Yesterday Cookie presented us with a roast chicken for lunch, provided by himself! The *ayah* has asked for my photograph. She's a nice little woman – I wish I could send her home to you.

Yesterday I wheedled the promise of a radio for the TB ward out of a wealthy Chinese. I'm very pleased about that; also that two required artificial legs have been delivered to the hospital. I still have some needy people to deal with, but we have broken the back of the list. The French lady who is our nearest neighbour will carry on organising the welfare work after I go. She and her daughter are splendid – very whole-hearted and enthusiastic – yet when I first approached her about this work she seemed quite indifferent. The fact is that like many of us she had never encountered real misery.

*Batu Gajah, 5.5.47*

I was so happy to receive your letter of 30th April, this morning. Yesterday we went to Kuala Kangsa as guests of the Sultan. Breakfast there was about 8.30 and consisted of sandwiches and coffee served on the lawn under trees beside the tennis courts. I have described the Istana to you previously, but to repeat: It is a picturesque building of a dusty rose pink shade, with a lovely skyline of towers and domes. Tennis began immediately after breakfast. John plays steadily and well, not spectacularly but he gives nothing away. The Sultan first appeared in a fawn silk Malay suit with deep red and gold sarong, but later changed into light trousers and sport shirt. The Tungku Ampuan his wife joined us at about 10.30, a study in mauve: a long almost knee-length *baju* and ankle-length skirt. The *baju* was, as usual, opened at front and was fastened by three brooches joined by a slender chain. Around her shoulders was draped a pale mauve net scarf embroidered in blue. Malay women generally have some sort of drape around the shoulders; sometimes if walking in the sun this is worn over the top of the head and falls down each side; sometimes the corners are folded back across the top of the head. The Tungku wore mauve sandals also; diamond ear studs and a couple of rings. She does not speak any English, and as my Malay is so limited we could not converse at any length. But I did my best, for the Sultan had told her to sit beside me. Tennis went on steadily until lunch time. The day was balmy – a little more dull than usual, with a coolish breeze. From where we sat we looked across the two tawny-coloured courts over to the bluish hills, and in the foreground to the left and immediately behind the courts, the grounds sloping down to a green hollow with bushes and trees. One of these is a jacaranda. The exquisite mauve-blue of it was like the focal point of a picture; it seemed to emphasise the mauve 'morning glories' which starred the vines around the courts, and the colour of the Tungku's costume.

The sky, for most of the time, was a happy blue and the clouds floated big and white and lazy. At midday, through the 'pot-pot' of balls on racquets, and the low murmur of conversation there broke clear and near from the minaret of the Istana behind us the Muezzin's call to prayer. I wish I could convey that sound. The voice expressed vitality, youth, manhood, was crystalline, like running water – without tremolo, except presumably where tradition demands, and delivered in that enchanting minor tone belonging to oboes, and 'the East'.

At about one o'clock lunch was served on the lawns – on tables brought out for the purpose. We had a very good curry of great variety, and not too hot. After quite a brief spell tennis was resumed and John had to finish playing off. It was pretty

hot by that time – and anyway, a curry tiffin is not conducive to good tennis – so he was mighty glad to finish. But other matches were played off until 3.00 or 3.30. Then tea was served and soon we went off to the football ground where a game had been arranged. We stayed until half time and then left. It was a very enjoyable day but we were very glad to reach home, particularly as we had been dancing the night before until 2.00 a.m.

The Chinese *towkay* I approached for a radio for the TB ward very generously agreed to give it, so today we chose a 7 valve GEC and delivered it to the ward. The patients are in great glee about it and applauded me before I left. However, it had cost me nothing, as I told them.

### 13.5.47

We are very busy with general preparations for departure – and now we learn that the *Strathnaver* is not expected to leave Singapore until 21st. I find it difficult to concentrate on writing a long letter but I hope to make good the brevity of recent ones once we are on our way. We are both well; are staying with our neighbours until our departure. We let the cook go a few days ago. I hope to send you along despatches from each port. Meanwhile, as you know you will all occupy much of my thoughts.

### On the train, 19.5.47

We Left Batu Gajah at 1.20 and are still on the train, on our way to Kuala Lumpur where we entrain for Singapore. We should arrive there at about 8 a.m. tomorrow and are due to sail on the *Strathnaver* on Wednesday.

There was a large crowd at Ipoh station to see us off and when the train stopped at Kampar the Matron and teachers, the seamstress and about twenty children were there and gave me a posy and a photograph taken at the farewell party last Saturday week. I am sorry to leave the district: I was working up certain small schemes which I would like to have seen through. However, if the present plan eventuates we shall return to The Residency at Ipoh where we were for several weeks last year, and John will be acting Resident for six months while the incumbent goes on leave. That would suit me as it would allow me to take up the threads again where I have left off. We were happy to learn that the manager of Boh Tea Estate, who provided the big Christmas Tree, has taken the boy Muniandi into his labour force. (The one from the Children's Home.)

The washing *ayah* brought her six children yesterday to say goodbye and they presented John with a white handkerchief – with J.F. embroidered (very badly, bless them) in one corner; and gave me a little sponge bag and a handkerchief with a flower embroidered (ditto) in one corner. It was a very sweet gesture for they are very poor. I have put her on to Welfare relief until she gets another job.

The second gardener's children – four of them – were all dressed in their best to say goodbye, yesterday, and I was given the baby to nurse. And, do you remember I told you months ago about a beautiful young Indian woman who had come to ask me to find her a job? I'm sure I enthused about her beauty and her picturesqueness in her white saree. Well, I did find her a job and yesterday she came down – twenty miles – also to say goodbye and to tell me how happy she was. This morning, too,

the Chinese community leader Cheong Kim Voon came to say goodbye and brought a message of goodwill and gratitude from the 'destitutes' whom we have helped. It was all very gratifying.

This is not a very comfortable carriage: there are no luggage racks, and the padding on the seats is flat and the covering is dirty. There is a refreshment bar at the end from which emanates a smell I love – cooking garlic!

The journey is not very interesting. There are clumps of tangled bamboo where we're passing now, and endless vistas of rubber trees. At intervals are squares of padi-swamp. John has just pointed out a house whose one-time occupants he knew well and about whom there is a strange story. They were a married couple, who fought, literally tooth and nail, and repeatedly left scars upon each other. They had been third-rate theatricals, he a comedian, she in the chorus. They lived like cat and dog until, quite young, she died. He found he couldn't live without her, and took his life.

Cookie has been paid off – thank goodness. John gave him \$1,000 to set up in a coffee stall.

It is raining heavily now which is a good thing, for it cools the atmosphere. We still have about 1¼ hours before we reach KL.

Woy's offspring arrived last week – puppies to the gardener's little Rosie. Rosie is a pretty little thing: entirely cream, dainty little face and plume of a tail. She probably has some pomeranian ancestry. Four of the puppies take after father, being black and white; one is sable colour, and the sixth sable and white. I don't know whether Woy saw them before we went away. His new 'uncle' phoned on Thursday to say that Woy was having the time of his life. The atmosphere up the hill is so bracing that he appears to be full of joy.

#### Singapore, 20.5.47

We are now in Singapore after a somewhat restless night. We had sleepers from KL but the mattresses are rather hard and at each stop one is apt to wake. Anyway, here we are, at the Station Hotel – a pretty poor place but the only one where we could find accommodation though John wired several others over a week ago. What a different journey down this time from the last time; and what a different feeling! Thank God we are together this time, without horror behind us. Here he is, my John, sitting beside me puffing contentedly on his pipe – a bit travel-stained withal; with a day's growth of whiskers; a cold blister on his lip – and altogether not a picture. Neither am I, to be sure, but who cares!

#### Singapore, 22.5.47

I am ashamed that this letter is still unposted. The ship's sailing has been delayed until tomorrow. We've had two days of shopping, without purchasing very much. The shops are crowded with merchandise from China and there are plenty of materials. I do so want to send some little novelties to you all from here. I look forward to our return to Malaya and then to going home to see you.

*On board Strathnaver, 27.5.47*

We are due to arrive at Colombo tomorrow morning. So far it is a most uneventful trip, with goodness knows how many passengers, the majority of whom are troops. However, we have a cabin to ourselves which is a concession these days. The ship commenced its voyage from Japan and called at Hong Kong where a great many of the troops boarded her. Sir Mark Young (Governor of HK) and his lady are also on board. I had the honour of sharing the ironing room with her this morning while she ironed her husband's illustrious pyjamas!

Among the passengers are several dusky brides of British servicemen – Eurasian girls. One certainly wonders how such marriages will work out. Everything about life in England will be so different for these girls – the climate alone may make them wretched. Eurasians, though their language is mostly English, speak it with a rather staccato accent – their speech doesn't seem to flow. They are, in Malaya anyhow, a self-contained community and generally marry within their community.

*On Board Strathnaver in the Red Sea, 4.6.47*

There had been some doubt about our going ashore at Colombo, but we did go. Following my usual inclination we made a tour of the shops. One result of it all is a pair of ebony elephant bookends – good king-ebony – on their way to you. King-ebony we are told, is from the root of the tree.

I suppose you have a fairly accurate mental picture of Colombo: it is a mixture of domed white buildings in the broad main thoroughfares where are also expensive jewellery and silk shops. In contrast, little shops edge and jostle each other to show their noses onto narrow alleys one could almost span with outstretched arms; and eager, watchful eyes would compel you into their mean cubbyholes of merchandise amid a ceaseless tumbling of persuasive words. No sooner does one set foot on the jetty than he is beset with mingled invitations to 'Taxi to Mount Lavinia'; to take a ricksha to the Galle Face; to 'see lovely jewellery – no need to buy'; to indulge in the luxury of 'beautiful silks, Madam'; 'Come in here, in here . . .'; 'Ivory elephants . . . necklaces . . .'; 'You want postcards?'; etc., etc. People, people, clamouring, competing, urging, skinnily surviving, or flourishing in the tumultuous competition – for all the world, a human jungle. So much noise, trade cries, taxi horns, the jangle of bells on the cart-bullocks that plod on regardless, the sharp 'pang' of ricksha bells. And there, in the midst of it all, remote nevertheless and like a lily on a garbage bin, reposes Government House immaculately white, green shuttered, irreproachable and unapproachable – but set surprisingly close to the footway behind a white stone wall. There are many trees, such fresh-green trees, many with flame-red blossoms.

We took a taxi to the Galle Face hotel where we had lunch. This hotel faces the sea beyond a long surf-beach quite reminiscent of Sydney beaches – except for the all-important fact that as far as the eye could see there was not a soul on the beach or in the water. Apparently it is not safe. The hotel has a swimming pool of salt water – I swam in it in 1934 on my way to England. Incidentally, John has told me that before the war, in Colombo shops, you could select jewellery or anything else

and take it away without payment, and be trusted to send your cheque later on – or pay for it on the return voyage.

Benefiting by our uncomfortable experience during the voyage from Australia to Malaya, this time we took the precaution of having deck-chairs made with footstools to match and that was wise because there aren't nearly enough of the ship's chairs for so many passengers – and none can lay claim to a ship's chair once he leaves it, even for a few minutes. We've slept on deck for the past two nights, on our chairs, for it has been very hot. It is a very crowded ship – about 3,000 passengers in all, of whom there must be 2,500 troops. The food is not bad, just ship's food, cooked in enormous quantities: good old unimaginative English tucker. We are due to reach Port Said on 7th, but we are so far through the Red Sea now that unless we slow down we should be there before then. I do hope we go through the Suez Canal in daylight, as happened on the first occasion, when I found it vastly exciting.

The Canal is so narrow that one has a clear view of both banks and the activities in the immediate foreground, and ships behind appear to be on dry land. I remember that our great-grandfather was buried in the Red Sea: perhaps I have twice passed over the place where his remains were lowered – with full military honours, no doubt, but no consolation to him. What a dreadful experience it must have been for his twelve year-old son who would have watched.

*My great-grandfather Colonel Alexander Cairncross was posted to NSW and was stationed at Parramatta. His eldest son, my grandfather, had accompanied him. Great-grandfather was probably not a well man from the outset as he had been wounded in one of the wars. I have copies of his letters to his headquarters in England asking to be recalled on account of his failing health. When his request was granted in 1842 or 43, it was too late: probably the heat in the Red Sea sapped the last of his strength.*

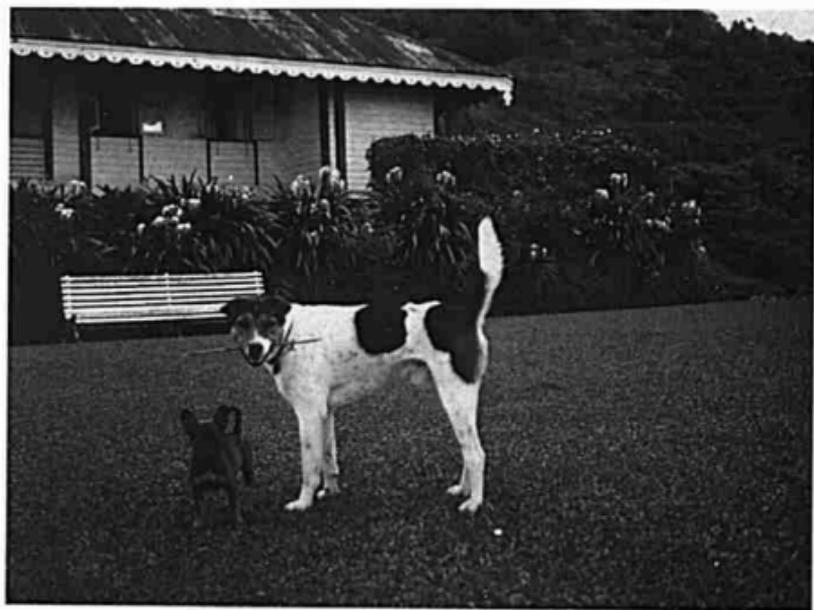
It is a very uneventful trip and the days seem rather long. I'm too old, too married, and there are too many people, to have the fun and games I enjoyed on my first trip to England. Anyway this is a troop-ship really, under naval orders. So we sit on our deckchairs most of the day, have the occasional game of quoits, do a little reading, walk around the deck – and sometimes snooze.

*On Board Strathnaver, 6.6.47*

We entered the Suez Canal about an hour ago and are now slowly moving along within a stone's throw of the left bank. There is a lot of greenery in the foreground, mostly date palms, I think, and there is a roadway – a long road lined with pine trees. Predominating is, of course, sand but there are square plots under cultivation of some sort, very green. Arab children and adults in long flowing robes, dirty-white, and coloured, odd flat-topped buildings, an occasional mule or cow in a backyard, a couple of white-and-brown sheep. Narrow channels intersect the land, presumably carrying water inland. It takes about twelve hours to reach the other end of the canal which is Port Said. (More in my next letter.)



*Walk-time; Bruno and Bobby, Johore*



*Willie at Maxwell's Hill, 1947*



*Malacca, 1 June 1948, watching Chinese street acrobats.*



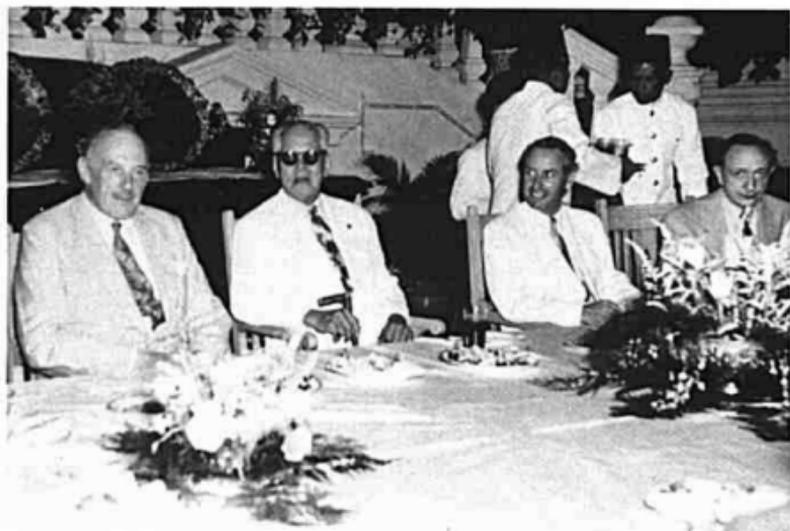
*Garden Party at the Residency, Malacca 1948.*



*Brigadier Hedley, Sir Anthony Eden, the B.A.,  
March 1949.*



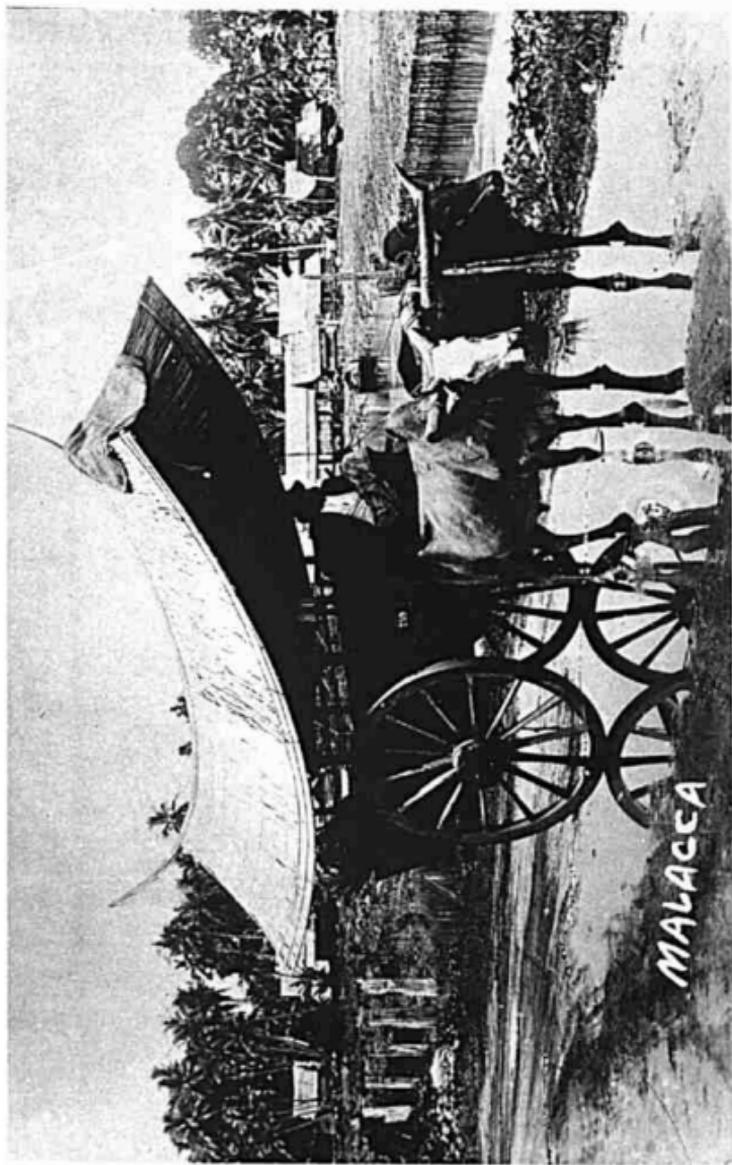
*Women's Service League Party at The Residency, Johore Bahru 1952*



*Sir Oliver Lyttleton, Sultan of Johore, Malcolm McDonald and John Falconer, B.A.*



*Johore Bahru, The King's Birthday Party at night.  
Centre: H.H. Sir Ismail, Tunku Mahkota the Sultan's heir,  
and Tunku Ampuan the Sultan's sister.*



*Bullock Cart, Malacca*



*Haji Ismail bin Haji Abdul Rahim and his wife Hajjah Rogayah Binte Haji Dahlam*



THIS TEMPLE WAS ERECTED BY THE M. C. A.  
AND CHINESE OF JOHORE IN  
HONOUR OF THE HON'BLE MR. J. FALCONER,  
BRITISH ADVISER, JOHORE, 1949 - 1952  
AND MRS. FALCONER ON THE OCCASION  
OF THEIR RETIREMENT FROM MALAYA.

*The plaque on the outer wall of the Chinese Temple at the Leper Settlement, Johore.*



*Major General H.H. Sir Ibrahim Sultan of Johore; the Sultana; Princess Mariam.*

*On Board Strathnaver, 15.6.47*

Here we are, within two days of Southampton. There is quite a heavy swell and this afternoon we should enter the Bay of Biscay which can be frightfully rough. I have been somewhat indisposed ever since leaving Singapore; now I've developed mumps – or perhaps I should say a mump, as it is a mild attack, and the swelling is only on one side. The compensation is that I have been in the isolation ward, right aft, since Thursday. Rather pleasant it is: nice airy, decent-sized room and bathroom – and a deck – all to myself. The snag is though that in this part of the ship one feels the motion rather badly. John spends most of the day with me, of course. I only hope he doesn't catch my complaint. The doctor is going to let me off the ship without reporting the case to the port authorities as I have no fever and the swelling has commenced to subside. I'll make a rather unlovely landing; my hair is dirty and I cannot wash it, and my face is even more peculiar than usual. I shall have to wear a scarf over my head to disguise my mump!

We reached Gibraltar early yesterday morning. Passengers were not allowed ashore; we waited only long enough to take on more service-men. That part of the Spanish coast we could see was beautiful: all gentle hills of farmland sweeping down to the bay where groups of red-roofed white houses were tidily packed like toy blocks amid symmetrical dark green trees. Little bum boats soon came around the ship, as at all the other ports, with merchandise for sale; and the boatmen calling the soldiers familiarly George, or Jim or John. They held up little triangular shawls embroidered and with long fringe on two sides. These looked fine from a distance but were rubbish on closer inspection.

John laughs and wonders at my insatiable love for shops and strange merchandise. I told him yesterday that if I ever lost that curiosity it wouldn't be worthwhile travelling. That seemed to touch him somewhere for he called to a boatman to let us see his wares. As I said, it was all rubbish.

I realise that I have not described our visit to Malta. We went ashore there last Tuesday. Looking out to the clustered, clean-looking city of Valetta from the ship one would imagine that it had suffered little, if any damage. We ascended to the city in an open cable car. But once ashore and walking through the streets one realises that the whole place might almost be called a shambles. The destruction is hideous and heartbreaking. It seemed to me that certainly not more than half of the original buildings still stand and that of the others one third are hollow shells; the rest heaps of rubble. It is such an interesting, historical old city with a few long, narrow horizontal-lying streets from which a series of steep narrow alleys wind down toward the sea. There are as many Catholic churches as an Australian country town has pubs. We went into one famous old cathedral – St. John's – with its ancient tapestries hanging from the walls. These were pictures representing sacred occasions in Christ's life, or other sacred subjects. They are very little faded – the colours are still almost as rich and vital as stained glass. There must be twenty or thirty of them and each would measure 20 feet by 30 approximately. Every section of the entire interior is adorned or wrought most richly; stone carvings all over walls and pillars; mosaics on the floor; while the great domed ceilings of nave and the many chapels and alcoves are most elaborately painted. It is over-rich, in fact – there's too much to assimilate.

I missed the goats: When I was last there – in 1934 – goats were being milked into jugs at people's doorways; we were advised then not to drink anything containing milk as it often carried the germs of undulant fever.

*On Board Strathnaver, 16.6.47*

We are in the Bay of Biscay now and it is very calm. The biggest swell is on my face, but it has decreased. Doctor has diagnosed the trouble as very low-grade infection of the salivary gland. Tomorrow Southampton – last seen by me in 1939.

*In England and Scotland we travelled a little and visited John's family and our friends; and I fell in love with the magnificence of the Highlands which I had never travelled through before.*

*On Board Empress of Scotland (erstwhile, by strange coincidence Empress of Japan) Liverpool, 30.10.47*

We expected to be well on our way by now but are still held up on account of an unofficial strike which has not the support of the Seamen's Union or the majority of the crew. A bunch of toughs of the waterside are intimidating those who wish to sail on the ship and are threatening to wreck their homes if they do so. We have no idea when we shall get away, certainly not today. It is an infuriating waste of time – utterly boring for there is nothing to see but dirty-grey water, a grey foggy sky and bits of vessels protruding from other berths. It is a troop ship, as practically all are on the Far East run, so messages and orders blare through the loudhailer at about five minute intervals all through the day.

We do not consider it wise to unpack yet; if the strike continues we may have to leave the ship. As it is, the Health Authorities will soon insist on our going up the river, as there are altogether about 4,000 people on board and the harbour is being polluted.

There was some confusion about our sailing together, owing to some stupid, interfering woman in the Crown Agent's Office. When confronted, she tried to justify her action. John dealt with her in no uncertain manner and a little later, still bristling about it, 'Women!' he snorted . . . pause . . . 'bless their little buttons!'

We are not sharing accommodation. The first cabin to which I was assigned simply horrified me. It had ten berths – all 'booked', and I think the complement included at least five children, some young babies, for there was already a line of nappies slung aloft! I quickly got hold of the P & O representative and asked if he could not do better for me. He could – and I was sent to another ten-berth cabin which at the time had only one other berth booked. Now there are five of us, and no children. There are no wardrobes – just a few pegs on the walls. Two of the young women in this cabin are brides. What sort of a honeymoon trip is that!

One of the passengers told me of an amusing encounter with a small boy. He stood in a corridor gazing at a notice on the wall. Pointing to it, he asked her, 'Who is that Mister Stanton that they show the way to on all the walls?' She looked and saw a broad arrow pointing to 'Muster Station'.

And now, good news: John has been informed that he has been appointed Resident Commissioner, Malacca. Quite a distinction, especially for a man still in his forties.

On Board Empress of Scotland Gulf of Aden 8.11.47

We left Liverpool three days behind schedule. Despite crowded accommodation it is not really an uncomfortable voyage. Weather has been good; food is reasonable, and the public rooms are all one could expect under the circumstances. Morning tea comes in a large urn; the cups are thick as basins so it is difficult to avoid dribbling when you drink. The ship did not call at Port Said for water as there is a cholera epidemic in Egypt. No one is allowed ashore; even trading with the bum boats is forbidden. Nevertheless some stupid passengers – both civilian and troops – were buying from them. Also, some other travellers came on board from Port Said – both passengers and pilot crew. In view of all this John and I decided to be inoculated against cholera and we are to have a second shot in a week.

We sailed through the Canal yesterday and last night. I understand we are not stopping at Aden and will go direct to Colombo. Even there it is doubtful that we will be permitted to land as the port authorities may consider our contact with Egypt represents some hazard.

On Board Empress of Scotland Indian Ocean 14.11.47

We are due to reach Colombo tomorrow evening; Singapore next Thursday. Quite a strong wind has persisted throughout the voyage, making the atmosphere cooler than it might well have been.

As I told you John has been appointed Resident Commissioner, Malacca. Before we settle in I must go to Maxwell's Hill to collect my darling dog. Perhaps it is cruel to take him from that bracing climate – but at least I must see him again.

Isn't this nice: I came across a small boy crying, in one of the foyers. 'What's the matter, dear?' I asked. 'I've lost my Mummy!' 'Mummy's not lost – she'll come and find you soon . . . Come and look at all the things in the shop.' I said. But after ten minutes Mummy had still not appeared. I asked if he knew his cabin number – yes, he did. So we went there. No Mummy. 'What is her name?' He hesitated briefly then replied, 'Her name's Doreen!' Any Australian would have laughed at that one (shades of *The Sentimental Bloke*). Still Doreen didn't come. 'Have you any sisters or brothers on board?' Yes, he had a brother. 'Do you know where he is?' 'Yes,' he said. Problem cured, I thought. 'Where, then?' 'In his *pram*!' So we found the brother and I left him there to be a big boy and look after little brother until Mummy came.

Singapore, 21.11.47On the train to Malacca, 22.11.47

How good it is to be back. I am thrilled to see and hear, and smell, what is familiar here and what represents Malaya to me. That ubiquitous smell of this country, as I have mentioned, must be a combination of woodsmoke, temple flowers – and perhaps cooking garlic! It makes me happy. It has been delightfully cool since we reached Singapore, and the rain is still falling after a rainy night. Singapore! I know how the very name has always enchanted you.

Princess Elizabeth's wedding day was a public holiday in Singapore and the evening was made gay with an enormously long procession of decorated and illuminated floats. Some of these were a mass of flowers grouped to form a crown; others had swinging Chinese lanterns made into shapes of birds and fish; another had a windmill with a seat on each blade, in which sat a girl; round and round they went as the wheel turned so they must have had a delightful ride. There were also fireworks displays from boats in the harbour – and lots of noise from drums and cymbals everywhere.

We stayed in Singapore with the Whites and I enjoyed one glorious morning's shopping and looking, with Dorothy. How you would love as I do all the curious sights and sounds and the beautiful things: fabulous materials; jewellery, fine leather, handcrafts of many kinds – and the people.

How I long to have you here to fill your eyes, as I do. In that connection I often think of Kipling's verse:

'These are the four that are never content  
That have never been filled since the world began:  
Jacala's mouth, the glut of the kite,  
The hands of the ape, and the eyes of man.'

(Jacala was the crocodile, I think.)

How strange it is that I am living your impossible dream . . . fulfilling for you that call of the Orient which you always felt. Probably that was implanted in you from childhood by your 'Aunt Kate' and her husband who took his trading ship to China. You often spoke to us when we were children of the bales of silk and curious exotic things he brought home and how the atmosphere of these intrigued you. In other circumstances you could have come and satisfied your longings. Now, sadly, as you put it, 'Almonds come to those who have no teeth'! Mamma dear, I hope in a small way through my letters I bring a little of the Orient to you.

*The Residency, Malacca, 24.11.47*

Well, we are installed. We were met at Tampin, the nearest railway station, by the outgoing Resident in his car flying the Union Jack. The Residency is a delightful house beautifully situated on a rise overlooking the sea. On a lower slope is the ruin of the church where the body of St. Francis Xavier reposed after being brought from China and before it was eventually removed for final burial in Goa. There are headstones also on the lower slopes and in the floor of the ruin, marking the graves of Portuguese and Dutch settlers who died in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The inscriptions are still legible and tell sad tales of whole families struck down: malaria perhaps, cholera, or typhoid.

*Malacca, 27.11.47*

I hardly know where to begin describing everything. In fact this must be restricted to the immediate scene for as yet we have not been able to make a real survey of the town. So I shall start with the house: it is a large, square, cream-coloured house

with many windows. A broad flight of stone steps decorated on either side with potted zinnias of many colours leads into a sort of conservatory verandah with grey-and-white marble floor. Here there are enormous oval windows and many, many potted plants, ferns and leaves. The dining room is entered from here, through two sets of double doors. At the end of the conservatory is a charming morning room with a patterned tile floor and furnished with heavy cane settees and chairs covered and cushioned with figured chintz – Chinese green and red on a white background. There is also a billiard room. Upstairs is an enormous sitting room, in three sections divided by arches. The floors there have become somewhat uneven and chipped, over many years, but they are now being repaired and will be polished. It is certainly a gracious house with a lot of character. But how can I do justice, in words to the setting:

The Residency stands on the crest of a small hill so that the upstairs rooms are almost level with the tops of nearby trees. Near the windows where I sit are two great Indian laburnums festooned with pendant yellow blossoms. They are never quite still and seem to fan in cool sea breezes especially for our comfort. From three sides of the house we look out over the Straits of Malacca: stretches of calm water ever-changing in colour and dotted with dark furry mounds that are little islands, and enlivened by small craft, and sometimes ocean liners sailing by in the distance. From here where my desk is I could literally throw a stone and hit the noble old ruin of the Church of St. Paul, its walls a patchwork of rather porous-looking rust-coloured stone (laterite I think) trimmed with green moss and vines. It was built by the Portuguese in 1511. But what makes this idyllic cameo absolutely lyrical are the golden orioles. They are the spirits of the Indian laburnums, weaving between them like skeins of yellow silk, with a mellifluous carolling call, weaving and calling all day long.

Our garden and its near environs are firmly believed to be haunted – by benevolent ghosts I might say. Generally the apparition is of a nun – and sometimes, ha ha! she is being pursued by a halberdier! But to me there is a quality of gentleness and innocence pervading Malacca – so maybe the halberdier doesn't mean the lady any harm. There are other, different accounts of this phenomenon, largely concerning a house – No. 7 Fort Road – built about the middle of the seventeenth century. Various occupants of this house, even to the present day, have been, and are, apparently familiar with this *hantu* of a brown-habited nun whose ghost is said to have even brushed people in her haste through the house and has been seen often by children. One version has it that she had a soldier lover, was discovered and as a punishment was walled-up there. If so, it would have been during the Portuguese occupation which continued until 1641. Another story concerning the halberdier is that not long ago a Chinese boy reported having seen a man go by dressed in kerosene tins!

Perhaps the spirit of innocence emanates from St. Francis. I think it is on 3rd December that his feast day falls and then, I understand, five masses are said in the church ruin and people come for miles to be present. I am also told that in the evening of that day there is a candlelight procession from the town up to the church. I hope to see it.

It really is a pleasant garden, complete with what I am told is an ebony tree. Other trees set in the lawns will make it ideal for garden parties. There is a grass

tennis court also and all is in perfect order.

### IDYLL

Their flight is like a melody that counterpoints their song –  
 The Golden Orioles that day-long  
 Weave their arabesques between the Indian Laburnum trees  
 Opulent with bullion tassels  
 Their leaves of emerald shimmering in soft breezes  
 From the sea where distant ships go by  
 And pond'rous old junks under the hot sun  
 Sleep, while great eyes painted on each prow  
 Keep watch, lest *hantus*\* of the past invade the now.  
 The Golden Orioles, the gilded trees  
 The venerable red church walls  
 Then the wide, calm sea . . .  
 Malacca – unforgettable idyll  
 Framed in the tree-top windows  
 Of the white house on The Residency hill.

Already we have been to several cocktail parties, and to lunch, but generally the Resident – and his wife, of course – do not accept invitations to meals but themselves do most of the entertaining (we get an allowance for that).

### *Malacca, 1.12.47*

I have just returned from a tour of the French convent which, incidentally, is staffed by Irish nuns though the Order is French. There are about one thousand pupils of various nationalities – including Malays, who are Muslim, and that is an acknowledgement of the quality of the school and dismisses any fear the parents might have had that an attempt would be made to convert their children. Apart from academic subjects every girl is taught to sew; this year each had made herself a dress – some with assistance, of course. Indeed I saw some pretty snazzy French knickers also – perhaps intended for Reverend Mother! There are also orphans at the convent.

One thing the Reverend Mother told me this morning is worth repeating: we were discussing the behaviour of the Japanese during their occupation and she related that once, when a General was to visit the school, the children had not been prepared with a 'drill' to welcome him so the local Jap. Commander when the General arrived made the four senior nuns do the drill out on the *padang* under the midday sun. The local people had to be there as spectators as the Japanese wanted the nuns, as Europeans, to be ridiculed and humbled in the eyes of the people. The result was quite the reverse: they were disgusted with their 'masters', knowing that those good sisters were their friends who would never turn a needy one away.

\**Hantu* is Malay for 'Ghost'

I have been reading outlines of local history – Malacca in particular. Ancient Hindu, Chinese and Arab races have left their influence: the Portuguese were the first Europeans to govern; then the Dutch, who ceded Malacca to Britain in 1824 in exchange for Bencoolin. The Chinese have been established since the sixteenth century. British influence altogether commenced when Francis Light established a trading post in Penang in 1788; Raffles did likewise in Singapore in 1819 (Britain bought the rather swampy island from the son of the Sultan of Johore). The Malay States became 'protectorates' only, and over the years from 1873 the various Rulers made agreements with Britain to provide advisers (on matters other than religion) and establish good government. It has worked very well.

*Note: The history is given in some detail in the Background.*

On Saturday night we were the guests of the Chieftain of the Malacca St. Andrew's Society, at a dinner and dance. The occasion was complete with pipers and bagpipes, some kilts, and even a haggis. There is a ceremony attached to the entry of the haggis: it is piped into the room, borne aloft on a tray by the clan chief; deposited on a table on which six glasses of whisky stand. Then the piper, the chieftain, heads of other clans I suppose, and the guest member of the St. George's Society, drink the whisky in one gulp – after the chieftain has spoken some words in Gaelic. Thereupon the poor innocent haggis is stabbed with his dirk and the body is carried away for distribution. I had some with mashed potato. I liked the potato.

*Malacca, 2.12.47*

Yesterday I received a letter from Dorothy White in Singapore. It commences: 'Lord Killearn's thoroughbred Scottie was mated with another thoroughbred of the same brand, then she had a disgraceful few moments of enjoyment with a Johore pariah and has produced three puppies. Lord Killearn doesn't want them after that. Would you like one?' I have refused.

I want to get Woy back though that may not be possible as Perak is a rabies-infected State. It is worth a mention that Dorothy, being the selfless mothering type who thoroughly spoils her husband, was interned in 1942 because she felt she couldn't leave him. Soon after moving into internment at Sime Road the women were ordered by the Japs to clear a large area of ground for the growing of vegetables. They provided no tools whatever and the ground was covered with *lalang* – tall, strong, sharp-edged grass. The only instrument Dorothy had was a pair of nail-cutting scissors. (She still has an enormous corn on the palm of her right hand.)

Yesterday I duly opened the YWCA club, made my little speech, and was presented with a bouquet of pink and gold gladioli tied with pink ribbon.

*Malacca, 7.12.47*

Again, it is raining heavily and is beautifully cool this afternoon. The rain quite blocks out the view of the sea and the islands: I can only see the trees, the trees taking what I feel to be quite a sensuous delight in the rain's refreshment; they

seem to lift up to it and stir their wet limbs voluptuously; I can imagine them sirensinging in an ecstasy of pleasure.

We were very much amused a few days ago to receive a bill for foodstuffs, headed thus: 'Your Excellency or Her Excellency J. Falconer, Governess of Malacca.'

*Malacca, 8.12.47*

Christmas seems so nearly upon us and we shall be giving several dinner parties around the festive season. I am still making enquiries for a really good cook; the present chap is in some ways even worse than the last. He has a nice nature, otherwise he would have been sacked.

We are to go to Kuala Lumpur on Wednesday where John is to attend the plenary conference of Sultans and all heads concerned in the signing and sealing of the new Constitution. We are to be guests of the Governor and Lady Gent, staying at King's House overnight. More about this in my next letter.

There has been great excitement this afternoon in making preliminary preparations to re-erect the flagpole which the Japanese removed to another place where they established their naval training college.

*Malacca, 14.12.47*

This afternoon we went for a drive to a place called Santa Cruz which is generally referred to as 'The Portuguese Settlement'. It is a village of little dark brown wooden houses all of one style with a living room and possibly two small bedrooms. They all seemed tidy and well kept. These particular Eurasians are the descendants of the sixteenth century Portuguese conquerors and have somehow managed to remain as an isolated community who speak a patois of their own which is probably sixteenth century Portuguese with a mixture of local Asian words. Why they are sort-of 'left behind' and not among the other Portuguese Eurasians I don't know. They are essentially fisher-folk anyhow, and the poorest of the poor – but self-respecting and law-abiding. However until the Government took the initiative of building this settlement for them their conditions were, I believe, absolutely squalid. Now the 'Portuguese' Convent has built a small school for the children which has been very successful. When the children attended other schools previously they were looked down upon on account of their abject and obvious poverty. Next year I hope to go to the settlement and see at closer quarters how they are living.

*Malacca, 2.1.48*

Well, the holidays are over and I feel that now we can settle down to business. We were awfully tired yesterday after a very late night at the Club dance. Some of the guests were certainly under the weather; one young woman at midnight went around the room and kissed everyone including John. Later she came back to our table and was talking nonsense for a few minutes, then asked who John was. When told she said to John, 'Oh, I *am* sorry!'

About the Constitution:

Immediately the war was over the British Government sent a special delegation to Malaya in the hope of arranging new treaties with the Sultans whereby jurisdiction was to be transferred from the Rulers to His Majesty the King and so create what they termed a Malayan Union comprising the nine Malay states and the settlements of Penang and Malacca and to confer citizenship with equal rights on all who could claim having been born in Malaya or having lived there for a period of years. Singapore was to become a separate colony. Probably in the euphoria of release from the Japanese the Sultans signed the treaty. Then it was fully realised that the Malays would lose the preferences they had always enjoyed over the Chinese and Indians, most of whom in fact owed their allegiance to China or India. Very soon the full significance of the proposed treaty was realised by the Malays and they opposed it with fierce hostility. So His Majesty's Government had to retract and an acceptable Constitution was established. Now we have 'The Federation of Malaya' which has restored much of the former sovereignty to the Sultans while maintaining a strong central Government which is considered essential preparation for future self-government. In celebration, a procession was arranged in Malacca as elsewhere and from quite early morning people began to arrive in their gayest finery to take up their positions along the route. Quite early too, decorated bullock-carts started rumbling in with their human cargoes, many of them women and children all with their faces rouged, lips redded and eyes outlined with kohl. Their heads were beflowered and their clothes of the brightest colours. Some of the carts represented houses; some mosques; one, a wedding with two small girls dressed as bride and groom respectively sitting quite motionless and solemn as in a real Malay wedding. There were others playing instruments and singing and some dancing either on the grass or actually in open carts. In the afternoon we attended a tea-party arranged primarily to honour the man largely responsible for enforcing abandonment of The Malayan Union – Dato Onn, the *Mentri Besar* (Prime Minister) – a formidable person.

*Malacca, 6.1.48*

There is an Indian circus in town; there are not many animal turns I'm glad to say. However one animal star is a blond bearded goat. He walks a tight-rope – not a rope but a strip of metal about two inches wide. In the middle is fastened a little pedestal affair like an over-large cotton reel. We saw him mount it – and how his four hooves fitted on it I don't know, but they did, and there he stood for a few seconds then dismounted back on his 'tightrope' and returned to the platform. There were also five young elephants which waltzed around the ring and finally sat upon their little tubs. Like you, I resent the spectacle of dignified animals being made to look ridiculous.

An excellent scheme was inaugurated by the Welfare Department here some time ago and is working very well. Through this, poor people who have no real source of income go daily to what is called the 'work centre' where they learn to do all manner of basket work. They are provided with a free meal and paid 30 cents a day. It was never expected that this would be a paying proposition, but there is some little return each month from the sale of goods produced, and with

some management I think a lot more cash could be turned in. I've had some quite good ideas for new types of things that can be woven of basket-ware and we have condemned the haphazard production of miscellaneous baskets of the kind that are two-a-penny everywhere. This morning I am to go out to the work centre and make a selection of goods to take to two places where they are generally put on show. Even quite small children attend the centre with their parents, get a free meal and 15 cents a day – and what is important, also learn a useful trade. I don't think there are any men engaged – they are mostly Malay and Chinese women, widows with children.

One of the local people is to receive the insignia of MBE from the Governor at the end of this month. That means His Excellency will be with us for luncheon, and in the afternoon we will hold a tea-party in the recipient's honour – about fifty people I think.

### *Malacca, 8.1.48*

As you know, I intend to go home as early as practicable this year and I am writing today to the Shipping Company offices and to Qantas to get possible departure dates.

Train services from Singapore are temporarily suspended and the main road impassable on account of flood. This flooding caused us some upset yesterday. We had a message about 10 a.m. that the Governor was aboard the train which could not get through and that he, with all other passengers, had had to de-train in Johore and that he and a party of four others would be continuing their journey by road by a route through Malacca, and virtually would like to have lunch here. So we began ordering extra food, giving instructions to the servants, cutting more flowers, etc. – all was brush and polish, hurry and bustle, in preparation. The table was dressed to kill. Then at about 11.30 we had a message to say that they couldn't get through by car and would have to lunch at another town. So! there we were with fourteen cutlets, plus lots of other goodies – and no one but us to eat them. The staff benefited.

We went to a Eurasian wedding this morning – an 8.00 a.m. Nuptial Mass. They are a very handsome couple, the bride in full wedding finery, the groom in a cream suit. The reception was held at the bride's home where there were two or three hundred guests; a five-tier wedding cake. The couple sat on a decorated seat with gorgeous cushions, set in a corner of the room. First they stood to receive the good wishes and congratulations of the guests who filed along in an enormous 'crocodile', seemingly endless. After tendering our good wishes we were asked if we would like to see the bridal chamber – this is apparently the regular thing with Eurasian weddings. The chamber itself was nothing – but the bed was enormously broad and low and draped from a little canopy with frilled net curtains. The pillow covers had embroidered wedding bells and the bed cover was of white lace with a cameo of cupids in the centre. The reception lasted about an hour and after the usual toasts John was asked to speak on behalf of the guests – then we left. These are middle-class people – there are no wealthy Eurasians in this district, as far as I know; they are usually superior tradesmen or clerks and as such could certainly

not be called well-off. Yet each daughter of a respected Eurasian family apparently has a wedding like this. It must cost a great deal.

This afternoon we attended the unveiling of a memorial plaque to members of the local Volunteer Force who lost their lives in the war with Japan. The Anglican minister, Catholic priest, Chinese Buddhist and Hindu priests each performed his particular dedication, the Buddhist in a saffron robe chanted while he beat softly on a sort of hollow rattle. He and the Indian priest laid fruits and flowers on the altar and burnt incense and candles. The pity of it all!

### *Malacca, 13.1.48*

I rather enjoyed yesterday morning; I went along to the work centre to sort out the poor-quality work to take to the Public Restaurant where we thought it might be sold at cheap prices. Much to my surprise news of this soon spread among the workers who had made the stuff and they came, scrambling and grabbing like the usual group of bargain-hunters at any department store sale. In a few minutes all the first bundle had been sold on the spot so we got another lot ready and called them in and all that lot went, and then a third lot. I was so amused, standing back watching them – the different types, the little touches of cunning. One old girl – a Chinese – had feet certainly not more than four and a half inches long. With those deliberately deformed 'lily' feet a certain type of footwear is always worn: tiny pointed, embroidered shoes with a sort of abbreviated top also colourful and embroidered and generally made of heavy satin. It is strange to see women who were certainly never members of the upper class, with these feet, for the fashion was affected by the aristocrats to indicate that they had no need to walk, that they were wealthy enough to be carried in some way or other. I suppose the lesser just like to ape their 'betters' as is – or used to be – done everywhere. Anyway, this old girl had rather droopy jowls; a run-away chin and sly-looking little eyes, and thin grey-streaky hair pulled back into a tiny 'onion' at the back of her head. (It would have been delightful to draw her outline.) She pulled a basket of the better type stealthily off a bench behind, and said 'How much?' in Malay, of course, hoping somehow to get away with that for about the same price as these poorer articles. Everything for sale we had tied a price-ticket on but some I think pulled off the tickets hoping to get a greater bargain. But altogether they were jolly and honest and good-natured – and enjoying themselves, as I was. Some had not the 20 cents or 30 cents necessary, so had to 'mortgage' their today's pay.

The Malays have a festival called *Mandi Safar*. *Mandi* means bath; *Safar*, the second Muslim month. The festivity is held annually, the date being governed by the moon. This festival brings a great gathering of people camping by the sea. Last week on this occasion we went along to see. We passed very many bullock carts with their crowded-in Malay occupants all in their best clothes, the oil lamps on the carts polished like gold, and often coloured flags decorating the carts. From near and far they came, and when we arrived at the beach there were many, many bullock carts already camped; the bullocks released to graze, the occupants either in the cart or out of it, as suited them. There were sounds of drums and fiddles and an accordion; there were food stalls selling the most appetizing-smelling food; hot coffee vendors; merchants squatting behind masses of colourful red spiky

rambutans (fruit); deep purple mangosteens; strong-smelling big, green spiky durians; great stems of bananas hung from everywhere – and, weather permitting, they would sing and dance and make merry the entire night through – and undoubtedly the men would swim. Malay women are most modest and being Muslims they stay generally in the background. However, since the war they have been awakening rapidly and many reforms for them have been introduced. They are now beginning to take their place at public functions, in education and politics, and recently the first Malay woman doctor emerged.

The enclosed photograph of us was taken during the procession to celebrate the new Constitution. The photographer told John that he had had many orders for it as 'the people say' we 'are a very nice couple'! So there!

*Malacca, 17.1.48*

The big day is past, thank goodness. It was a busy one but I think we all enjoyed it. The Governor and Lady Gent arrived before midday but they went out almost immediately to inspect the Boys' Home and to visit one of the wealthy Chinese families in their interesting old house. (I'll describe these houses to you some time.) Our luncheon menu was prawn cocktail, fried chicken, coconut ice-cream. The table looked lovely with its cream lace mats and the long matching runner; the floral decorations arranged in our two glass swans, one at either end, and a crystal bowl of matching flowers in the centre. These were pink and so made a delightfully delicate contrast with our blue china. The head boy folds serviettes in the most pleasing fashion; this time each represented a bird in the beak of which was a tiny flower. After lunch the party inspected the hospital then the Governor went to unveil a memorial to the old boys of St Francis' Institute who lost their lives in the war against Japan. Later in the afternoon was our tea-party, in the garden, given in honour of a Malay who was decorated with the insignia of MBE. The old chap is eighty and though quite poor-looking had the dignity of the born gentleman. That is natural to Malays, who also have the gift of words. He made a speech, in Malay, of course, without a stammer.

*Malacca, 22.1.48*

Tomorrow will be another public holiday – the birthday of the prophet. Monday, still another – the Indian festival of Thaipusam!

You mentioned friend Bert's reference to the tragic death of Jean Dixon last year and to his having been acquainted with Dr Dixon. Yes, we knew them when we were in BG. She was one of the sweetest, prettiest women I have ever met; they were a charming couple with two young children. The mad doctor who fired the shot meant to kill his own wife. She had gone with the Dixons to the club as he wouldn't accompany her and when they brought her home he was waiting armed with a pistol. I suppose he fired wildly, as his wife was unharmed. I believe that Dr Dixon was wounded and Jean died almost immediately. The mad doctor then killed himself and, I think, had set fire to the house. John knew him in internment and says he was 'peculiar' then.

While we were in Kuala Lumpur we stayed at the Hotel Majestic – majestic in name only, but we had no choice. However there was one compensation. The

windows of our bedroom looked out onto a rock sloping up to about the height of a normal house. I had heard that there were monkeys there – and indeed there were. We had enormous fun watching them in the early morning. There were big monkeys, middling monkeys and baby monkeys, some clinging around the mother as she loped along. What games they all had. The mother would stop and the babies would jump down on to the rock beside them and start frolicking; slap and run; pull tail and run; wrestle with each other; jump on elders' backs – and the adults would join in the fun, grabbing a little one they would hug it, roll it on its back and give it playful little bites, as a human mother does her baby – and sometimes they would emit rather bird-like noises. There was one very tiny one with very little hair, a wee half-pink body and little dark head which looked as though its hair had been parted down the middle. That one hardly left its mother at all. One thing seemed obvious: that the babies will go to any adult monkey, and any adult monkey is prepared to play with and 'mother' it.

*Malacca, 26.1.48*

We had two young people as guests for the weekend – an MCS cadet and his wife. We want to keep them with us for a few days in the hope of helping to repair any little crack that may still remain in the fabric of their marriage. It had become known to the DO who was the young man's mentor that the young wife and a police officer were seeing too much of each other – so, wisely, he thought a transfer one way and a little spell with us in the other direction might avert trouble. We went swimming yesterday morning, not in the swimming pool but right off a sandy beach a little way beyond. There are two Government bungalows above the beach there. We changed in one which is at present empty and then went down and had the beach to ourselves. How glorious it was: a very mild day no hotter than an early Australian summer morning, and the water was deliciously cool. There is a danger of poisonous jelly-fish in the waters around Malacca but we didn't see any, and took the risk. I believe the pain resulting from the sting of these creatures is excruciating, but the local people say that all one has to do is to use the sap of a vine which covers the rocks nearby, on the sting, and the pain will disappear. I understand these jelly-fish are present only in certain seasons.

Next Sunday we are going out to one of the islands in the Straits. I am told there is a lovely sandy beach there. We will have the use of a Harbour Board launch and will take a picnic lunch with us. We have invited a very delightful family to join us.

A rather amusing though embarrassing thing happened yesterday afternoon. We nipped into one of the shops in the local centre to buy a pair of sock suspenders. John told the Indian assistant what he wanted, and in due course the young man brought to him a small cardboard box. John opened it and pulled out the contents, and to our horror it was the other sort of suspender – an athletic support. There was another European woman in the shop, and seeing this she gave a little whoop of amusement – and we hurried away covered in blushes. This incident reminds me that a few weeks ago I went into another Indian shop and asked if they had nutcrackers. 'No,' said the shopkeeper, 'but we have Christmas crackers!'

*Malacca, 30.1.48*

I hope very soon to have a group of voluntary almoners working in the hospital, and – no show without Punch – I'll be in it. Anyway, I am the only one who has had prior experience of the work and I must set it going.

I heard a sweet story recently which represents the Malay attitude pretty accurately: a middle-aged Malay, retired Government messenger, was approached with a proposal that he return to work, and the amount of remuneration was stressed. When he refused the job he was reminded that he would have extra money coming in, to which his priceless answer was, 'But what do I want it for? – I have a bicycle!' The Malay ideal is (though it is under pressure of 'progress' now) to live peacefully in his *kampong*; to have enough padi-land to keep him supplied with plenty of rice; a few chickens; perhaps some rubber trees somewhere, for cash.

Yesterday John and I visited what is known as the French convent – though they're mostly Irish nuns – to see, in particular, the orphans. Poor little souls: some are mentally deficient, some crippled, and there are twenty blind ones. (Many young babies are abandoned on the doorsteps of the convents, especially if they are ill or damaged.) Here, as in the other convents, all of the unfortunates will be cared for all their lives. The healthy ones the Sisters hope will be married when old enough. Quite frequently, I was told, a young man or his mother will apply to the convent for a suitable wife. They know she will be well-trained and moral – and not have the possible encumbrance of relatives! The orphans are educated in the normal curriculum to moderate standard, but are prepared principally for the duties of a wife and mother: they learn cooking, laundry work, sewing and baby-craft. And that is very sensible.

*Malacca, 3.2.48*

On Sunday we went as we had arranged to two of the islands in the Straits – first to Pulau Undang (*Pulau* is the word for island) where there is a lighthouse. It was a rather dull morning and the sea was calm. How lovely and romantic, sweet and peaceful was that green little mound. At the fringe of the island the water shallows, so we had to get out of the launch into a rowing boat a couple of hundred yards from the shore – and on the silver sandy beach where we pulled up there was the lighthouse keeper and staff – all Malays in khaki marine uniforms waiting as a reception committee. The ascent to the lighthouse was very steep and up rough steps, and after a short climb we turned and looked back on a vista almost too perfectly beautiful to be real: tall coconut palms and jungle trees surrounded us and continued down to the water's edge, and beyond was the seemingly endless stretch of turquoise sea with a milky, pastel sky above. We inspected the lighthouse – there were seven of us including three children – and, that done, we were escorted down again. We pushed off, and after the launch started away we waved to the brown figures on the beach who waved back to us, and disappeared. We made then for the bigger island Pulau Besar. Again we had to go ashore in the dinghy. The white sandy beach there is not so pretty, being more level, strewn with driftwood and scattered and rather stunted-looking bushes. We swam and the water was deliciously cool, but just as we were about to spread our picnic the long-

threatened rain began, the girls changed, and the men went back to the launch with the food. There was a crew on board of course and just as well. By the time we started off the rain was falling heavily and the sea had developed a formidable swell. There was no alternative but to return home – cold and wet and miserable.

*Malacca, 7.2.48*

I missed writing yesterday as my time was fully occupied all day, in the morning at the hospital where I am commencing the Malacca Hospital Almoner's service, and in the afternoon at a meeting. I am Chairman since yesterday of the Malacca Welfare Committee. It is a coincidence that this hospital, not Batu Gajah, as was originally intended, has been selected to be the main TB centre. I seem to have followed it up – or it has followed me. The task of combating TB in this country is enormous – partly through limited funds; greatly through insufficient trained hospital staff; appalling shortage of nurses – but I think most of all because of the conditions under which so many people live – their deeply-rooted habit of sleeping with all doors and windows tightly closed; their crowding together (not the Malays) and their lack of understanding the danger of their insanitary ways. Keeping the doors and windows closed at night has something to do with a superstition about bad spirits which would otherwise enter. Of course, diseases escalated enormously during the Japanese occupation; they had no care for the local people, and perhaps also didn't understand efficient administration. One awful neglect was the anti-malarial measures which had previously been strictly applied.

John and I have now introduced ourselves to the Sisters at what is called the Portuguese convent. It is an Italian missionary order but has an affinity with the Portuguese Eurasians here. Many of the students are orphans, who are educated to a reasonable standard though the general standard is not as high as that of the French convent which is regarded as having no equal in all Malaya. I had briefly met the Lady Superior previously and knew she would charm John – and she did but in a quite ingenuous way. I had arranged the meeting because there is a piece of Government-owned land adjoining the school which she would like to have so that the residential accommodation could be enlarged. Of course, he teased her unmercifully – but I have no doubt she'll get her wish. This order of nuns don't shave their heads; they wear all white with quaint little white starched bonnets, fluted over the forehead, coming well down over the ears and with a small rosette affair on top. In the evening they take the air on the *padang* by the sea and John says they look like seagulls. They are here for life!

*Malacca, 10.2.48*

It's a public holiday today – Chinese New Year. They are noisy blighters, these Chinese. For the last forty-eight hours there has been the ceaseless mad staccato popping and banging of fireworks – nothing to be seen, only the incessant noise all through the night, too – and some of the barrages sound as though they are right outside the window. We're on a hill and the sound travels up. It is a glorious day, but these crazy explosions from all direction are beginning to get on my nerves. I think the original idea had something to do with frightening evil spirits away. Last

night we walked through the town where at frequent intervals we met 'dragon' processions of children holding enormous horrid masks over their heads from which trailed several yards of coloured cloth representing the dragon's body, which the dancing-ends succeeded in writhing and wriggling. This is the celebrated 'Lion Dance'. Streamers of coloured cloth and firecrackers hung down from upper stories to the pavements. The servants had a holiday today but fortunately the Malay caretaker can serve at table, though I wouldn't mind doing everything myself for a day.

#### THE ADMIRABLE CHINESE

Chinese are always on the go  
 They crowd, they're loud  
 They chatter so;  
 They strive, they thrive  
 And what is more  
 They own about half of Singapore!

(Originally, as a last line, I wrote 'Eat anything that's been alive', and that's true!)

#### *Malacca, 13.2.48*

We expect to go up to KL again next week. We have both been invited to the first 'conference of Rulers' which is a meeting of all the Sultans. I haven't the slightest idea what form the occasion will take unless it is a discussion of activities under the very new Constitution. But as the new Constitution has only been in force since 1st February it surely cannot be to discuss opinions and impressions of its progress.

We have acquired a very quaint puppy. It is sable brown and a veritable ball of fur, and looks as if it might develop into one of those Arctic 'huskies' – more likely a chowchow. It is now precisely like a toy and all that's missing is a set of wheels on its feet. We expect to adopt it formally next Wednesday night. I'm not sure yet what we shall call it – perhaps Bola, which is Malay for 'ball'.

Tonight I am going to a dance, *without* my husband! The women here, at my suggestion, are giving the Army boys a night's entertainment, with partners. The Army is paying for the band and we are providing supper – and company! No officers except one in charge of the men. Incidentally, the concert they put on for our Welfare Fund netted \$460. I must mention that one item, believe it or not, was a recitation of 'Gunga Din'!

#### *Malacca, 14.2.48*

Tonight we are going to a dinner to be given by the Ceylonese community to celebrate their independence.

There are several lovely frangipanni trees beside the house; people here call them 'Temple Flowers'. There is a pink variety and another quite red, but the cream with yellow centres are I think loveliest of all. Their scent is exquisite.

The mother cat is soon to be 'confined' again. The three kittens are half-grown by now. I've called them Mumpuss (short for Mama pussy cat), Bumpus – after the London booksellers (no connection), Dumpuss because he's a little stupid, and Grumpuss because he's an aggressive little beast: he growls and claws to get the lion's share of food and even invades the dish. Bumpuss will tolerate a bit of cuddling, just for a short while, but Grumpuss scuttles away like a rat if I attempt to touch him. Mumpuss is minus a couple of teeth, whether through old age, accident, ill-treatment – or adult initiation? I do not know.

*Malacca, 17.2.48*

I have had a very busy day, this morning at the work centre, and this afternoon on other welfare work. And now I have another small charge – a baby bird which we found two days ago under a tall tree, after a storm. It must have fallen from the nest and from such a height! When I bent over the little thing I thought it was dead but as I touched it it moved, so I brought it in and made a nest for it in a little bowl. I have been feeding it by means of tweezers, putting pieces of hard-boiled egg and bread into its throat, and today I gave it tiny pieces of meat. I'm sorry I cannot bring myself to chew up insects for it – but animal lover though I am, I can't go quite so far as that. It is a very young fledgling and cannot stand properly yet and I don't know what sort of bird it is – probably a Straits sparrow.

Mention of the bowl reminds me that it is one of a pair given to us when we went on Sunday afternoon to have tea with a Chinese family in their beautiful house. They are a wealthy, much respected family established here for generations. There we had Chinese tea in exquisite little bowls and all manner of small cakes which are traditionally made at their New Year. The house is in Herren Street – the most exclusive residential street in Malacca, and one of unique interest and charm. It is quite narrow – originally meant for palanquins only, perhaps, to convey its patrician residents. The houses stand in terraces along either side and all have outer façades of intricately carved red and gold lacquered wood, the fine doors and all main sections fitted together without screws, nails or glue, but in the tongue-and-groove manner. Behind all this carving is of course a stronger, more protective structure.

This particular house is two rooms wide, about eight rooms deep, I should think, and has an open courtyard in the centre. The first room, on entrance, contains the family altar. There were many pictures of ancestors on the walls, and among them one of NAPOLEON! That mixture of unrelated objects seems fairly typical of Chinese decor. Our hosts have an enormous collection of fine ceramics – many displayed in a wide cupboard, ceiling-high. It was from this collection that our hostess chose the two bowls with matching spoons which were presented to us. She told us that they are over a hundred years old. Apparently it is a Chinese custom to present a 'distinguished' guest with such a gift on the occasion of their first visit.

*Malacca, 20.2.48*

We have today, suddenly, had a request from 'above' to entertain a Lord and Lady something who will arrive in Malacca tomorrow – just like that! We're both

furious as they are just tripping around, and we have several engagements tomorrow. In the first place we have arranged a luncheon for twelve people, have promised to go to one of the districts later in the afternoon; then to a cocktail party at 7.30 . . . we shall probably take them to that.

*Malacca, 24.2.48*

My birdie is growing up and is the sweetest little darling – he sort of ‘talks’ to me and I answer him and if he is silent I call him ‘Sweetie’ in the tone he uses, he answers immediately. (It is the same tone as wee Kathie used when she used to call ‘Daddy’ at night.) Yesterday he became rather excited as I had put him where he would watch the birds in the trees outside. He definitely got big ideas from it and for the first time climbed on to the edge of his ‘nest’, and later I found him right out of the nest, on top of a cupboard. Later I put him on the floor to see what he would do. He looked around and up, hopped onto my shoe – and was dirty there, incidentally, (excitement no doubt), hopped along my outstretched leg, onto my skirt, up my body, onto my shoulder, around my neck – and onto the top of my head. And when John came home there was I – a lunatic picture – with a bird on top of my head, bending forward, with the ‘nest’ held to the side of my head, and calling ‘Sweetie’, in the hope that bird would oblige. But not it! There he remained on top of my head, cheeping for all he was worth, and John had forcibly to remove him. Last night he was still a very big fella and wasn’t going to sleep in his nest like a baby; he sat on the edge with his head under his wing, swaying slightly back and forth as he breathed. There was quite a strong breeze blowing through the room. I propped a silk hankie with a wad of cotton wool inside, up near the edge of the nest, and when we put the light out, I heard the little thing move, and on putting the light on again, discovered that he had given in and settled down in his nest by nestling up near the warm hankie. So I tucked him up and I think he quite enjoyed being a baby again. We get him small live grass-hoppers to eat, sometimes. It is dreadful to put these into his throat, but I accept what the servants say about it – that they would be his natural food.

I left off there to go with John to a Hindu Festival which is peculiar to Malacca and to which Hindus come from places as far distant as Penang. There is a big temple about five miles away which has various rooms including one where the multitude are fed on this day. The priests expected to feed up to 8,000 people irrespective of race or religion. The feast honours the god Subramanyan, son of Shiva, and his effigy was on an altar there; in fact there were several effigies, one of solid gold – so they say – seated on a throne of solid gold. The whole thing stands about three feet high and is lavishly adorned with bejewelled ornaments. As we approached the temple we passed a middle-aged woman who was being assisted along the road by two other women. Perspiration was streaming from her face, and on her head the other women were holding a brass bowl full of flowers. She had walked from outside Malacca – about six or seven miles – fasting and, I suppose, started off holding the bowl herself. There were other people dressed in saffron yellow holding canopies of coloured paper and flowers in procession with drums and obviously verging on religious frenzy. As we left we saw a man whose trunk was stuck with perhaps fifty thin skewers upon which was supported a

canopy. This self-punishment represents penance. All the Hindus present brought offerings of fruit and/or flowers; camphor was being burnt before the altar, and a Hindu priest put some holy ash on our foreheads.

*Malacca, 26.2.48*

I am pleased to tell you that the people we were suddenly requested to accommodate for a weekend proved to be delightful company. We took them with us to a very large cocktail party on Saturday evening, and on Sunday to the swimming club. We had a swim and then had lunch of bacon and eggs and chips in the clubhouse which is open on all sides – so it amounted almost to lunch alfresco. We have, indeed, just received a parcel of books from our guests – Lord and Lady Ailwyn, from Singapore.

Next week we are to have for an afternoon and night the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Listowel, PC Minister of State for Colonial Affairs. He and one of his party will be staying overnight with us and we shall give a dinner in his honour, for sixteen people.

Tomorrow night will be the Welfare Ball. Lots of entertaining lately: on Sunday a Miss Trevelyn from UNESCO will be coming to stay with us until Tuesday. She is a musician whose recreation, according to 'Who's Who' is playing Bach – she is an organist of no mean quality.

This morning a Eurasian woman came to me, in great distress. I asked her to sit down and listened to her sad story. She told me that her husband, who is twelve years younger than herself, had fallen in love with a young woman of their community and doesn't want her any more. She asked me if I could speak to her husband and try to persuade him back to her arms. Poor soul, who can rekindle love once it is cold? And how could I intervene? I suggested she talk to her parish priest – but that won't avail either.

As I have told you, Malacca is heavily haunted – many quite sensible and even hard-headed people have had 'strange experiences'. At least on one occasion the ghost, however, was substantially more than ectoplasm. To begin at the beginning: in the grounds of The Residency, but well away from the main house, there is a bungalow known as the Annexe, built to accommodate any overflow of guests but now occupied by three young bachelors. One night after a well-provisioned party they got home and went to bed. BUT in the early hours of morning they were awakened by the most unearthly shrieking. No doubt with their hair upstanding, one by one they plucked up courage to emerge and face this very vocal spook . . . and there she stood, a Chinese woman, in their sitting room, 'having a wail of a time'.

But quite insubstantial is the ghost or ghosts who haunt one of the Government short-leave bungalows at Pringgit a few miles out from Malacca town. A very sensible and intelligent man who is in charge of the Labour Department in Malacca decided to spend a week's holiday there. On the first night he was greatly disturbed by sounds of cutlery being roughly handled downstairs. He complained to the houseboy next morning but was told by the boy that he had not entered the house again after evening duties. On the following night there were persistent sounds of heavy furniture being moved about. Again, in the morning our friend

asked the boy what he was doing with the furniture through the night. The boy again said he had not been in the house. Then he explained that it was the *hantu* – a phenomenon with which he was familiar. Our friend dismissed that as nonsense, but on the third night after he went to bed suddenly the mosquito net around the bed started to blow violently. He got up to close the shutters – but there was no wind; it was a calm night, absolutely still! That was enough, he left next morning. The servants told him that the Japanese had beheaded a number of Chinese in the grounds and dumped their bodies in a well. ‘Nice people, with nice manners.’

*Malacca, 3.3.48*

The Ball was great fun. We didn’t wear fancy-dress. I hadn’t the time to think of that because I had had a lot of preparatory work to do.

We enjoyed Miss Trevelyn’s visit. She is making a tour of Far Eastern countries to assess the loss of education caused by the war. We made music together, and she was quite flattering about my voice, describing it as ‘Mozartian’. John played some Schumann and she praised his sensitive touch (he regards classical music as essentially spiritual).

Within an hour of Miss Trevelyn’s departure Lord Listowel and his party arrived. Three stayed to tea and after tea were taken to see the sights. Dinner was very successful. Listowel seems a very gentle and aesthetic man – almost an ‘innocent’ – and very polite. At official dinners here the time-honoured custom is followed of ladies retiring to the withdrawing room after dinner, leaving the gentlemen to their port and cigars – and anecdotes (you know when they commence by the gales of male laughter that burst forth). John told me that Listowel politely praised our port. However, here one cannot indulge in the niceties of choosing from a selective cellar; the port came from the only local suppliers, ‘Wee Tin Po’ of the grocery store. (That is a fictitious name that John uses for any unidentified Chinese.) Our table for dinner parties always looks supremely elegant. Ah Tong the head Boy is an artist in folding serviettes. These are always well starched and he manages to present them sometimes each one as a bird, rather like a swan, with slightly open bill, as I have previously described; sometimes as an open lotus flower with a little blossom in the centre or as a kind of pagoda; and there are always finger-bowls in which float coloured petals. Ah Tong is intelligent, serious, and big – he comes from North China. Strangely he still refers to Government as ‘Company’, that mystified me until John explained that it must be a relic from ‘East India Company’.

*Malacca, 6.3.48*

Our Welfare Ball has netted about \$1,400. Early next month the Army will give a concert for Welfare funds and that will, or should, bring in \$400 or \$500.

I should have written you last night, but though I was very tired I felt I must have a walk so off we went, down to the old river which is thick and brown as milk-coffee and encrusted on either side with all manner of very-much utility craft – junks principally, most of which have an eye painted on either side.

Birdie is still flourishing but still not making any attempt to feed himself, and until he does so I feel I cannot let him go. It is a sweet little creature; I had no idea

one could get so attached to a bird – though he does eat live grasshoppers which his perfectly revolting ‘mama’ puts into his mouth with tweezers.

One of the influential Chinese here sent me recently some home-made fish crackers. They looked rather like dehydrated potato – thin, brittle, colourless flakes that smelt a little fishy. I believe they are made of shrimps pounded with sago flour and dried in the sun. In the evening we had a few with our drinks and found them absolutely delicious. When fried they puff and swell to about twice the original size and are light and crisp.

I must delegate some of the work I have undertaken. I feel I cannot spend more time on this letter – there are things I must do. Next week I’m going to call up a few people to help me and get properly organised. When these spells of heavy entertaining crop up serious work has to be neglected and shelved, so it’s obviously bad policy to have so much entirely in my own hands.

*Malacca, 9.3.48*

This afternoon I am going to one of the districts where the DO’s wife is giving a tea-party to some Malay women whom I am to address *in Malay* and to whom I shall present Women’s Service League badges. This league covers any organised welfare voluntary effort, usually sewing for the poor.

My little bird is dead, and I am devastated; I miss that dear wee creature more than I can say. My feelings about it may seem abnormal, but I am literally sick at heart. I never wanted to keep it, only wanted to have the joy of seeing it fly away to take up its little life with all the other lovely creatures. You have no idea how responsive a baby bird can be.

Yesterday I received a letter, written in Tamil, with a covering typed note in English signed by Soosay, one of the Batu Gajah gardeners, asking me to have the Tamil writing translated to me by a Tamil Catholic priest only. I did this, and the message concerned the eldest daughter of Pavaday the second gardener. It seems she has become so interested in the Christian religion that she wants to become a Catholic. It all started through her seeing Soosay’s copy of *The Child’s Bible History* – in Tamil of course. (The gardeners all had quarters in the grounds of our house in BG). Soosay explained the pictures to her and told her the story of the life of Christ. Now she has become devoted to the Christian religion. Her parents wish her to marry a Hindu, but she wants to marry a Christian and be a Catholic. Soosay has a nephew of twenty; she is fifteen and likes the nephew. Poor Soosay is obviously worried, so on the advice of the Tamil priest here I have written to the Tamil priest in Ipoh sending Soosay’s letter, and I have written to Soosay advising him to go and see that priest. I understand that no Catholic priest will baptise anyone of another faith, under twenty-one, without his or her parents’ consent, as it might cause family trouble to do so. Even at twenty-one they hesitate unless the parents are agreeable. (She is the little girl whom I taught to sew.)

*Malacca, 12.3.48*

We were in KL again yesterday. John has been appointed, for two months only, to the Federal Executive and the Federal Legislative Councils – the permanent member has gone on leave and is a more senior officer. The Federal Executive

Council is a small body which initiates policy; the Federal Legislative Council is a much larger one comprising certain top civil servants and private individuals nominated by Government. Their function, as the name implies, is to consider, debate and pass the appropriate legislation. Their meetings are open to the public.

Before going to KL we had breakfast at The Residency, Seremban, as guests of the Resident, Gordon Hall. It is a palatial house with magnificent marble-flagged floors, as here, much dark wood panelling and a glorious garden. (Such a waste of a lovely place, on a bachelor – though such a pleasant person!) Gordon Hall is in fact the ADO who greeted John when he stepped off the train at Kuala Lipis to start his MCS career, in 1921. They were reminiscing at length about their initiation. (Selection for the MCS was by competitive examination and a committee of 'three wise men'; then the cadets were sent out to Malaya.) John landed at Penang with a small company of his future colleagues where they were met by a group of senior officers including the Under Secretary who acted as their hosts for the evening. They were given the option of specialising in Chinese, Tamil or Malay – for John, Malay was the clear choice. He was accordingly directed to Kuala Lipis in Pahang, right up north in the *ulu* (jungle), and set off next day. The train didn't go any further! Pahang was quoted in the guide books as 'the least-developed State'. He recalled the awful train journey for much of the way: alone in the first-class carriage of a smoky little train, without food – the train cook had absconded with the cashbox – and as evening came, with only one dim guttering lamp, for light. Hour after hour in that unhappy state he travelled through jungle – nothing but menacing, gloomy jungle, with occasional small clearings and primitive stations where a few people (rather wild-looking, he thought then) in strange clothes moved around. Steadily his spirits plunged while images of deadly mephitic vapours and tales of sudden and mysterious or lingering tropical diseases invaded his mind, and he was assailed by misgivings: why had he come here? What could anyone usefully do in such an uncivilised, dreadful place? Surely he'd made a terrible mistake! So it was a rather depressed and disillusioned young man who at journey's end was welcomed by Gordon Hall whose genial hospitality, however, soon had him cheered, refreshed – and reassured. As was required, without much delay he launched into the study of Malay and Law in preparation for an examination a year or two hence. (John qualified in six months). So now here they both were, twenty-seven years on, at the apex of their very satisfying careers.

On Tuesday afternoon I duly went to Jasin for the tea-party, said my little piece, in Malay, rather haltingly, and pinned badges on the bosoms of my 'sisters under the skin'! This done, we all drifted out to the garden and talked as well as we could – for few could speak any English and my Malay is so limited. I was surprised to see some of these Malay women stick a wad of betelnut between their lips – certainly some of them had the tell-tale red on teeth and gums, but I didn't expect to see them openly produce it in European company. I don't think town Malay women would do so. It is horrid looking stuff, like a little ball of tobacco and, protruding a bit from their lips, looks like a butt of a cigar.

Recently we were shown the old Dutch silver in the Anglican church here. There aren't a great many pieces but most are beautifully engraved, heavy and gracefully proportioned. There is quite a story about its preservation: I'm told that in 1942 when the Japs were approaching Malacca – and when the Church of

England Padre left – the church silver was placed in a box and put on the wharf to be placed on board the small vessel on which he got away. But in the haste that ensued the box was left behind, and there it remained for several days. Meanwhile the Japanese had entered Malacca. A Tamil coolie working on the wharf had noticed the box and, curious to know what it contained, opened it partially to have a look. He was a Catholic and recognised that the silver was from a church. So at the risk of his life – for he would have been accused of looting – he carried the box to the Catholic Priest's house. Father de Sousa knew it was the property of Christchurch and hid it under his bed – also at the risk of his life, for 'looting' was punishable by death then. When the war ended he delivered the precious antiques to the Padre as soon as he returned.

Christchurch is a particularly pleasing piece of Dutch architecture, inside very chaste and with high square windows. Outside it is painted terra-cotta as are most of the old public and Government buildings here; this is traditional since Dutch times. It is said that the Dutch hierarchy hated the Catholics – largely the Portuguese whom they had fought for possession of Malacca; that they had dealt harshly with the religion as they saw in it only political intrigue. Partly to show their contempt, partly to make room for their own graves on our little hill, they exhumed the bodies of a Catholic priest and a Catholic bishop and buried them under the floor of Christchurch to be walked over. I find that a bit funny!

Outside the town are the flat green padi areas; flame trees are ubiquitous; and there are many rubber plantations. A unique feature of Malacca *kampong* houses is the decoration of colourful, figured tiles covering the front steps – a relic surely of Portuguese influence.

Malacca bullock-carts, of which there are many, have a distinctive curved canopy. Their serene plodding progress is perhaps representative of this place, sometimes called 'Sleepy Hollow'. I love it!

Recently on some lesser holiday we were walking through the town when we noticed the door of an Indian shop open. We wanted to buy something or other but hesitated at the doorway seeing that the shopkeepers were sitting around a table drinking lolly-water. 'Come in, come in,' they urged – so we joined them; sat and talked for a while. Learning that one of them came from Kashmir I remarked on the reputed beauty of Kashmiri women. 'Yes, Madam,' said he, 'They are so beautiful; their skin is so transparent that when they take the glass of water you can see it going down their throats!' I thought how interesting if it were pea soup, for instance.

### *Malacca, 19.3.48*

There are so many birds here as I have previously mentioned – and so many different calls. Sometimes I hear them as having words – like this one I heard just now:

'D'you mean that you're clean when I've seen the latrine  
where you've been with your hands and your FEET in'

At the word 'feet' the voice is slightly elevated, otherwise the tone and the beat are even (scarcely a dainty, bird-like theme).

Yesterday afternoon we went out to the Government 'stud' farm which boasts a mother pig, two father pigs, two young kid pigs and nine babies all pink and white-eyed and awfully like people. I felt the babies' little pink noses and the impression is just like one's own lips stiffened to a ridge. The pigs, all except Mum who seemed to have been spilt out and running over, in a corner, were slurping up some sort of watery porridge from troughs, and the little ones were licking the remains off each other's faces and from their Mum's face. Their tails go round and around all the time like twirling bits of thick pink string.

Our entertaining still goes on: we shall have ten guests to lunch on Sunday, and on 5th April the High Commissioner is to come again – I think he must like coming (High Commissioner erstwhile titled Governor).

#### *Malacca, 24.3.48*

Two British cruisers are in port, and there is consequently entertaining on both sides. I took the two Commanders around Malacca, sightseeing, this morning. We are to go on board tonight for a buffet supper and one of the Commanders is coming back with us to stay overnight. Then tomorrow night we entertain some officers. They leave on Friday.

During our sightseeing this morning we went into a Chinese temple – the oldest and biggest in Malaya they say – built three hundred years ago. Though it is primarily Buddhist it caters for the religious customs and superstitions of all Chinese. For instance, the Cantonese have a Tiger God. The effigy is there on an altar with smaller figures of some unrecognisable animals around it. Each had a little cotton coat or jacket on. We were told by the Buddhist priest that that is the god to whom Cantonese send their naughty children to pray.

#### *Malacca, 27.3.48*

Dinner on board *Constance* was great fun. The officers are certainly a jolly lot – and some of them know a little about Sydney: Romano's and Princes in particular. After dinner with us on the following evening they entertained us with most amusing songs – one, I remember, started 'Be kind to your four-footed friends, for a duck may be somebody's mother. . .'

Last night we went out on a Harbour Board launch to one of the big fish-traps in the Straits. There are many of them placed about – *kelongs* they are called – and they consist of a series of poles driven into the bed of the sea – about thirty feet deep here – and with many cross poles and planks and a landing-stage with a small *atap* hut to shelter in when it rains. The nets are fixed in one way or another to some of the poles; the first three or four act as a funnel leading into the main net at the forward end. This main net is suspended on ropes from pulleys on overhanging poles because, with a good catch, its weight is considerable.

As there was a full moon last night the catch was not at all good – only about four medium-sized fish in all. But meanwhile a small net was pulled up from time to time and as it came to the top it was as though filled with small green lamps. The net was then emptied onto the landing stage, and what a precious sight it was as countless half-luminous bright-silvery discs of wriggling little flat fish spilled out. Naturally, I was sorry to see such pretty things die. The phosphorescence of some

was astounding; one had been trodden on, and it left a spot of gleaming green on the floor. I took a little piece of it onto my nail and it gleamed there like a jewel until I brushed it off. One kind of small fish that was netted makes a little grunting noise something similar to a frog's croaking. We took supper with us and the Chinese 'Fish King' who escorted us had brought plenty to drink!

*Malacca, 29.3.48*

This morning I have invited to have tea with me a young English girl who has very recently arrived. She is the wife of a Malay barrister who will act as magistrate here. I met her briefly yesterday. She is a pleasant, sensible-seeming girl but obviously unused to anything like the lifestyle here so I want to prepare her for any possible social difficulties she may encounter.

The Army's concert for welfare funds is to be presented on Saturday next. I have been sticking up posters around the town and at places frequented by Europeans. We need money, money, money – can't do much without it.

*Malacca, 3.4.48*

I am late again in writing to you but yesterday it just wasn't possible. Apart from sitting on the committee all afternoon there were other matters to attend to in preparation for the concert tonight.

I don't like Cookie's appearance of late. Twice I have asked him if he is ill, and this morning he admitted that he had had a fever, but he says he has taken medicine and is better. I must keep him under observation; indeed I wish he would go to hospital instead of relying on Chinese physic.

We have now formed a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals – Malacca branch. Soon after that was announced in the press, the secretary had a letter from an Indian in Singapore expressing his satisfaction, and sympathy with its aims, and ending with the observation that, but for some Indian festival when it is customary to release caged birds, 'many poor canaries would die at their posts'.

*Malacca, 5.4.48*

Well, the luncheon party is over and His Excellency has just gone along with John to attend what is known as the Nominated Council's Inaugural Meeting. They will be back, or send the car for me, at 4 o'clock to go to tea at the home of one of the leading Chinese families here, the people who entertained us before. I am taking this opportunity of writing as tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock I commence my almoner's work officially at the hospital. That means that an office has been made available to me there and funds have been provided. I have been doing the work as well as I could for the past six or seven weeks, but an established office and regular income are essential.

Sir Edward is trying to find a home for a twelve-months old elephant. He says that the animal, though only a baby, is too strong for any man to handle, that it should be confined within a stout enclosure and have a keeper. (I think it should be with other elephants – in the jungle.) Its diet is bananas and condensed milk.

I forgot to tell you that we cannot get our Woy back. Recently a case of rabies was discovered in Taiping which is just at the foot of Maxwell's Hill where he is, so no animal from Perak may be moved outside.

We didn't have that special apple soup today at the luncheon; Cookie wanted to make fish in jelly so we had that instead. It was very nice. I think he had mashed and sieved tomato into the fish liquor – the jelly was tomato pink. He certainly goes to a lot of trouble to make his dishes look inviting when we have guests in particular. Chinese servants are very clever in that way. They know all manner of little tricks with vegetables to decorate a dish. For instance, the plate on which the fish jelly was served was trimmed with slices of cucumber cut to resemble a flower – the green skin was left on and the flesh cut so that the final shape was a little like a lotus bloom. Sometimes Cookie uses the tubular green of shallots cut into pieces about an inch long, the ends curled and a piece of chilli threaded through.

His Excellency this morning unveiled a memorial here in Malacca, which marks the common grave of a number of unfortunate Chinese massacred by the Japs. That happened in many places all over the country; their barbarous savagery was unimaginable, and of course the Chinese bore the brunt of it.

#### *Malacca, 6.4.48*

Well, we all went to tea at our Chinese friend's house. They served little cakes wrapped in pieces of banana leaf, as well as other dainties of a modern Western character. Before we began tea, a group photograph was taken – it's the usual thing at any valued function. After tea we went with HE to see the old Dutch silver at Christchurch, and then accompanied him to the airfield where a small plane was waiting to take him back to KL. I travelled with him in his Rolls and John went in our own car, with the ADC who, by the way, is an Australian. Poor John looked pretty weary by that time, his curls ruffled up and his face shiny – he had had a trying day. It began badly with HE arriving over an hour late for the unveiling ceremony, his fool driver having taken the wrong turning somewhere, and John who was waiting at a place appointed was telephoning police stations and fretting at the most embarrassing delay. One always breathes a sigh of relief when these functions are over. Incidentally, his secretary told me that whenever John is really annoyed and 'on the war path' his hair curls up into 'little horns' either side of his head!

#### *Malacca, 9.4.48*

This morning piercing shrieks from below. Looking down I saw a young Indian woman running for dear life along the green slope that borders the gravestones below our garden, our roly-poly Bruno in mischievous pursuit. As I rushed downstairs to the rescue I wickedly thought 'a bear behind!' And that is how it could have been eventually because as I arrived she was facedown on the ground, arms and legs flailing, and screaming to all the Hindu gods to save her while Bruno was hell-bent it seemed to tear off her saree. I slapped him and sent him away, hurt and uncomprehending of course; helped her to her feet; invited her to come into the house to rest; offered her money to buy a new saree if this one was damaged, and gave her a fresh, beautiful handkerchief from my pocket, to dry her tears. But

she would not accept anything but the handkerchief, wanting only to reach home, no doubt to relate how she was nearly devoured by a ravening beast among the tombstones. I could imagine Bruno in his fat puppy head thinking, 'Spoil sport!'

Today we have a few roses and some gladioli in the house, out of our garden. One doesn't expect those flowers to grow here so near the Equator. We had about thirty pawpaw trees planted recently and they're now about 4'6" high. However, the head gardener told John this morning that they are all male trees so we shan't get any fruit from them; he'll have to put in a few 'girls' and pull out some of the boys. Apparently one cannot tell until the trees are a certain size what sex they are.

This morning I went with John to a place called Kuala Linggi. It is a glorious spot on a bay, half-surrounded by jungle-covered coast and is at the mouth of the Linggi river. About 300 yards from where we stood, quite close to the bank and under some trees, there was a tiny island with a little strip of reddish sand. One of the small boys nearby cried in effect, 'Look – a crocodile!' And there we could see its dun-coloured mass flattened out on the reddish sand. It must have been a very big one to have appeared so large at that distance. Sometimes we could see its great jaws open, and remain open for some time, and sometimes it would pull itself along for a few feet, but for the most part it just lay and basked in the sun. We went then to see the remains of an old fort built by the Malays to defend the coast against pirates. Only the surrounding walls remain, and I think it was built without cement. The wall we walked on was about four feet wide and, looking over, it seemed to be built of big rounded red laterite stones carefully laid one upon the other. Perhaps they were just joined with mud, and nature's generous growth of weeds helped bind them.

John is going with another man to a cinema show tonight – whilst I'm in the arms of the army!

#### *Malacca, 13.4.48*

On Sunday we went again to the lovely little island I described some time ago – the one with the lighthouse – and again to the larger island where we intended to picnic. But this visit wasn't completely ideal either – remember last time the rain came down at lunch time and the sea whipped up and the rest of the day was rather unpleasant. Well, the weather on Sunday was grand, but when we reached the island the tide was so low that swimming was impossible – we waded out a good distance but still found the water only up to our thighs and the sand gave way to oozy mud, most unpleasant to tread on. So we gave up. The sand in places was so hot that it was painful in the extreme to walk on. There were countless crabs in 'rented houses', ranging in size from quite small spiders to some bigger than hens' eggs. It was fun to watch the shells being propelled along as though by their own power. Sometimes if you shake a shell long enough the crab will emerge and drop out. How each manages to find the right fit amazes me.

We expect to fly to KL on Thursday and fly back. There is to be a musical performance in the evening which we are to attend – parts of the *The Magic Flute*, and of another opera – each with a string quartet accompaniment. The latter we have grave misgivings about: we have heard these particular instrumentalists before! One of them is using my violin – she lost hers to the Japs.

Today is another public holiday – not quite sure for what: Hindu New Year, perhaps. Anyhow we are going out to the swimming pool taking our three guests who arrived last night.

*Malacca, 16.4.48*

I seem to have so much to do lately that few of the letters I write contain all I would like to tell you. I have been out this morning visiting TB cases and since lunch have had about ten minutes rest and been to the Cold Storage to collect foodstuffs for tomorrow's luncheon party. It is now 3.15 and at 5.00 there is to be a big meeting to discuss activities for Welfare Week in June, and I must prepare a few notes beforehand. All races will be working to make it a success.

Yesterday we flew to KL and back. It was very pleasant. We left the house at 7.45 accompanied by the driver's wife and small daughter who had never seen a plane at close range so wanted to take the opportunity of doing so. We took off at about 8.00. It is a small two-engined plane and was piloted by Leroyd, an air VC. We rose to about 1900 feet and flew at approximately that height most of the way, and at an average speed of 120–125 miles an hour it felt like crawling-pace. The country below looked all so green and so tidy – it is most interesting to see so much 'design' which cannot possibly be discerned from ground level. It occurred to me as being true of life generally: that perspective can only be gained from a distance; that one cannot see the whole while being part of it. Quite intriguing from the air were large rubber estates covering hilly ground. These were terraced according to the contours of the hills and from above looked quite like the whorls on a weather-map. One could also compare the proportions of padi with that of rubber and the areas under vegetable cultivation – and marvel at the beauty of the clouds. We flew above thick still strips and layers of cloud, and right below were thin little dabs looking like whitish fluff that an untidy sweeper had left about. We reached KL at 8.45 and a friend's car was at the airfield to take us into town – John to his Executive Council meeting, me to one of the big stores. I filled in time largely looking at books and reading bits until lunchtime when John arrived. We took off again at 3.00 and returned by a slightly different route, travelling for half the journey over the sea coast. The water was an incredible blue, exactly one with the azure sky. Looking down at the lovely line of pinkish sand – no, it's not pink, it's between gold and salmon, fringed with leaning palm trees – I jerked myself to the realisation that upon this beautiful land I have the good fortune to live. May I never be insensible of my blessings. As we approached Malacca town the pilot brought us much lower and we circled low over The Residency and offices and had a grand view of Malacca's old clustered housetops with their weathered tiles, as well as of our own hill and all on it. We were having tea at 4.45. Travelling by plane is certainly the ideal mode for comparatively short journeys. Over a long trip it's boring.

I had notification from the shipping company that the *Gorgon* on which I am booked will leave Singapore on or about 14th May.

*Malacca, 21.4.48*

A report has come of the latest amok (Pahang, I think): *Cherchez la femme!* The story is that a love-sick Malay who started following his enamorata around the *kampong* was confronted by the girl's father. Angry words were exchanged; the girl chipped in and called the man a pig – the greatest insult. He produced a *parang*, struck out insanely at the neighbours gathered around, killed the father and several others, and was himself killed when one of the men *threw a parang* which sliced his head half off.

*Malacca, 27.4.48*

We are in KL and I am writing in the car outside the Council Chambers where John is at the Legislative Council meeting. It is now 4.30. I attended the meeting this morning as there is a gallery, and stayed until lunchtime adjournment. It was quite interesting to hear people debate, but the subject was a rather dry one. We brought Bruno with us; he didn't like the car journey much but is quite happy now as a guest in a friend's house. After the meeting concludes we are invited to a demonstration of the new Vampire jet plane – it can travel from KL to Malacca in 15 minutes.

Street scene: A small bus tearing along crowded to the gunwales, the name proudly proclaimed on the side – 'FOO HUP'.

*Malacca, 30.4.48*

Oh, that Vampire jet plane! The noise, and the *concussion* of it taking off over our heads was positively stunning; it felt as though one's scalp was being dragged off.

For the first time since we came to this house we are having tennis on our own courts. People have been playing for an hour and twenty minutes. How they can do that in this climate I cannot understand. Pouring over the side of my chair at the moment is Jemiah, six-year-old daughter of our Malay driver. She is a plain little thing but a nice child – smells of soap and coconut oil.

My address was successfully delivered at the Rotary meeting yesterday. I had it all typed out and much to my relief when the time came I was not nervous. I spoke for fifteen minutes and was congratulated afterwards by many people, and I think it might get results. My object was to get recruits among the Chinese-speaking people for welfare work; for these and Tamil- and Malay-speaking women to act as interpreters, and eventually to take up voluntary almoner's work themselves. Also to teach handwork to long-term patients in hospital.

*Malacca, 4.5.48*

A week tomorrow I should leave Malacca for the first leg of my journey home to see you. I am very pleased to see rain this afternoon. There has been little of it during the past month and the grass looks parched as in Australia in midsummer.

We will be fourteen in all to dinner tomorrow evening; ten to lunch on Sunday; ten to dinner on Saturday night. I just wish Cookie were more expert.

Before I go home I want to get a dolls house made and taken to the hospital, to be fitted and furnished by the patients in the TB wards. Making little pretty things

for it would be less demanding than taking on larger articles, particularly since many of the patients would never have done any fine work before. And perhaps this might give them the idea of making small toys as an occupation later, when they are discharged.

I am seething at the moment. I told you that I had given a talk to the Rotary Club last week with a view to getting people interested in the welfare of TB sufferers. There were several Chinese women school-teachers there, one of them English-speaking. All agreed to help. Today I phoned their spokeswoman and asked about her promise to get recruits to teach Chinese handicrafts. She had agreed that she herself could visit the hospitals on Sundays. In reply to my enquiry today about how she had got on she said 'UH?' then she said she didn't understand me; ultimately that no, she couldn't help! They want to form a Rotary Inner Wheel – to get credit for being members of this and that but when it comes to *doing* something – ah, that's another matter. God help the less fortunate when the naughty Colonial overlords depart, for 99% of voluntary work is done by European women. But I mustn't be too harsh; there are several Indian and Chinese members of the Welfare and the Anti-TB committees who are sincere and helpful.

It is delightful to see and hear the rain again. It has been falling steadily for hours and is so refreshing after the weeks of comparative drought.

Our puppy Bruno is a great companion. He goes with John to the office – had a very big day on Thursday attending the District Officers' Conference, occasionally giving his opinion, I believe. We were out to dinner on Thursday evening and when we got home and came upstairs there was poor Keefi, my monkey night-dress case, prone on the sitting room floor, and what a sight greeted us in the bedroom: the cushion off the chair; John's pyjamas; a pair of underpants; a tennis shoe – just about everything Bruno could reach was scattered with the greatest abandon all over the floor. One could imagine him thinking as he did this: 'Go out and leave me, will they? I'll learn 'em!'

Singapore, 14.5.48

Dearest Mama,

Just a hurried note to tell you that the *Gorgon* will not reach Fremantle until the 26th so I'll not be home in Sydney with you before the 30th I suppose – depending on when the first available train leaves Perth.

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*Note: I spent about two months in Sydney on a visit to my family. Following are extracts of some of John's letters to me there.*

From John, to me in Sydney

Malacca, 15.5.48

It wasn't very nice leaving you yesterday, my darling, but already it's 24 hours nearer the time of your returning. I had lunch at the Club as arranged; left at 1.30

and had tea at Batu Pahat at 4.00, but alas when we were just on the other side of Muar something went wrong with the gears. By a bit of luck we were near shops, one a rubber dealer from whom we were able to get a lorry – so we were ignominiously towed the last twenty-four miles, arriving at 8.30. Bruno tried to tie himself in knots with delight and rushed off to the bedroom to see where you were. Later when I went up to our bedroom it looked strangely empty, but I couldn't see anything missing (how could I?) and concluded that it was my darling's presence.

I'm afraid Bruno got rather frisky during the night and this morning I found on the sitting room floor two waste-paper baskets, and one long sock, to say nothing of papers and such that he usually distributes. Ah Tong has thawed and is quite paternal to him now!

I'm going to miss you more and more – and I don't intend to get over it!

The papers have just come in. Your horoscope is 'Best for you not to be adventuresome when it comes to expansion, especially on another's urging.' So please don't expand – and beware of the urging of Sir Jasper!

*Malacca, 23.5.48*

I am writing this after breakfast having previously gone to St. Francis' school and read the Empire Day message. I stood on a dais under the Union Jack while 800 boys marched past and formed into a square. Then they sang 'Britannia the Pride of the Ocean', after which I read the message: then 'God Save the King' was sung followed by three cheers for the Empire: 'Hurrah, Hurrah, etc.' (Hurroo!)

Yesterday afternoon it looked so much like rain – though in fact there was only a drizzle – that I stayed at home and played the piano, but Bruno kept interfering and wanting fun and games. I had to stop when he actually got hold of my elbow; perhaps he just doesn't like Bach (I may as well pun and say rather 'another's Bach!')

*Malacca, 27.5.48*

The flagpole is now up and looks fairly innocuous. There are no struts or stays. The workmen painted the pole white while it was on the ground and are now giving it a second coat *in situ*. I wondered how they were going to climb the pole to do so without making a mess. I see the answer is quite simple: they tie a series of steps at intervals all the way up; start painting at the top and unfasten a step at a time. As you know, the Japs had moved the pole to the other end of the garden.

*Malacca, 30.5.48*

The Navy has arrived in the form of a sloop, *Alacrity*. I'll be giving some of the officers dinner tomorrow night – am seeing the Captain this morning and will invite three of them.

A Chinese whom I knew in Batu Pahat and whom I hadn't seen since I left in 1937 came to see me yesterday. He said I didn't look any older at all, and that was because I had virtue – I knew my conscience was clear!

*Malacca, 2.6.48*

There wasn't a great attendance at the football match. I presented my cup at the City Park. The other cup which the *Straits Times* anticipated my having given also falls due this month; that match will be played in Seremban on the 12th.

And a telegram has arrived from the Navy announcing that another sloop will be here from 4th to 8th June. I don't feel like doing much about this – I'll suggest they go to the City Park on Saturday and help swell Welfare Funds – and I might ask the officers to the garden party.

I have my Settlement Council meeting this morning and I am all dressed up in my 'Sunday best'. You see, the DOs and their wives are coming to look on and I thought my little wife would like me to look 'sweet' as she terms it although I fear the other girls will have a less prejudiced vision.

Another letter about the visit of the Gents. Their 'brief' stay will be from the forenoon of the 2nd till after breakfast on the 4th. The Rotary Club have invited them to dinner on the Saturday so of course they must stay another night with me. I want to get Lady G. to visit the Women's Service League but I don't at present see how it can be fitted in – it's no doubt much more important that our Sir Edward should present his medals!

*The Chinese Communists opened their campaign of terrorism by the murder of two planters in Perak, in the first week of June. Their plan (the usual Communist ploy) was to disrupt industry; disrupt the economy thereby; cause terror with consequent widespread disorganisation and collapse of morale and thus bring general chaos to Malaya – and then take over, as they had intended to do in 1945. This resurgence of their aggression was certainly encouraged and aided, no doubt, by their home country Communist China. During the three years since their first effort they had been able to build up their forces and ammunition, adding to their confidence of winning, this time.*

*Malacca, 6.6.48*

Saturday I go to Seremban to witness the football match between Malacca and Negri Sembilan Government Servants and present my cup to the winners.

The flag was hoisted on the new pole yesterday and is flying bravely.

The 30th is the Agricultural Show at Alor Gajah; July the 5th tea party for somebody whom I have made a JP; the 6th I may have to go to KL to a meeting of planters and ourselves about getting rid of squatters on estates.

My guest has just left. He is a very nice fellow, though quiet – and he left me \$20 for welfare. The City Park I think was a great success last night. Two thousand tickets had been sold besides what were sold at the gate. There was a great dragon dance – three in fact – which I wish you had seen. The final act was for the dragon to climb a pole and bring down a \$10 note hung from another pole. It was all accompanied by gongs, drums and whistles and must have lasted for an hour. Oh, it was so nice when the noise stopped.

*Malacca, 11.6.48*

The garden party's over: Hurray! I think, however, it was quite successful and that people enjoyed themselves. It was rather hot and sticky but it didn't rain so we were able to carry out everything according to programme. There were many enquiries about you. One was from a Sikh schoolmaster who asked me to send you greetings from Malacca and tell you that Malacca *sportsmen* hoped you would soon be back. Then Shanmugam wanted me to send you greetings from Malacca and to say that Malacca wants you back soon. It is very apparent that they recognise your worth. You would have been tickled to see Alagappa yesterday (remember our former caretaker who refuses to resign). I saw him before the party began, helping with the chairs, then during the party I noticed him standing at the table, having a cup of tea like any guest, and finally I passed him sitting in a front seat eating ice cream and watching the tennis! He was so absorbed in his ice cream he didn't notice me – or took me to be just one of the guests. Laffan says he's a bit of a nuisance in the lines; he tries to behave as RC there.

It's pouring again this morning. Bruno went out early and came back all wet and I had to dry him and I'm blowed if he hasn't gone again and got wet once more. Oh dear! What a time I have with chores and children!

*Malacca, 15.6.48*

The Admiral and his wife and nieces called yesterday. They are all very nice. But entertaining – and so much else – seems so incomplete without you.

You appear to be fairly up to date with the general news of Malaya. The outbreak of political crimes is certainly serious; we are reaping what Gent has sown. I mean his failure to acknowledge what the police have known and reported about the Communist build-up; his persistent attitude that if you ignore the threat it will go away.

The recent roundup of bad hats has cheered everybody immensely: things have been much quieter since. It will take a long time to root them all out and restore confidence. The killers are not very brave when any resistance is put up. If we can get a few death sentences for carrying arms I fancy there will not be so many volunteers. Malacca is just as peaceful as it ever was except that there are road blocks all over the place where everybody is searched and the Army is going out on patrol through estates by day and by night. It's at least well to show that we are prepared. Special Constables are being taken in and they will guard estates and vulnerable points. If it makes you any easier, I am having the guard-room moved nearer the house; the police guards are visited every hour and a half, and in addition I've got a detective attached to me. But, as I say, everything is really peaceful so far so you needn't worry. Johore and Perak are the really bad spots.

*Malacca, 16.6.48*

Did you read that Mrs Kathigaisu – you remember, that heroic woman who was tortured by the Japs – had died in Scotland? She had certainly merited her George Cross. I wonder was the little girl with her. She will be taken care of, but nothing can compensate for the loss of her mother. When she received her card of

commendation in Ipoh I thought that perhaps it was on behalf of her mother but apparently it was for herself, for standing up to the Japs' ill-treatment without flinching: obviously made of the same steel as her mother.

I have read our erstwhile guest Lord Ailwyn has been asking in the House of Lords if the Government is satisfied with the action taken by Gent; and that our loyal little Listowel replied that he knew from personal contact that the most energetic measures were taken. Lord Ailwyn, of course, knows otherwise, as we do: that all the back-up necessary for those measures which we've asked for were not sanctioned by Gent. Anyhow, at last Emergency Regulations have been issued and all the European police who are on leave have been instructed to return, by air. That makes a nice gesture – costs nothing, but robs the men of their needed respite.

I suppose nothing will keep HE from coming here on the 2nd – crime or no crime. He had told people they 'should preserve a sense of proportion'. (Next morning three more planters were murdered.)

*Malacca, 20.6.48*

During the night the police rounded up more of the listed bad characters throughout Malaya. There were about eight in Malacca: I shall hear soon how many are actually in the bag altogether.

I'm glad to know you had already received snaps of the garden party. I too was surprised that some of the European women didn't wear hats, but there were only a few. Yes, there was only one long table, from which everybody was helped. This was deliberate and I believe it was a fact that contributed much to the general success of the party. If we had had tables, Pringgit Hill would all have sat at one; Garden City at another; Indians at theirs, and so on. As it was, people had to mix, more or less. The McC's arrived half an hour early, went to their chairs at the farthest end – and didn't move all afternoon!

*Malacca, 23.6.48*

Everything is still very quiet here. Last night it was reported that a gang of Chinese were going to Machap to attack the police station. There was great drama about intercepting them – but it turned out that they were only on their way to a wedding, but had behaved rather furtively because they were afraid the police would stop them.

I believe the planters have flown a representative home to see Creech Jones about the present situation and the inadequacy of forces to deal with it, and that among other things they will ask for the removal of Gent. However, I think Gent was too long at the Colonial Office for the British Government to interfere with him. More police are required; and, as usual, the Army is short of suitable arms. Why does Britain never learn a lesson? Why do the backroom boys always think they know best?

There is a Mrs O'Shea staying at the Rest House. She describes herself as a refugee. Their estate is very isolated and I don't think they even have a telephone, so her husband thought it wise to send her away to Malacca for the time being. I've invited her to join the party for dinner tonight.

What an absurd position Australia has got itself into politically – the Government apparently afraid to send arms to Malaya in case your local Communists object!

I think I once told you about a lad from the *Empress of Asia* who was interned with us in Singapore and whom we dubbed 'Donald Duck': a letter from John T. tells me that he has been hanged in Liverpool for murdering a woman. So – I have known a MURDERER!

Later: the latest is that Gent has been called home for consultation and is on his way now. I wonder will he come back.

*Malacca, 30.6.48*

One of your former 'clients' has just rung asking if he could speak to Mrs Jean Falconer. He has been discharged from hospital, lives in KL and is down here to see Mr Shield. He's a Chinese but I couldn't catch his name. He said he wanted to thank Mrs J.F. because she had been very good to him in hospital – *and* he wanted recommendation for a job in KL.

I fancy the planters and Shean, the lawyer, who are in London now will do their best to prevent Gent's return.

*Malacca, 2.7.48*

It appears certain now that Gent will not be coming back. I feel rather sorry for Lady Gent who is left behind to clear up and say goodbyes. No doubt she regards her husband as a wonderful fellow and I'm sure he's always been a clever little boy. He has not done this country any good – on the contrary, much harm – though doubtless with good intentions. It gives some indication of what might have been achieved had stern measures been taken when the police advised it, for now they report that last week in Malacca there was less crime than at any time since the liberation thanks to the recent blitz on the bad hats.

I've been asked to give an address at the Rotary dinner tomorrow night, instead of HE – as I expected. Altogether I have a busy day in front of me and lots of things to think about. This emergency is such a frustrating, costly preoccupation.

*Malacca, 3.7.48*

You will have read the tragic news of Sir Edward Gent's death. He was on his way to report to the Home Office. One could hardly imagine a death in more wretched circumstances – the plane was actually coming into the runway at Heathrow but in approaching to land struck the ground. I think all the occupants were killed. I have to go to a meeting in KL tomorrow and was invited to stay with Lady G. at King's House. Goode has just phoned to say that she still wants me to go. A few other people will be there – he says she feels she wants company. I am deeply sorry for her.

Malacca is still quiet, but this emergency keeps me very busy.

Do you know, two of the nuns from the Portuguese Convent have signed my book since you left. Shall I invite them to cocktails? And a Chinese came in yesterday, saying 'Good morning, my lord'! He told me about applications he had

made to Sir this and Sir that, and hoped 'that my lord will grant them'. Oh my Lord!

You ask if I did in fact speak on the lack of civic sense in Malaya, at the Rotary dinner. Indeed I did, and waxed eloquent thereon. I said that Malaya prided itself on the fact that various races lived together in harmony but that now she was on the road to self-government a mere passive tolerance to each other was not of much use. Then I referred to the present situation, praised the police and then said how lamentable it was that nobody came forward, from the public, to give any assistance. And I told them how impressed I was by what I had seen in London and what had been endured there during the war – because Londoners had a pride in their city and in their country and would never allow the enemy to dispossess them. I felt in excellent form especially as a certain Chinese gentleman was near me at the table and had made a speech before me. I felt it was time we blew our own trumpet a bit.

#### *Malacca, 5.7.48*

I returned from KL about noon – quite an uneventful journey. Lady Gent is marvellous. I met her upstairs after I arrived at King's House and she said she had to carry on as Gerald would have liked her to. I was actually the only person staying there and she thought it was very nice of me to come, in the circumstances, but to my surprise there was a small dinner party. I didn't enjoy it – the atmosphere was too unreal.

Before that we had a meeting on security which Malcolm MacDonald attended. Oh, I forgot to say that after dinner last night he and my sweetie Mrs MacDonald came in for a short time. Lady Gent is very fond of her. I think there is an idea that MacDonald was behind Gent's being sent home.

The new General (fortunately we have a new General) impressed me as being very shrewd and level-headed, and his report was encouraging. Of course they intend to kill or capture all the guerillas in the jungle and he is quite sure he can do it. He doesn't think they are at all brave when faced with real opposition. Our part is to relieve the Army as soon as possible of all protective and defensive duties and for that purpose we are enrolling and arming thousands of special constables. They will be in the *kampongs* too as that is really the only way to stop these isolated murders. In fact it rather looks as if this time we are being rather un-British at least by being prepared against eventualities that may not occur.

The fasting month begins tonight, and coming back this morning we saw two or three buffaloes being cut up for tonight's feast!

#### *Malacca, 8.7.48*

It has been another lovely morning of pouring rain – no thunder this time. Yesterday there was one clap which broke a pane of glass in one of the stair windows.

Bruno has been such a naughty dog, and it was while I was writing to you yesterday morning. I saw him worrying something on the sitting room floor – and there was one of your gold evening slippers. As you may remember they were wrapped in tissue in the cupboard with your other shoes. He must have carefully

selected this one just because it was wrapped in paper – the paper I found intact on the bedroom floor. He has chewed the heel and bitten one of the straps nearly through.

Well, yesterday was a great day for Malacca. I duly 'opened' the cattle trough in the presence of the Committee and members of the public, though as you know I flatly refused when Jane asked me to – she finally won. There were three or four buffaloes and a *gharry* pony in readiness, but it was a very dull cool day, and they had forgotten to give the animals salted peanuts, as you suggested, with the result that none of them was the least interested in the trough except to back away from it with a look of scorn. The pony was actually frightened and wouldn't go near it. Mrs Wilson tried watering one of the buffaloes by hand and it seemed to like that, but didn't want to drink in a big way – or from this unaccustomed trough. Later Edmund, who had paid for the trough, as Jane's birthday present, you remember, said, 'I told you so!' But eventually I suppose animals passing through will use it if they're thirsty.

*Malacca, 9.7.48*

The Memorial Service at Christchurch yesterday afternoon was very well attended, the church being full. I went in uniform and was escorted up the aisle by the two church wardens carrying spears or something like that – I felt rather glad to find myself in the seat instead of on an altar of sacrifice! They were most thoughtful, even reserving a whole seat for my hat! The padre spoke very well and truly about Gent and I have suggested he should send a copy of part of his address to Lady Gent.

I had our Mr Purcell along last night with his fiddle and we made an awful noise from 6.30 till 11.00 – with an interval for dinner.

*Malacca, 10.7.48*

The Army has started making small raids, the idea being to break up camps and push the bandits further into the jungle where it will be difficult to get food. It can certainly be said that progress is being made. A significant fact is that there are hardly any strikes anywhere and, where there were, most of the strikers have now gone back to work – a sign that they are no longer being intimidated. What worries me is events in Berlin. Peace must be maintained somehow.

*Malacca, 13.7.48*

The bandits attacked Batu Arang coal mine yesterday, killing five Chinese and damaging machinery. No Europeans were hurt. I think there must have been mismanagement somewhere; it seems incredible that the only coal mine in the country should have been left unguarded. Perhaps it was thought that the police station there was sufficient.

*Malacca, 17.7.48*

It was cooler yesterday, the rain being not far off. We had very good tennis. Bruno

created a diversion by running off with a ball and Perumal and I had to chase him right into the house before we could recover it. He can run quite fast now.

I see Australia is very interested in what is happening in Malaya and some people even want to send help. The police and detectives did a good job in Selangor the other day: about fifteen of them put about fifty bandits to flight and shot half a dozen including the head of MPAJA – the chap we had sent to London for the coronation! What a wonderful race!

*Malacca, 19.7.48*

Singapore's General Boucher, his wife and daughter came to lunch yesterday; they were thrilled with the house and garden and all the flowers. The General says he doesn't worry about Malacca; doesn't think the bandits are likely to do anything here. He is in fact very optimistic – I think too much so. He believes the worst should be over in about two months. I don't! And he doesn't have to cope with it, of course.

Darling, I do hope there won't be any coal or train strike until you join me. I should hate to think of you padding along the desert of South Australia with your hands so cold and your nose shiny. It will be hard for you to leave your mother and the children.

I am sorry to hear people are so selfish and unhelpful in Australia. That is what I expected to find before I went to Australia and was so pleasantly surprised to discover it was not so. I'm afraid the deterioration is general. I have been reading how badly the crowds behaved in gentle England at the Test Matches and people are apprehensive as to what may happen at the Olympic Games.

Bruno made a great hit with the General and his wife. In fact the General quite unashamedly gave him his bones – I mean the chicken's. But Bruno is a bully; that nice pussy cat sometimes comes to make love to me at the table, and Bruno when he hears her leaves his bone and dashes in to chase her off the premises. Sometimes he comes to the office but soon gets bored and goes home.

I had a letter signed by a Mr Happy Low asking me to be Patron of the Malacca Psychological Society. Not even to make Mr Low happy will I do that!

*Malacca, 27.7.48*

You will want to know what the arrangements are on arrival. At present I propose to go down to Singapore by the day mail on Sunday, meet you on Monday (hooray!) and travel back by the day mail on Tuesday. Although nothing has happened on the main roads for a long time most people are avoiding them except when necessary and I fancy Samad would be pretty windy driving through Johore. We could travel by night mail on Monday but that gets in to Tampin about 3.00 a.m. I hope you never have to leave me again, my darling. I am incomplete without you.

*On the Transcontinental en route to Perth, 4.8.48*

Dearest Mama,

We are due to reach Perth at 6.15 tomorrow morning but we have lost some speed so may be delayed by an hour or so. I'll wire you from Perth and write from other ports on the way north.

I had time to walk through the town of Kalgoorlie today; it is a remarkably fine town with streets three times the width of Pitt Street, and very nice shops. There is a drinking fountain surmounted by a bronze figure of Patrick Hannan who first discovered gold in Kalgoorlie in, I think, 1893. The aperture of the fountain is the mouth of the crumpled old waterbag on his arm. How many pubs the town has I'm not sure, but in the main shopping street I counted nine.

My feelings are so mixed: so sad at leaving you all but happy to be rejoining John.

All my love, Jean.

*On board M.V. Gorgon approaching Singapore, 15.8.48*

We are due to berth at Singapore tomorrow morning at 7.00. An uneventful but pleasant enough journey – except for the smell of sheep, poor creatures – and the fact that some of the animals were slaughtered *on board*. One child managed to look around a makeshift screen and watch a cow or bullock being poleaxed!

I was so impressed with Perth that if I could transfer the whole family there I would certainly do so. Cost of living is scarcely more than half that in Sydney. For instance £500 will buy almost the best block of land, water-frontage, of half an acre in the best suburbs. It is a lovely, friendly, sunny, pretty place with a splendid future I'm sure.

Write to me soon, much love. Jean.

*The Residency, Malacca, 18.9.48*

Dearest Mama,

Back home here safe and well. John was at the wharf to meet me when the ship berthed at Singapore and we left next morning at 7.15 by train. It took nine hours to cover the 150 miles of our journey. Samad was waiting with the car when we arrived at Tampin which is the station nearest to us, and from then everything was grand. The house looks lovely, freshly painted, and with the new lounge suite completed.

Welfare work here has been progressing satisfactorily during my absence, thanks to a few enthusiastic souls, but I am having a holiday this week. I'll start looking around next week.

It is such a pleasantly cool day with sleepy pale grey clouds creeping across the sky and there is the 'shurring' sound of wind in the trees combining with the twittering of many swallows.

John tells me that there was an exceptionally violent storm last Friday night – he doesn't remember ever experiencing one of such fury before. Right in front of the window where I sit I can see great branches snapped like matchwood off the trees.

*Malacca, 22.8.48*

This week – or that part of it since I arrived – has been pleasant and quite quiet. I went to the hospital on Friday to see how our TB welfare was progressing, and to my great surprise, when I reached the women's TB ward there was a huge silver basket of the most ingenious and beautiful paper flowers made by some of the patients – this as a present for me, merely because I, with so much, had given some slight attention to those poor unfortunates. I think I told you that I had had a doll's house made, with the object of getting TB men patients to furnish it and the women to make little curtains, rugs, etc. A first start has been made, but what we lack are people who will teach. Up to date there are a few chairs and a sofa made from match boxes covered with shiny paper. Tomorrow I hope to have the house moved to the women's ward. They haven't seen it yet. It is quite large – about 3'6" square, and the roof lifts up in sections.

*Malacca, 23.8.48*

It is really bedtime now and I'll not be able to continue this long, before my beloved will come and chivvy me to cease. Tomorrow morning is my time at the hospital and I expect to be busy.

I don't know whether the press there is still concerned very greatly with reports on the Communist terrorism here in Malaya. You can rest assured that, so far anyway, Malacca is fairly peaceful. It is all so regrettable, this aggression. Malaya is essentially a happy country and there is no question of the current banditry being a fight for freedom. As far as I know there isn't one Malay involved, except to oppose the Communists. Indeed, it would be a case of Heaven help the Malays – or anyone else – against the Chinese Communists if they did win power. There are only a few thousands of the thugs but they are totally ruthless. Obviously, Communist propaganda in Australia and in England pays not the slightest heed to the true position. It is a scandal that such gross lies as the press spread are permitted to poison the minds of people who don't know the facts.

*Malacca, 24.8.48*

It is rather hot at present. Last evening we went again to the swimming pool, but the sea was quite warm, so not altogether refreshing. I have an idea Bruno would like to swim so we intend to take him to a little beach soon where he may frolic. We were half-way through breakfast this morning when he decided to go off on his social calls. Actually I found him at the bank with Sally, his little girl-friend. I quite expect this friendship to 'ripen into love'. As soon as I emerge from the house, at any time, in quest of the missing hound the news seems to fly before me: the syce and his children, the policemen at various points; they're all in it. So generally I know in which direction to go. He is a gentle-natured creature but cussed at times and lies down if he doesn't want to go your way.

*Malacca, 31.8.48*

I am experimenting with seashells as a material for TB patients' craft. On the beaches here one finds innumerable perfectly flat pearly discs about one and half

to three inches in diameter. I am enclosing a piece and you will see its texture is quite like that of mica. I find that holes can be punched in these very easily, with a tapestry needle. I shall see if I can thread them in some way, perhaps to make lampshades.

Bruno now has two tricks which John taught him: he sits up to beg, and he offers a paw to shake, I find he is excessively fond of ladies. His first owner paid me a visit recently and Bruno remembered her. His greeting was overwhelming. He could have swallowed her with affection and his demonstrations lasted throughout her stay. He clambered up and sat on her lap, tried to lick her face – and looked thoroughly absurd, the great big fellow, behaving like a lap-dog. We took him to the sea for the first time on Saturday afternoon, first to a place where the water rolled forward and back in little breakers, and broke on rocks nearby. At first he was frightened and quite bewildered and we couldn't induce him even to wet his feet. However, we drove further along to a broad shallow stretch with sandy patches and there he had the time of his young life. The water was still, practically, and only to his knees and much to our surprise he went in, galumphing along like a young pony. It was enormous fun, too, chasing birds off the little patches of sand and nosing after the strange little fish that frequent the water's edge here – fish somewhat like lizards with tiny legs. They scuttle about on rocks or in the mud: must have dual breathing apparatus. (I have mentioned them previously.)

*Malacca, 3.9.48*

I must tell you I got a present of a very snappy pair of crocodile shoes for coming back according to my schedule; they are being made for me. They have platform soles and an ankle strap, and I think they are slightly 'tarty' but as I dress with restraint I'll get away with it – and John likes them; he likes 'French' style in clothes, particularly shoes. He looks very well – in fact when he went down to Singapore for me and stayed with the Whites Dorothy told him she thought he looked years younger than when we both saw them before my departure. To what does one attribute that? A blameless life, or a wifeless life?

We intend giving a cocktail party next Saturday evening, with mixed European and Asian guests including the Chinese Consul who has recently been appointed to Malacca. This will be in the garden, under flood lighting.

*Malacca, 7.9.48*

I have just returned from a morning investigating TB cases for welfare relief – sometimes the sufferer, sometimes his or her family. I have not yet encountered here the type of piteously poor people I met in Perak – perhaps there is less poverty in the towns than in the rural areas, despite theories to the contrary. Or perhaps it just means that life is getting back to normal for the local people. I have two women helping me – a Belgian and a Scot – the young Australian woman who was in charge during my absence has moved to Singapore. We find it impossible to get anyone to go and teach handcrafts to the long-term patients so we ourselves are going to attend classes at the Malay Women's Training College, in basket-making and lace-making, so that we can pass on our knowledge.

Fighting the bandits must be the most frustrating sort of warfare: Once again we hear that the Army, having got information of the location of a bandit camp, planned a pincer movement; surrounded the camp, rushed in – and found the birds had flown!

*Malacca, 9.9.48*

I've been for a walk around our hill with Bruno, and also had fifteen minutes singing practice – and it is still only 8.10 a.m. The day holds the threat of being very hot.

I think when I was at home I repeated to you some news I had been given about a District Judge who had embraced the Muslim religion. You may remember I remarked that he seemed quite eccentric, to me anyway; that on the only two occasions I had seen him I considered him strange, and that he made silly statements from the bench. Well, he is now about to be discharged from a mental hospital and sent home. The story about him is this: he is known to be rabidly anti-Catholic but, as irony would have it, when he was very young he fell deeply in love with a very beautiful French girl – she was seventeen and he twenty-one. And she was a Catholic. He would not marry in the Catholic church, she would not marry in his – so they had a Registry Office marriage. In due course a child was born and was baptised in the Anglican church. Later, when they were in France, after repeated requests from his wife, he consented to a Catholic church marriage ceremony. Later she began to worry about the son not being a Catholic and asked that he might be educated as one, which the father vehemently refused. So they parted! A couple of years ago she came out to rejoin her husband, but she left six weeks later. His mental state deteriorated after that. Not long ago he was in Malacca and one day turned up in John's office in a rather distraught state, saying that he was being drugged and would have to get out of the State. John realized that he was sick and said, 'Well, if you are being drugged you must, of course, see a doctor,' and arranged for him to go to hospital. There he was detained until one night he telephoned the Anglican Minister at eleven o'clock and asked him to visit. The Minister went and the poor chap told him that he had discovered that the doctor in charge was also a Catholic, so he must get out at once while there was time. He was removed then to the mental hospital. He told the Minister that he became a Muslim in order to try to put down bribery and corruption among Malays, and had a list of names of people who were the 'brains' of an imaginary vice ring – these were all Catholics, including the manager of the bank – who attends Mass daily. Anyhow, that no doubt is the last we shall hear of him.

Much to my delight I discovered this morning that our pigeon orchids are in bloom. We have these growing in empty coconut shells and hanging from under a jutting verandah. In bud, they are exactly like models of tiny white pigeons, but they are in full bloom now and their perfume is divine. There is a peculiarity about pigeon orchids; they come into bloom at the same time precisely all over Malaya.

*Malacca, 13.9.48*

This will be a week simply bristling with social functions. Last night we attended a dance and today is a public holiday to celebrate the liberation of Malaya from the

Japs. I hope we will before long be able to celebrate its liberation from the Chinese terrorists!

This evening the cruiser *London* arrived off Malacca and tomorrow mutual entertainment begins between Navy and Malacca residents. First of all, tomorrow we go to a tea party at 10 a.m. at the Chinese Consulate for its official opening; we had the Consul and his wife at our cocktail party on Saturday evening. After the tea party we come home and John will dress in uniform to go aboard the cruiser – at the Captain's request. He will be piped on board and a salute of eleven guns will be fired – to honour the King's representative. My, what fun we have! Since uniform trousers are strapped under the boots his will be a mighty stiff-legged ascent of the gangway I imagine – but I am not included in that performance, so shall not be there to witness the ritual.

At 6.30 there is to be a cocktail party on board to which, of course, I *am* invited. On Wednesday night we shall have six officers and some other people to dinner. On Thursday at 11.00 a.m. we attend the official opening of the Dunlop company's new building here – a champagne party probably – and at night attend a dinner given by the Chinese in honour of their Consul and his wife. Friday, so far, seems free. On Saturday at 2.30 I present prizes at the Anglo-Chinese school. There is to be a tea-party later given by the Muslim Indians in honour of one of their members who was recently made a JP – and at night we go to another dance, this one arranged by the Rotary Club.

Bruno has decided now that he likes travelling in the car. This morning he came with me to the Cold Storage. I left him in the car while I went into the store, then I heard him crying in distress. I rushed out and found that he had his poor little paw caught between the window, which was half-way up, and the side of the frame. The more he struggled the more, naturally, it hurt and the more frightened he became. It was easily released, but the *syce* was engaged in turning the car round and couldn't do anything about it. In any case, orthodox Malays don't touch dogs – they're considered unclean. I don't know whether Samad would or would not have ignored the injunction – in a good cause. The Anglican minister tells me that Bruno nearly every morning 'attends the 7.00 a.m. service', I know he often does go off for a short while in the morning, but I hadn't realised he was so religious! What a wise dog. You see how he keeps on the right side of the law, and the church. I believe on the occasion that Christchurch had a card evening at the Club he represented the family there also. We didn't go, having just completed a nine-hour journey. He is not only social and religious, but apparently intellectual, for another of his haunts is the library!

*Malacca, 17.9.48*

We were guests last night at the dinner given in honour of the new Chinese Consul and his wife. There were about 250 guests. Dinner consisted of shark's fin soup; pork crackling; baby chicken stuffed with vegetables; fish; and several shell-fish dishes. The food was prepared by a catering contractor and typed at the head of the menu was the name of the contractor who described himself 'first-class cookie'. After dinner the Consul rose and proposed a toast to the King: 'Hip-hip hooray! Hip-hip hooray!' was his way of doing it. I so wanted to laugh, as I'm sure did

others – but we kept our dignity. Then John rose and proposed a toast to the President of the Chinese Republic. Followed a speech in English by an old damn fool Chinese here who can't speak Chinese – long and rambling, full of copied dates and classical quotations read from his notes – and full of unveiled stabs at the British and the Government. This was eventually translated into Chinese by another man in what seemed to me the most incredibly see-sawing enunciation possible to imagine.

*Malacca, 21.9.48*

We have two or three big mimosa trees in the garden – it is literally a breath of home to catch that familiar scent of wattle. I have some sprays of mimosa in the house now. The one floral triumph of this establishment is its potted flowers. Recently wicked Bruno nipped one of the gardeners; it wasn't serious so I bathed and dressed the wound on his leg, and he seemed gratified that I personally had done this, and wanted a *big* bandage. And I gave him a present to further console him. Incidentally, when John, as the King's representative, went on board the cruiser *London* and was given an eleven gun salute the gardeners who had seen him go off in uniform on this exercise – and for sure knew *where*, for staff know everything about us – when they heard all those cannon shots commence rushed to get a clear view of the ship – and probably wondered why it took so many shots to kill the Tuan!

I think I forgot to tell you that recently a letter came to us from a person in the Russian zone of Berlin – it was addressed to 'The Mayor, or Lord Mayor of Malacca' and was from a young man asking if we could send him food. He gave his family history and stated that they had helped as far as they could British POWs. He wrote that he gets up hungry and goes to bed hungry at night. Apparently his letter had not been through the hands of the censor. I really felt I would like to send him what he wanted but John felt it would not be allowed, in the first place, further, that in preference one sends food to the British. Obviously all is not so well in the Russian zone as they would have us believe.

*Malacca, 24.9.48*

We had a meeting yesterday to organise a group of women to conduct clinics at the schools. A great many of the children suffer from scabies, discharging ears, enlarged spleen, worms – and a few other ailments. So a couple of the European wives who are in fact trained nurses are going to spend a little time in the hospital studying the latest treatments of these local complaints, and then will pass on their knowledge to the other women in the group. Then, three mornings a week in pairs they will attend a few of the schools to give whatever attention is within their capability. It is a fine scheme and I would love to be in it, but my hands are full and will be increasingly so with TB welfare work.

Tonight we are going to the cinema to see 'A Cavalcade of Charlie Chaplin films' – old pie-throwing ones, I supposed – so I'll have the time of my life. Last Saturday afternoon John came home from a tea-party with a most gorgeous gold bullion garland around his neck and holding a stiff-handled posy. That is the way the Indian Community honour one.

The menace of communist terrorists still goes on and is a wicked problem to deal with, consuming money and man-power which could do so much good otherwise. They are not Malays – they're 99% Chinese (a few Indians also I believe), and many of them alien Chinese at that. 'A great national uprising,' said Chifley, didn't he? I wonder what he's saying about it now. If it were a national uprising nothing on God's earth would quell it. Anyhow, independence will come soon, in a civilised way and an uprising will never be necessary. (The bandits claim they are fighting for 'The Liberation of Malaya' despite the fact that the Malays are fighting *them*.)

*Malacca, 28.9.48*

I duly presented the prizes at the Anglo Chinese School on Saturday afternoon, and made my little speech. When the presentations were over a very small boy was led along and presented me with a truly beautiful basket of tawny-gold orchids, with a big yellow ribbon bow on the basket handle. The Principal gave an address, then led 'three cheers for Mrs Falconer – hip-hip' . . . etc. That after several references to our graciousness in having honoured them with our gracious presence – as though we had given them the Koh-i-noor. In fact we were so pumped up with our own graciousness that we almost 'took off'. I don't think! Anyhow it was a pleasant afternoon and everyone seemed happy – and that's all that mattered.

Now I am off to deal with a Chinese woman who has been untruthful and misrepresented her case in order to get more help than was due to her. We must not let people get away with that sort of thing. We must not allow the organisation to appear stupid and gullible – that would lose us respect. And anyway, we are always short of welfare funds.

*Malacca, 15.10.48*

I have spent an hour or two this morning at the lace-making class. It is very interesting, and some of the lace which they say is easily made is really lovely. The work was silent except for the tap tap tapping of wooden bobbins against each other, as all the darkly luxurious heads were bent intently over slim brown hands. The girls are Malay trainee school teachers, and there are a few Malay women instructing. One recently spent months in England on a Girl Guide Convention.

On the 6th October Sir Henry Gurney arrived as the new High Commissioner. He previously held office in Palestine. We hope he will prove wise, and more fortunate than his predecessor.

*Malacca, 20.10.48*

I am so busy just now; our anti-TB work in particular is expanding rapidly. I know more about the social side of the problem now than the others so I cannot let go. It will probably resolve itself and settle down into a better routine soon, and then should be easier.

Later: it is lunchtime now and I've just returned home from the hospital. I had the 'distinction' first, of opening the Municipal Labourers Union Women's Sewing Club! We got the loan of two sewing machines for them and a Tamil doctor's wife secured some free cloth from the Indian Welfare Organisation

Committee; bought cotton, etc. The doctor's wife is teaching them to cut simple garments and run them up – so off they go. (This lady is one of the very few locals who give their time.) I'm becoming quite a professional 'opener'; saying the appropriate things will soon be quite a simple matter for me, no doubt. The Portuguese Convent has asked me to open its Fair on the 30th, so I shall have to speak again. It is not for me to say now: 'Unaccustomed Siam . . .'

*Malacca, 22.10.48*

Bruno has just come in to report, after his early morning excursion, and probably having attended service at the Anglican church. No one seems to resent him anywhere for he is very gentle and well-mannered. We were told that a few mornings ago he actually sat on the altar steps throughout the service and when the Minister turned to give the congregation his blessing Bruno stood and put his front feet on the Minister's leg – so he got a blessing too!

Yesterday I visited a Chinese woman TB patient in her home. I was accompanied by the Chinese Salvation Army Captain. After the interview the SA officer suggested that I might like to go through to the back of the house where there is a small coconut oil factory. So I went and saw the oil being processed. First, the pieces of coconut are put into a grater and grated fairly fine; next it goes into a big fairly shallow bowl over a fire and is constantly stirred around. The heat melts the oil in the nut so that eventually it is put into a cylinder where it is subjected to considerable pressure which squeezes the oil out. The smell of a coconut oil factory is absolutely delicious – all roasty, toasty. I bought a coconut cake, for Captain Tan said many dogs like it. The cake is the compressed flesh from which the oil has been extracted. It looks good too. Bruno appreciated its appeal but found it too dry.

As we drove back Captain Tan – who is 'Straits Born' – told me something of their traditional marriage customs – fast being abandoned, but I shall use the present tense. To begin with, the couple are chosen by their parents. 'Thirty years ago,' he said, 'we never had a chance to see our future wives before the marriage, so if we got a beautiful girl or not was "lottery luck"!' 'Before the marriage contract is agreed the parents consult first the Goddess of Mercy about whether the birth dates of the couple make them suitable. If they don't the betrothal will be called off. If they do harmonise the next to be consulted is a scholar, expert on the Fate Reference Book, who will work out the suitable dates and hours for the cutting out of the white costumes for bride and groom, of the Wedding Toilet Ceremony, and preparation of the wedding bed: the white wedding suits (white indicating purity) will not be removed until three days after the Toilet Ceremony! Before the Wedding day there are several other ceremonies: the Opening of Marriage day; the Presentation day; the Preparation of Spices day; the Peeling of Onions day; the Pounding of Flour day and the Invitation day. During these days friends and relatives come and help with preparations.' Thirty years ago the bridegroom had to deliver the wedding invitations personally otherwise the guests – particularly the old ones – would not come. 'But today,' he added, 'the invitations are just posted.' ('Straits Born' is applied to Chinese of long-resident families born in Singapore or Malacca.)

You have no idea how poor Chinese people live. A mother and four children might occupy a cubicle no bigger than 10ft. x 12ft. There they may cook, eat and sleep. Of course, there may be a husband too – but so often he is dead (so many were killed by the Japanese) – and anyhow, where there is a male bread-winner the family is generally somewhat better off than where there is not. The average working-class locals don't use mattresses – they sleep on mats on raised board platforms and often instead of pillows they use a block of wood with a hollow for the head. I have seen some of these made of porcelain, indeed. Even in the richest Chinese homes there is not the same degree of comfort as we are used to; the chairs are straight-backed, with much carving but no upholstery – but by way of additional luxury have marble seats!

The extent of superstition among some local people – even those sufficiently educated to know better – is surprising. The SA man I mentioned earlier – and he is quite well educated and of a rich family – told me that a few years ago he was suffering from malaria which was rather persistent. Friends told him that he would not lose the disease until he ate dog-flesh and monkey-flesh. So dog-flesh and monkey-flesh were supplied and cooked for him and he ate it – and said it cured his malaria. I reminded him that malaria is caused by bacteria in the blood and liver and is injected by mosquitoes, so it was hardly likely that any meat eaten could deal with that – but he believes what he said.

Superstition is a force that fuels the power of suggestion. The Principal Medical Officer told us of a case in point: recently a Malay woman was brought into hospital from an up-country *kampung*, completely paralysed. All the relevant physical tests proved negative, so enquiries into her background were commenced. It was discovered that she had been conducting an illicit association with a married man of the *kampung*, that his mother had put a curse on her and that as a result she believed she had a devil in her stomach. It would have been useless to reason with the woman so the doctor told her that he would make a little cut in her stomach and extract the 'devil'. She was taken to a darkened room; a surface scratch was made on her abdomen; an amber bottle with cotton wool was produced as being the offending devil captured – and the 'cure' was immediate.

What are the papers giving out now about the situation here? Has Mr Chifley been convinced of the facts yet? These terrorists are the most cowardly bunch of jackals possible. They will only attack in gangs. The day before yesterday thirty or forty of them ambushed an estate manager and his assistant in their car on the estate road; forced them out and shot them; set fire to the car and then slunk back to their jungle lair. The people they killed were perfectly decent employers, doing no harm to anyone. The bandits' aim is to demoralise the general community; make decent government impossible – and then force their alien communist thuggery on the whole country. They use the most unprincipled ruses and commit the most dastardly vengeance. Recently they murdered the fifteen-year-old nephew of a Malay against whom they had a grudge; they murdered a thirteen-year-old Indian cowherd; they abducted the young wife of a Chinese detective. Among the Chinese are the most horribly bad people. The Malays, though so much quieter and easy-going, have much more courage than the bandits and cases are reported of their having mauled their attackers though outnumbered and unequally armed. Recently a Malay policeman was confronted outside a coffee shop by a group of

the devils who just shot him dead. The man's eleven-year-old son was with him; he picked up the gun which his father had dropped, fired at the retreating bandits and shot one of them dead. (On the other hand, it was the Chinese who, where possible, risked their lives against the Japanese and bore the brunt of their savagery. A strong-charactered people for good or evil.)

*Malacca, 2.1.48*

This is the last day of a long holiday weekend. John has been at home since Saturday and this is Tuesday. Sunday was the Indian festival Deepvali for which Monday was given as a holiday and today is Muslim New Year's day.

We attended a badminton championship match last night – Malaya is very well up in this game and expected to win the International Cup. In one match the runner up was a big Chinese – a regular Glaxo baby type – but very agile nevertheless. In the next match, men's doubles, one player was such a tiny, fragile-looking creature with a large head and glasses and a body which looked little bigger than a young child's, and a rather concave chest (reminded me of a mosquito). I said to the president of the Badminton Association, 'My word, that man is a fly-weight, isn't he? What is his job?' He answered, 'Oh, he's in the Nutrition Unit.' 'And the big fellow?' I asked. 'He's in Food Control.' It was quite seriously said, but I was so amused I laughed and laughed and couldn't control myself.

Poppy Day will be celebrated next Saturday, of course, and although I am not the organiser I have had and shall have quite a lot to do. Tomorrow we make the wreaths which various individuals and institutions have ordered for placing on the memorial.

It would be nice if we could get away to one of the hills, for Christmas, but the terrorists have made that impossible. Malacca is relatively peaceful, thank God, but this is not the time for a Resident to be away from his State.

Yesterday we were invited to a small tea party at St Francis' Institution, a big Brothers School here, to meet the Revd. Brother Assistant of the de la Salle Order. He is second head of the entire order and has come from Rome. We were very interested to hear what he had to say about Italy – one so rarely meets anyone who has recently come from the Continent. He told us that the Communist meetings there always start with the Sign of the Cross (shades of 'Don Camillo') and that after some Communist party victory of any sort they all go to church and sing the Te Deum! This Brother blames the spread of Communism there on the wealthy class in Italy who are millionaire industrialists, or feudal landowners upon whose estates thousands work and who are required to return one half of their crops to the landowner. They, the small farmers, live at just subsistence level. He himself is an Irishman and quite young – early forties – so must be a brilliant man to have reached his present eminence. We thoroughly enjoyed him. In his address to the lay teachers who were present he referred to a former one – perhaps the founder of their order – who had been canonised. 'The only other teacher of the order to be canonised was martyred – yes, his pupils stabbed him to death with their pens!' he said drolly. He was altogether droll, with a musical Irish brogue, and when he smiled his eyes disappeared into his face.

Malacca, 9.11.48

Well, Poppy Day is over and now there are the 'afters' to do. Sunday was a lovely day, and the wreath-laying ceremony, with John in uniform, was brief but impressive. Ceremony and service were held in Christchurch and John read the lesson.

It is a heavenly day, the sky slightly milky with patches of thin 'brush-stroke' cloud and swallows wheeling on the currents of air. The beloved domestic sound of the servants' fowls contentedly clucking and cackling pleases me and, as always, takes me back to childhood when it was synonymous with being at home from school on a school-day. It never sounded the same on Saturday or Sunday, to me, but accompanied a time apart from routine: cosiness, companionship of mother, security for the time-being from the buffetings of one's small school life. And so it is I still love that dear, homely, childhood sound.

I have committed myself to go and have coffee this morning with the vicar's wife and, nice lady though she is, I grudge the time. But she is going to teach some of the TB patients to crochet. There is an amusing story concerning this lady, and the Chief Justice: when our District Judge here suffered a serious heart attack and was in danger of death, the Chief Justice was informed and immediately set off by car from KL, driving all night and arriving in Malacca soon after 7.00 a.m. As was his custom when coming here for the Assizes, he went straight to the house of his friend, the Padre. The Padre was conducting a service at his church so the CJ ran upstairs to the Padre's bedroom, as he usually did, brushing aside a protest from the houseboy. In the bedroom, he washed, changed his trousers, etc., then rushed out to visit the sick man in hospital. When he returned to the house there was a lady in the sitting room arranging flowers. 'A kindly parishioner,' thought the CJ. He said 'good morning', went upstairs again to the bedroom and when he came back downstairs the Padre had returned – and introduced the lady – his wife. She had been in bed in the room where the CJ had changed, fortunately surrounded by the mosquito curtains. Much embarrassment! But the CJ hadn't even known that the Reverend was married, let alone that his wife had been in the bedroom, in bed. That happened quite recently, and when we heard about it John told me of a somewhat similar incident.

When he was a very young Assistant DO he had a standing invitation whenever he visited a certain district to lunch with a planter there. On the morning after such a visit the planter came to his office and with obvious agitation said, in effect, 'I don't know what you could have thought of me yesterday!' John protested that he did not understand, that he had enjoyed a pleasant lunch, etc. 'Come off it,' said the man. 'When you went up to my bedroom . . .' John replied, 'What of it? I just washed and brushed up . . .' 'Oh, look here – it wouldn't have been so bad if there'd been only one of them, but when you saw *two*!' John assured him that he had not seen anything untoward. Apparently there had been two local girls in, or on, the bed and John hadn't noticed them at all. He wouldn't. Didn't some eminent person say, 'Never apologise, and never explain'? But of course that must be qualified.

*Malacca, 11.11.48*

We intend to go to KL on Monday and have been invited to stay the night with the Chief Justice, Sir Harold Willan. He came to this country at approximately the same time as John, specialised in law, went to Kenya some years ago – and this is the result! He is back here with a knighthood and as Chief Justice.

Work at the hospital goes on – but not only at the hospital. I mean the TB work and, once again, I find that those faithful to their undertakings are few. Only one other woman and I are really serious about it – the third has neither the mental equipment nor deep interest, and our new acquisition, a Chinese, I am in doubt about.

The Social Welfare Officer told me today that she had a desertion and an adoption all in one day – not the first of either, by any means. The woman who wanted to give her baby away is a Chinese who already has five; she wanted simply to leave the baby on the SWO's desk (probably in the 'in' basket) and walk away. But it can't be done quite as easily as that. The adoption case is interesting: the baby, only a few weeks old and Chinese, was found abandoned on a beach by a Malay fisherman, a bachelor who lives with his sister. The baby was handed over to the police and put into hospital, for observation. The Malay and his sister have visited it daily and wish to adopt it legally. These people are in their early 40s. You can imagine how the finding of that tiny human must have stirred up their dull middle-aged and sterile lives. They will bring it up as a Muslim of course – and no doubt gain a V.G. mark in Allah's book.

*Malacca, 19.11.48*

It is pleasantly cool. This time of year here is the commencement of the more rainy season – the tail end of the monsoons which deluge the north-east coast from now on for two or three months.

We have two guests – the lady who is still with us, and now a man who has been appointed to Malacca but whose house is not yet ready for him. We enjoy their company though, as I've said, it's somewhat distracting from my work. There doesn't seem to be much to relate; perhaps my perceptions are becoming dulled by familiarity. However, one amusing though rather scandalous episode was told me by the woman who is in charge of the voluntary service at the school clinics. (About six women in teams of two attend three schools.) The woman I refer to is a trained nurse. One child sent to her for treatment was so filthy and neglected that she sent for the headmaster. The girl's long hair was infested with lice. Our friend told the headmaster what she thought of parents who cared so little for their child and asked him to write to them and instruct them to clean her and cut her hair so that her scalp could be treated. She noticed that he seemed somewhat surly, but that was that. On the next clinic day she looked for the child but she was absent, so our friend asked one of the teachers why. He merely said that she hadn't come to school. 'Will you please call the headmaster so that I might make full enquiries about her.' The teacher was obviously most uncomfortable and finally explained that he could not do that. 'Why?' Diffidently the man then told her that the child was the headmaster's daughter!

Last week the syce's eighteen-year-old daughter fell and developed a sore shoulder. The syce told me about it and I went down to his quarters to see her. She was obviously in considerable pain and the shoulder and upper arm were hot and swollen. I took her and her mother to the hospital, and the doctor who saw her said she should be admitted for observation and subsequent treatment. The shoulder was X-rayed and she was told to come back again in the afternoon, as she refused to remain there. So I took them again later – even that took persuasion to achieve – and the doctor again said she should remain in hospital for treatment; the condition was due largely to something the mother had rubbed on the shoulder which had caused swelling of the glands and dermatitis. The girl carried on foolishly as she was frightened. I suggested that she just come with me to see the ward where she would be admitted. I got her as far as the lift where she started to carry on again – wouldn't even enter the lift. But her mother was sensible; talked to the attendants in the ward, saw the nice clean white sheets and the patients all comfortable. But that was as far as I got. Doctor then gave me a chit for her to present at the out-door dispensary. Probably they haven't used it. Now they say she is all right, but I know she is not – I saw her nursing that arm only yesterday.

*Malacca, 26.11.48*

Tomorrow night will be the St. Andrew's Ball. We shall have twelve guests and are serving a hot buffet supper here before going on to the Club. I don't care so much for functions that go on late – I get tired.

This sort of life doesn't give much chance to establish real friendships, but there are a few people with whom we feel some affinity and who are truly interested in music. In this connection, sometimes there are Club evenings specially devoted to gramophone record 'concerts' when people take along some favourite classical recordings and we sit quietly and listen. That is very restful. You will understand that we depend on each other largely for mental and cultural stimulus and for the exchange of ideas: there is no theatre; extremely few performances by celebrated artists, and they are restricted to Singapore and/or KL – so we make our own music, one way or another.

I am enclosing a couple of very poor snapshots: John in his uniform and the two of us boarding the little plane which took us to KL. Note the leg-show! It was most embarrassing and I could only hope that the gentlemen at the rear were in fact gentlemen.

What did Sydney do about the birth of the royal baby Charles? Was there much display? Here church bells were rung and flags and bunting coloured the celebration. It is certainly a pity that the royal tour of Australia has been cancelled. Didn't Princess Elizabeth realise the situation? I suppose a lot of money has been sunk in anticipation so the disappointment in some quarters will not be due to sentiment only.

The days are pleasantly cool now as at this time last year; the weather should remain mild like this until well into the new year.

*Malacca, 27.11.48*

We duly attended the St. Andrew's Ball – arrived at the Club at 10.15. Several men were wearing kilts, and at midnight pipers piped in the haggis – as last year. It was borne aloft on a plate and followed by a man holding a bottle of whisky, upside down, proudly in each hand. It was then placed on a table and the Chieftain said some words in Gaelic – a prayer for, or apology to, the haggis, perhaps – and forthwith stabbed the poor thing with a dirk which a piper had drawn from the top of his sock. He stabbed so violently that he broke the plate. Ooh, these Scotsmen! Three sets did the eightsome reel and one of the pipers gave an exhibition dance while the other played his pipes. We came home at about 2.15 a.m. – and at 6.00 we could hear the dance band still playing!

*Malacca, 7.12.48*

Yesterday we flew to Kuala Lumpur and we have just arrived back, by plane. We had the British Adviser, Negri Sembilan, with us for the weekend and as he also had to attend yesterday's meeting we decided to all fly up together. But on arriving at our little air field the pilot said he may not take a third passenger from there though there is seating accommodation for three passengers in the plane. The trouble is that the air-strip here is a very small one and apparently with a load of passengers the plane may not be able to take off in time. The pilot brightly solved the dilemma by saying he would come back for me, which he did a couple of hours later. So I had the Governor's plane to myself – not without pilot, of course. He is an enormous fellow, an air VC named Leroyd. I mentioned him previously.

The rain is pouring down and I am reminded that recently on such a day we had an unheralded visitor. John was playing the piano; I was in another room when I noticed that he stopped suddenly, then I heard a strange voice. I went to investigate, for with a guard at the foot of the entrance steps no one should be able to come in like that. John was looking absolutely dumbfounded and there, standing beside the piano, was a Chinese woman literally dripping a pool of water onto the floor and talking in Malay, gibberish, not making any sense at all. We rang for Ah Tong; he took one look at her, knew her I think, and said she was *gila* (mad). I gave her an umbrella and he escorted her out. She was the one who had 'haunted' the young men in the Annexe. I suppose the guard had taken shelter from the rain. However, he'll have to be reprimanded (probably hanged from one of the garden trees as an example to all naughty police who fail in their guard duty!!)

Bruno came in a short while ago wet to the skin. He loves being dried, and rolling on his towel, and goes quite wild on these occasions. So he nipped me gently to show good spirits, jumped up and his big teeth came in contact with my ear. How it hurt! Then I was playing with him with a rubber quoit he has and accidentally I poked my thumb fair in his eye, poor fellow. So now we are quits! One day he came to me in distress, but not wet. I discovered that ants were all over him – he'd probably sat on an ants' nest. I combed them out quite successfully, since when twice he's had a similar misfortune and on each occasion he has come to me, rather frantic, and gone straight into the bathroom where in the first instance I had lain him on the cool floor to de-ant him.

We have heard from people who were recently up Maxwell's Hill that our erstwhile Woy is blooming. They say that his master loves him and that they go everywhere together, Woy racing like a colt down or up the hill paths with tremendous energy. BUT, we also hear that there is a tigress in whelp known to be around there, so unafraid that she has quite often been seen sunning herself on the lawns of some of the bungalows. AND TIGERS LOVE TO EAT DOGS! Oliver, who is Woy's owner and is superintendent of the hill, doesn't want the tigress destroyed because she is so apparently tame but, tame or not, she has to eat something. While I hate to take life I feel that the tigress should be shot; when her babies arrive she will naturally be on the defensive and more than usually eager for quick-serve dinners.

*Malacca, 14.12.48*

The days are flying so, I feel almost dizzy with their speed, and I didn't realise until this evening that I should have written you this morning. We shall be off again to KL tomorrow morning so I'll leave this letter to be posted. We have been invited to lunch at King's House tomorrow to meet the new Governor – or High Commissioner as he is now called – and his lady. In the evening we'll be dining with Dick and other friends. I look forward to that.

As Christmas approaches my thoughts will be increasingly with you all. How lovely it would be if we could all be together. I miss you so.

*Malacca 21.12.48*

I suppose by the time this reaches you Christmas will be over and I have no doubt it will have been a quiet one for you.

We are giving a dinner party on Thursday night and another on Christmas night, and next morning we shall depart for Port Dickson for two days for a welcome break – and lots of swimming, I hope.

Perhaps I told you there is a possibility that we may be transferred to Johore. We should know by next week, I think, and I shall tell you immediately. There will be advantages and disadvantages. It is a more senior appointment – but there is the old Sultan who is known to be difficult to cope with at times. I'm sure John would manage in any circumstances; he is always his own man and he gets on well with people, also he has held office in two Johore districts in the past, when the Sultan was more unpredictable than he now is. He's not worried at the prospect of the transfer. As for me, well, however happy I am somewhere I am always interested in change, and if we are moved I shall look forward to starting up my TB welfare schemes in yet another State. It is pretty well systematised now and can easily be adapted to wherever we may go.

The Rotary Club is arranging a Christmas treat for poor and orphan children – a cinema show, chocolates, etc. John has given me money to distribute and this I will share between the Convent orphans and a few very poor families I know of in one of the districts.

All our loving Christmas greetings!

*Malacca, 29.12.48*

Thank you dearest Mama, and all, for your Christmas cable. I hope you all enjoyed Christmas and that our gifts arrived in time.

We had a very pleasant party on the night; the dinner was excellent, including the pud. – made from your recipe which I did find in time. We turned out the lights and had it brought in all aflame (the servants know as much about this as we do). On the previous Thursday night we gave a lesser dinner and for that I bought Christmas puddings which were also delicious.

Sunday morning saw us off for Port Dickson and our respite there was a great success. The two days were reasonably cool with a fresh gentle breeze from the sea. And we swam long and often. There the beaches are sandy, unlike the coast around Malacca. Port Dickson is about fifty-nine miles from here.

We gave each of the servant's children a little present on Christmas Day. It's amazing how these people know in advance about one's intentions. Certainly we did give them a little money each last year but this time bought small gifts. Early in the morning I went out to the back and was delighted to see all the little ones present – there wasn't one missing; even the babies were in evidence. So they each got a little parcel and sat down promptly on the concrete and opened them and for the rest of the day there was much delighted rattling and banging and playing with marbles. Altogether there were fifteen children.

*Malacca, 1.1.49*

A very happy and peaceful new year to you all! We saw the old year out and 1949 in very quietly at home, and I thought long and lovingly of my dear family. This morning we had courtesy calls from three priests, and five Eurasian ladies all dressed to kill. We served coffee and cake and all wished each other the usual.

It has been frightfully hot, the temperature higher and the atmosphere drier than usual – more like an Australian summer.

John and I went to midnight Mass at the French Convent when senior girls and ex-pupils sang the most enchanting French Christmas carols. Approaching the end of the last Mass the Mother Superior came and whispered an invitation to have coffee in the Convent. In the refectory we found breakfast set for twenty or more nuns and children and at each place was a prettily wrapped gift. We were told that on that night everyone was free to please herself. There were crackers and Christmas decorations and the room looked most inviting. We were served indeed with ham, fruit, cake, and coffee, as Mother Superior said – to John, not me – 'You must be hungry, and your servants will be asleep.' John says now he can whisper knowingly, 'I once had *breakfast* in a convent!'

*Malacca, 3.1.49*

We have just returned from the opening of the Court Assize which was conducted all according to old British tradition, with the judge wearing a scarlet robe and full wig; John in uniform; the C of E vicar in gown with green-lined cowl, and all the local lawyers also in gowns. When His Honour entered everyone stood and bowed toward him and the lawyers said something I couldn't quite hear (must enquire

about it) and, there being no criminal cases awaiting trial, the Deputy Public Prosecutor passed up to the Judge a pair of white gloves signifying innocence or freedom from guilt. His Honour then gave a short address about the significance of this act, the origin of which is lost in antiquity. But he did tell us that in early times in Britain the glove – ‘gage’ – was used in a pledge. If debt was incurred one glove was given and when it was redeemed the glove was returned: origin of the word ‘mortgage’. The proceedings lasted only about ten minutes, then the Court adjourned when all the guests went across to the Judge’s house for drinks. He and his wife welcomed us at the door and he said to me, ‘Now, tell me what you would like in your stocking next Christmas.’ His appearance made that quite apt – but he did *not* sit me on his knee!

*Malacca, 11.1.49*

We still have not been advised officially – only confidentially – of our proposed transfer to Johore though it is quite definite. But, what a blow, the new High Commissioner and Lady Gurney are to visit Malacca for two days just when we should be at the height of preparations for moving. They will arrive at 10.00 a.m. on the 2nd February and will not leave until 5.00 p.m. next day. They will be taken the rounds of the hospital, welfare home, detainees’ camp, school clinics, etc., and we entertain with two luncheons, a large cocktail party, and a dinner.

Shortly I shall be going off to my sewing group. I have organised a few Chinese women – discharged TB patients – into making underwear suitable for European women. (We get rather tired of the imported Chinese undies and they’re not always well cut.) I bought a few Vogue patterns for scanties and petticoats and waist slips and am explaining to women how to use them. It is going so well; some of the garments have already been sold profitably, and lots of orders are in hand for various items. With supervision and a little drive this is a venture which could provide livelihood, and light work at that, for perhaps half a dozen poor women. I had visions of hiring a little workroom for them; at present they use the Welfare centre.

*Malacca, 14.1.49*

John’s appointment as British Adviser, Johore has now been confirmed.

We attended a very sumptuous Eurasian wedding last Saturday. There was a Nuptial Mass at 8.00 a.m., a reception in town afterwards, and dinner at the home of the bridegroom’s family at night. The wedding cake was an enormous five-tiered one; the second-top tier looked rather different from the rest. In due course the bride and groom cut this special layer – and, oh, how romantic: out flew two white doves! That section was made of cardboard and the two doves had been installed just before the cake was carried in. There were over six hundred guests at the reception. Since then we have received from the bridegroom’s parents pieces of wedding cake – one dark, one yellow – and a bottle of wine which the groom’s uncle, the priest who officiated, had brought with him from Timor where he is stationed. The wine was labelled ‘Lacrimae Christi’ (Tears of Christ) and is regarded as the best Portuguese vintage.

Now my Bruno is asking to be taken for a walk – so I am his to command.

*Malacca, 21.1.49*

Your scrumptious Christmas cake has just arrived – Cheers! I must take up with Mr Massey the Australian High Commissioner in Singapore the fact that parcels from Australia are taking over two months to reach here.

The present British Adviser in Johore is Mr Arthur Sleep – A. Sleep. We know a man who went some distance out of his way, before the war, to meet this man 'Arfasleep'. Mrs Sleep, by coincidence, is Constance! I'm sure the gentleman's name does not reflect his character as he was recently awarded the CBE.

*Malacca, 28.1.49*

Tomorrow the Chinese community will celebrate their New Year's Day. However, this year the customary fireworks are forbidden on account of the Emergency. You can understand that gunfire could be mistaken for fireworks, and vice versa. We have told our Chinese servants to take whatever holidays they want but Cookie will only absent himself this evening and tomorrow, and the boy tomorrow.

Orders are pouring in for undies from our sewing group. It is ironical that I shall not be here long enough to get the venture firmly established.

Bruno has a birthday on your birthday – but you wouldn't much appreciate what he will get: a tin of sardines and a new lead! He's such a darling and so beautiful and with his own peculiar funny ways. He still lies with his tummy flat on the floor and his four legs splayed out like a bear-skin rug, and when he decides to rest he doesn't lie down but merely 'subsides', tossing his head in an attractive manner, like a pony. Months ago he devised a clever way of getting under the swing doors upstairs. He is now too tall to walk under them so instead he takes a run along the polished floor, flops onto his tummy and the impetus carries him sliding, instead of stooping, under the doors. He runs downstairs and slides along the polished flags at the bottom in a similar way. He loves ladies – Europeans only. Perhaps he knows that Muslims consider dogs unclean. Some parade this more than others. I was recently irritated with Lehar; I wanted to borrow the tin tub she uses, to wash mud off Bruno's legs – he'd been playing at the water's edge. But Lehar said that if the dog was washed in the tub she could never use it again! Our lordly Bruno! Do you know, he is never vulgar – he always goes behind a bush for you-know-what when we're out walking – and that's more than some of the more primitive Chinese do, as I've told you.

*Malacca, 4.2.49*

We do not expect to go to Johore now before 7th March. I welcome this extra time to boost the TB work and the sewing group. Orders are rolling in; I must ask Doctor to question other TB women discharged patients to find out if some can sew well enough to join the circle.

On Saturday, Chinese New Year's Day, we called on a few Chinese families to pay our respects. We had to take refreshment at each house: cake, biscuits, a little

piece of dried duck, etc. (Duck, by the way, seems to be as much part of the Chinese cuisine as pork. And ways of cooking and otherwise preparing it for eating are many and various. In every Chinese shop their mummified-looking corpses hang in abundance, complete with head and feet.)

On Sunday we drove twenty-seven miles out to a wonderful beach – all perfectly golden and fringed with tropical trees. We took Bruno with us and he had his first real swim. It took a long time to induce him in far enough and at first he scrambled for the first bit of dry land he could see – which was my back. But this small island heaved, so he swam because he had to, and having got himself ashore he wasn't tempting providence a second time.

The visit of our vice-regal guests ended yesterday. I believe they enjoyed their visit, and so did we. Our preparations seemed all very well rewarded and there were no hitches in the programme. On the last evening we were only five at dinner – HE, Lady Gurney, the Aide de C. and ourselves. After dinner HE requested a song – they'd previously asked about our musical interests for he himself is musical. I sang a couple of Schumann songs, to John's accompaniment of course, then HE opened the Schubert book at 'Who is Sylvia' and said, 'Now sing this, and I'll play'. Apparently the last time he had done so was when he was in prep school! Certainly he didn't play the accompaniment well but we got through it light-heartedly. They're a very pleasant and relaxed couple and we seem to have a lot in common. During the afternoon Lady G. and I had gone shopping. She was eager to visit a couple of junk shops I had told her about, and to see some old colour sketches of Government House, Singapore and Singapore street and river scenes that one of the shops had. We went there and Lady G. thought them good, too. So we took one home to show HE. He too was rather impressed and decided that they should buy all three. They are not beautiful but are of historical interest – should really be hanging in Government House, Singapore. The pictures bore no signature and no date but must have been done before the turn of the century. We took them out of their frames and found that as packing they had some 1924 English pictorial papers which were a terrific laugh, with photos of women in pointy-toed shoes, waistslines at their knees, cloche hats crammed down to their eyebrows over bunches of hair crowding their faces in as if they were peeping through the legs of a woolly bear.

Yesterday I took Lady G. to see one of the school clinics in operation. This is the voluntary service conducted by European women. We watched them dressing the children's scabies and other sores; worm dosing; taking haemoglobin tests; treating lice-infested heads, etc. Then we went to the almoner's office at the hospital where she saw the system as it works, and some of the garments which the sewing group had made. Next, four of us – she and I, another voluntary almoner and our Chinese Salvation Army officer interpreter – went to visit some of the TB patients, dependants, and discharged cases in their own homes. In short, we took the lady slumming. I am sure she was very interested and impressed.

*Malacca, 12.2.49*

This will again be a hurried letter. I've a report on last year's activities to prepare for the Welfare Committee; two people are coming to tea and I must give thought

to an address I have to give about our anti-TB work; and tonight must prepare for our early departure for KL tomorrow.

There is in Singapore at present a sort of convention of all religious leaders: Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, etc., all meeting to discuss the country's prevalent evils and how to deal with them. And recently the Catholic Bishop met a visiting Muslim high dignitary. What a good thing it is for leaders of various faiths to work together for the common good.

News of the trials in Hungary and their horrible significance are blood-chilling. How fortunate are people living in the democracies – imperfect though they are.

At a tea party this afternoon, given by the Badminton Club, I am to present the prizes, and the occasion is to serve also as a farewell to us. People are being very flattering about our general popularity. Probably they say that to all departing Residents! We expect to go from here on 6th March.

#### *Malacca, 17.2.49*

We went to KL on Tuesday morning, by car. As we had arranged to fly back and Samad was nervous about driving back alone, we took a Malay policeman with us so that Samad would have reassuring company returning. We had been invited to visit His Excellency and Lady Gurney at King's House, John to discuss problems with him and I to enlarge on the almoner's scheme to Lady G.

We hear that the Sultan of Johore who is seventy-six recently sent for his medical adviser in a great hurry – he brought the doctor back from leave. It was announced that HH was ill. He had said, 'I am a very sick man!' Later we read that he had undergone a slight operation. Yesterday John heard from the MO that it was, as he put it, 'just an abscess on his backside'.

#### *Malacca, 22.2.49*

We were guests of the Chinese Consul and his wife recently and enjoyed the evening. Before dinner drinks were served with thin potato chips, and *chocolates!* It was a small dinner, in Chinese terms, six courses only, commencing with shark's fin soup followed by boiled fish with mushrooms; fried prawns in batter; duckling stuffed with lotus seeds, peanuts and much else; chicken and prawns in aspic; and as a sweet a dish of cold bird's nest concoction. I didn't really like that – it's much tastier as a hot soup. Fruit and coffee ended the meal. The table was beautifully appointed, with exquisite china of white patterned with butterflies and blossoms in many colours; fine crystal; and beside each guest's place were a tiny silver article which was a rest for chopsticks, a little tube containing a few toothpicks, and a wee cigarette rest and ashtray. Our host, using the toothpick during the meal, delicately wielded it behind his hand. That is their accepted practice, and why not? Indeed, these are very likeable, gentle and genteel people. After dinner we women went into Madam Cheng's bedroom to titivate, but some of us wanted to do more than that. So, though she speaks only a few words of English, the lady, reading our thoughts, led us through a room where the gentlemen were admiring the pictures, to the la-la. Ooh la la! It was the non-European type – a porcelain trough with a footplate on either side so one *squats* and we were in elegant, long evening gowns. (What happens to people with stiff

joints, I hate to ponder.) When we returned to the bedroom Madame showed us her embroidered satin bed-covers which they use instead of blankets. One was yellow, one apple-green. They are embroidered in silk, in patterns of birds and flowers in exquisite perfection and profusion. They are padded slightly and on the underside there is a sheet which is folded up over the top and bottom and fixed on the upper sides with neat, large tacking stitches. Obviously that sheet is removed frequently for washing, and keeps the satin cover clean. I believe the best Chinese embroidery is done by men.

*Malacca, 2.3.49*

We have bought a few Chinese panels and some old lacquer articles of furniture, all from Kutty's rudely termed 'junk shop'. Malacca is about the only place where one would find these old pieces. Chinese families have been established in Malacca for the past three or four hundred years, first under Portuguese suzerainty, then Dutch, and now of course British. The contemporary generation of Chinese are apparently tired of the old furniture and are favouring modern styles – hence the plethora of antiques. In Malacca also one sees more Chinese women with distorted 'lily feet' than elsewhere in Malaya.

*Malacca, 4.3.49*

This, I suppose, will be the last letter I shall write you from dear old Malacca. We have been deluged with farewell functions. Last night there was a big Chinese dinner in our honour when reference was made, in the usual speeches, to my endeavours. But what was more pleasing to us was the afternoon tea given by the Penghulus. These are Malay village leaders appointed by Government and paid small salaries. There were fifty or sixty guests, and much to my surprise the Penghulus spoke in glowing terms of my work; one indeed was quite lyrical about my tramping through the *kampongs* 'over mud and ant-hills'. I truly didn't expect any such eulogy. Altogether people are really behaving as though they are sorry to lose us. John, I am sure, is respected as a genial, just and intelligent administrator. It isn't over yet; tonight we are to be guests at a small dinner party; tomorrow evening first to the house of one Chinese family at a cocktail party in our honour, then to a dinner given by another. We leave on Monday by which time I'll be ready to collapse. I promise myself a holiday in Johore. We are to meet Anthony Eden there on the 11th.

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*The Residency 'Saujana', Johore Bahru, 8.3.49*

We left Malacca yesterday after much sad farewellling. At Tampin the British Adviser's car from Johore was waiting for us, this one flying two flags – Johore and the Union Jack. Thus in due course we arrived at The Residency where Mr and Mrs Sleep welcomed us. It is a much more modern house in spacious grounds but lacking in atmosphere, and there is no view beyond vistas of the garden. I should

explain that only in the Crown Colonies of Penang and Malacca is the administrative head termed Resident Commissioner.

*Johore Bahru, 16.3.49*

We are now in our second week here but I still don't feel in the least as though it is our home. It is such a large house that I tend rather to favour our own suite. I'll settle down soon no doubt – probably when I get busy again. After another week's holiday I hope to arrange that.

As might be expected, the house is quite handsomely furnished including fine Chinese blackwood pieces, and the billiard room has a beautiful newly-felted table so some of our guests will enjoy using it. And that reminds me of a story current since the British return to Malaya – i.e. that in the larger houses which Jap officers used, the legs of all the billiard tables had been cut shorter!

Our piano hasn't arrived and we miss that very much. I miss also Lehar my dear Malay *ayah*; she was almost a friend. There was quite a bond of affection between us, to say nothing of her willing usefulness. Here, the head boy's wife does our personal laundry. Also I wish we had brought our own nice little Cookie – the one attached to this house is a rapacious wretch, and not expert either. It is so unpleasant having to wrangle about and check his charges.

Although this is a relatively modern house it follows the established positioning of kitchen and servant's quarters. These are always separated from the house; placed at right angles to it and connected by a covered way. First comes the kitchen, then a series of rooms for use by the house staff. (The *syce* always has his own small house in the grounds.) I very seldom venture into the kitchen and even less frequently have I looked into the servants' rooms – just a token glance occasionally, for I am reluctant to invade their privacy. Personally they are always immaculately clean.

Anthony Eden arrived in JB on 11th and Malcolm MacDonald invited us to Bukit Serene to meet him. He looked anything but the impeccably sartorial gent one expected which, I suppose, can be explained by the fact that good clothes in Britain, particularly 'tropicals', would still be in short supply. Also, pretty ragged was his haircut; he said it had been perpetrated on him in Darwin, his last stop-over. He gives the impression of being a quiet man who keeps many of his thoughts to himself, and according to John is a good listener. He has come to Malaya as a member of the opposition party in Britain, among other things to see for himself how the emergency is being dealt with. He was impressed by the extent of the measures already achieved in Johore, against so many odds, particularly as terrorism is particularly severe here. It has been a brief visit but I hope he was able to see that support from the Colonial Office is inadequate.

*Johore Bahru, 18.3.49*

Tungku Makhota, the Sultan's eldest son arranged a farewell banquet for Anthony Eden today. This was in the vast reception hall of the Istana Besar. This time, however, the gold plate was not used. I have heard that on a few former occasions some of the precious teaspoons disappeared so perhaps Makhota doesn't want to feel responsible to his father for further such losses. This magnificent hall must be

quite 150 feet long and half as wide, has a fine lofty ceiling in proportion to its size, and extends at one end to the sweeping broad staircases with marble pillared balustrades and decorated with five feet high rare Chinese vases of predominant turquoise blue, from which on this occasion sprang great arches of flamboyant flame-red bougainvillea. We were about fifty guests in all.

*Johore Bahru, 22.3.49*

Dinner at the house of the Mentri Besar on Sunday was in honour of Lord Milverton who was at one time a member of the Malayan Civil Service and is indeed a former BA Johore. Malcolm MacDonald was there and two of the Sultan's sons. There were twenty-four of us. Conversation was not conspicuously political. Makhota's principal interests are his horses which he likes to ride; his dogs, of which he's said to have fourteen; and his zoo. The Mentri Besar is a very shrewd, clever, political man, prime mover in every facet of development towards strengthening the position of the Malays in their own country, and towards imminent independence. He's formidable – the sort of person with whom one could very easily feel frivolous or foolish. Dinner was excellent. The fish course was something new to me: it consisted of a greyish-white mixture of the consistency of close bread and was made from cooked fish pounded to a paste, blended with coconut, then dried in the sun, or in a slow oven. I learnt that from one of the Malay ladies. It was delicious – we ate it with raw cucumber.

John has a wicked sense of mischief. Sometimes at a dinner party, if there are mostly rather shy junior guests, a little in awe of dining at The Residency, John will drop his brick. He will pilot the conversation to a point where he can, it seems, quite naturally announce, 'Before we were married, Jean confessed to me [slight pause] that when she was a girl in London, for six months she edited the Women's Page of the *Daily Worker*!' The exposition was only a little less shocking to these well-brought-up young Conservatives than would have been what they momentarily had feared to hear. John would enjoy seeing them adjust their expression and think of an appropriate comment. I would then help them out by referring to the well-known fact that in the thirties there was much revolt among the young intelligentsia – particularly at Cambridge – against the social injustices of the time, and who had for the time being regarded Communism as being probably the beginning of Utopia. I would end by explaining that I had not been a Communist, for one good reason: that they had no sense of humour – but that in doing this job I was simply helping out a Communist friend who was very ill and who had done the work voluntarily, as I was doing.

*Johore Bahru, 24.3.49*

I am still having a holiday but next week I must take preliminary steps toward doing something useful. Johore is a very large State with eight districts outside Johore Bahru, whereas Malacca had only two beyond the central area. Normally John would travel comfortably about his State quite a lot without any thought of danger. Now, since the outbreak of terrorism, it would be inadvisable to go without considerable protection. (To cut down the big shots is one thing the bandits would like to do.) So when he visits the districts he must take a police

escort. The trouble seems to be abating, probably because of the action taken on the 'squatters'.

In this country that term applies to Chinese – usually illegal immigrants – who establish themselves on a piece of land, build a hut on it, grow vegetables and raise a few chickens and pigs. They have represented the chief source of food supply and intelligence to the Communists, whether voluntarily or not, as their squats are usually in more isolated areas not far from the jungle. Recently in particularly bad areas where it is known that the squatters were illegal immigrants and had definitely been assisting our enemies, they have been paid by Government for what livestock, etc., they had and shipped back to China. Others have been/are being removed to resettlement villages. I recall now that whenever I went out from Batu Gajah to seek out sick or needy people known to be living in squatter areas there was an atmosphere I could not define, and certainly scarcely a young man ever to be seen. What I didn't know, none of us knew at the time, was that such places were Communist country. I was perfectly safe, anyhow.

*Johore Bahru, 29.3.49*

We visited the State Welfare Home yesterday afternoon. The Sultan of Pahang who was in JB had arranged to see it and we were invited to accompany him. It is very enlightening, as such places are always, though somewhat saddening. Among the children are three little Malay boys whose parents were killed by a tiger. I vaguely remember reading of it: the mother was attacked; her husband went to her aid and both lost their lives. Probably it happened very early in the morning and on their little rubber plantation. There are also some blind children who are learning Braille; and unhappily, a few children of terrorists who I suppose have been gaoled. Some poor little souls are mentally and physically damaged.

Our Bruno is a fighter. I may have mentioned that Samad, our *syce* in Malacca, had very proudly related how Bruno had fought four dogs at one time and seen them off. Gentle creature though he is with us, he's an aggressive wretch with his own kind – I've witnessed it, and I prophesied recently that he might meet more than his match. That same evening after a terrific rumpus of dogs he came home, very crestfallen, went upstairs and lay down. When he tried to rise he whimpered and on his tummy were bites and welts and, worst of all, a large lump which continued swelling. He was very uncomfortable so I administered aspirin but he remained restless. He's better this morning and the swelling is down, but I hope he's learnt a lesson.

*Johore Bahru, 6.4.49*

You asked for more description of Resettlement areas. These are the nub of the strategy worked out here between the Administration and the Army according to what is now referred to as the Briggs Plan (though in fact it was set in train before General Briggs took over – and Johore had led the way). The plan which I have briefly referred to before is to remove squatters, their livestock and all their necessary belongings, to where they can be protected from the terrorists, and prevented from giving them food or information. The 'New Villages' as they are now called are in fact like compact villages but are enclosed within barbed wire

fences and have guards posted night and day around their perimeters. The people are free to go out to work during the day but are not permitted to take with them more food than they would need for that day. They must be back before nightfall when lights go on. The terrorists at present seem to be getting the worst of it though they have by no means lost their sting. They are such ruthless devils; they murder, burn people in their houses, commit all manner of atrocities, then melt into the jungle. And of course there's nothing to distinguish them from other Chinese: a servant in one's home could, in some places, be a bandit at night. It is all so sad, so unwarranted, so wasteful.

Not long after this Resettlement scheme was inaugurated John when he came home announced – not quite seriously – ‘Well, I might be sacked. I’ve just authorised the spending of a million dollars without the authority of the Federal Government, to speed up the Resettlement programme.’ His attitude has always been to do the necessary without delay, and take the responsibility for it.

The planters and their wives are heroic: they are being attacked frequently in the hope of disrupting the rubber industry which is what, for instance, wool is to Australia. When a planter leaves his house on early morning rounds he knows, as does his wife, that he may not come home alive. The terrorists lie in wait, and there is nothing easier than to gun down their innocent quarry. There have been many such casualties; also the plantation labourers are often threatened, coerced, sometimes killed. A short time ago Special Constables were appointed to guard as far as possible as many plantations as possible. This limited degree of protection, though inadequate, does offer some measure of reassurance. One must not forget, in praising the planters, to mention also the faithfulness and courage of many of their staff. I have just received a letter from a planter's wife answering an invitation. In this she wrote: ‘All the managers' bungalows in the estates in this area have been shot up while we were away and our assistant's dog was killed. Intimidation and a warning meaning they'll be back! Jimmy went round the estate, in the armoured car – of course, no bandits in sight.’ (Not all planters have armoured cars.)

I was made ashamed of Bruno a few days ago. I had a lady visitor over whom he made the usual fuss, but as she was sitting talking to me and stroking his head he suddenly, without any warning, snarled and snapped at her! I was dumbfounded, and still have fixed in my mind the tableau: it is not of a lady but the cartoon of an outsized terrified mouse (the lady has a rather large, prominent nose and large, prominent ears and is very small); the mouse has eyes round with horror, and with fore-paws drawn up to its chest. Bruno was standing against the settee and his teeth were bared. It seemed minutes before I de-froze and called him to order. He was contrite immediately and offered the lady his paw. My only explanation for his behaviour is that she has an appalling, droning nasal voice, that he has a discerning ear, and just couldn't stand it any longer. I have noticed, anyhow, that since coming to JB he is not quite the friendly dog he was.

We hope to go to a place called Mersing, at Easter. It is about sixty miles from here; we'll go by sea and it will combine an official inspection with a private visit.

An invitation has arrived to attend the ceremonies connected with the installation of the new Sultan of Perak. Our dear old friend the former Sultan who visited us in Batu Gajah and whom we visited, died last year. Unfortunately we

cannot accept. Kuala Kangsar is in Perak; John would not wish to absent himself from Johore for the time we would have to be away. It's a pity, for the celebrations include, apart from the actual installation ritual, a tiffin, garden party and State banquet.

A little long-legged iridescent thing has just flown past my face, reminding me once again of nature's artistry shown in such beauty and in the wonder of camouflage. Recently I called John's attention to a moth which resembled exactly a brown leaf, even to the 'vein' which extended from wing tip to wing tip.

*Johore Bahru, 19.4.49*

A sweet photograph of the baby Prince Charles appeared in the newspapers here a few days ago. I expect your local press have printed similar ones. He's a lovely baby, isn't he – as indeed he should be, with every advantage this world can offer. How different are the pathetic little souls I see here sometimes who are born, one might say, like weeds on a dung-heap.

I spoke my little piece to the State Anti-TB Committee recently and as a result I believe the necessary funds will be forthcoming to allow me to institute an almoner's service here too.

We returned yesterday from our weekend in Mersing. It is a pretty place on the China Sea, but the sand is grey and the water not sparkling or clear. Few beaches elsewhere have the long stretches of clean sand and clear blue water of Australia. However we swam and enjoyed it.

In Johore State each district has an Administrative Officer, a European, and a District Officer who is a Malay. On Saturday evening the AO gave a cocktail party for us and on Sunday morning he took us out in a motor launch to a tiny island a few miles off the coast of Mersing. It is known as Pulau Gajah (Elephant Island) because at the northern end there is a great arch of rock curving into a narrow 'trunk' which, in relation to the rest, suggests a sitting elephant. The sea rushes through the arch and spills all frothy on scattered rocks. There was clean white sand there and the water looked most inviting. I indulged in a brief dip only and hurried out because of the danger of stinging jelly-fish. It is a delightful little island covered with palms, spikey things and trees with little white tubular flowers divinely scented. Back at the Rest House we changed for a curry tiffin given by the DO. Malay curry is most delicious – full of flavour but not too peppery. I might say we were escorted to Mersing and back by an armoured car and a jeep full of police.

While in Mersing the AO told us of an amazing incident concerning himself. His wife when she first arrived from England was a little nervous about creepy-crawlies and most of all terrified at the thought of snakes. He had reassured her: 'You'll probably never see a snake.'

One day soon after when he came home at lunch-time she met him with the words, 'A snake came into the house, went up the stairs and into the bathroom!' 'You're joking – it couldn't happen,' he said, and wondered if she'd suffered an hallucination, but she assured him she'd not been mistaken. So, confident that she had in some way imagined it, he took her hand and they mounted the stairs to the bathroom. Looking round the bathroom floor, he said 'See, no snake,' but just to make doubly sure, he glanced under the raised bath – and there it was: a fine big

python! He said he was paralysed for a moment, then rushed downstairs, got his revolver, and shot it. He didn't tell us what his wife said!

From Mersing we went to a district called Kota Tinggi, on a pilgrimage you might say, to the scene of wholesale slaughter of innocent Chinese by the Japanese. The atrocity concerned the destruction by retreating Australian soldiers in 1942 of an iron bridge spanning the Johore river there. This so angered the Japanese when they arrived that they murdered the entire Chinese population of the village, except enough able-bodied men to form a forced-labour gang to build a wooden bridge. When that was completed these men also were taken away and murdered. A small granite pillar at one end of the bridge is their memorial.

There are many people to be entertained. We are to have a luncheon here on Thursday, another on Sunday, and next week we plan to give a cocktail party.

I don't know whether I have explained to you that the Resident, or British Adviser, always has a calling 'box' built somewhere near the entrance gates to The Residency, and in the 'box' or kiosk is the visitors' book. It is a courtesy that people of any standing in the district, or visiting the State, should sign the book. They merely write the date and their name, their business, title or profession, and whether resident or visiting. Non-residents write their home address. People who don't sign the book are not invited to The Residency – so there! Apropos that, I think it was in Malacca that we met an old-timer – appropriately somehow a Mr Salt – who said rather defiantly that he'd 'never signed the book'. So for fun I decided to try breaking down his old die-hard resistance with a little banter and friendliness. I chuckled when we found a little later that he had signed. We invited him to something but we didn't manage to hook him in. And recently a couple with their seven-year-old daughter on holidays from school in Australia drove up to the gates, explaining to the child they had come to 'call on' the BA. They related to us that as they opened the door of the kiosk the child looked inside and exclaimed, 'Oh, he's not in!' (The kiosk is about the size of a telephone booth.)

#### *Johore Bahru, 30.4.49*

Recently we met Mr Claude Massey, Australian High Commissioner in Singapore. I'm going to try persuading him to secure gifts of wool for use by TB hospital patients. The men in this hospital as well as women knit and do it beautifully. I spoke to a young Indian patient and asked him what he was making and he replied, 'a matinee jacket'. It seemed so incongruous.

Tonight we are going to dinner at the home of a wealthy Chinese in Singapore who is an Oxford graduate and is a member of the Executive Council, Johore.

Two days ago at a Girl Guide meeting I met the Sultan's sister who is the widow of the late Sultan of Pahang, a State further north. She is a very positive character, like her brother, and her seventy-eight years haven't dimmed her keen wit and lively interest in life. Her appearance is not quite queenly; she is very bent, wears a plain white sarong, well-starched *baju*, men's black cashmere socks, gold anklets, and black sandals. The combination of those socks and the anklets is intriguing. She converses with Europeans in a mixture of Malay mainly and English, and gets hold of some quaint expressions. She uses 'snake in the grass' as a term of disapproval, and while I was talking to her she said something or other was

'*banyak* (very) snappy!' Her servants are kept under strict old-fashioned discipline and enter her presence – so I'm told – on their knees. That is surprising, because she is full of fun and in many ways seems so modern in outlook. The Sultana of Johore was also at the meeting; she is rather beautiful and gives the impression of being a kind and worthy woman. She is certainly much respected and I liked her. I need not add, I suppose, that she wore gorgeous diamonds.

*Johore Bahru, 3.5.49*

We have been invited to lunch with the Sultan and Sultana on Wednesday – just a small party. I will tell you more about it when next I write.

Our arrangements to inaugurate Welfare Week have begun and there's going to be a great deal of work to do within the next month. Up to now voluntary welfare work here has been practically non-existent but it's starting to pep up – and I'm the pepper-upper in chief (some people are probably going to hate me).

Now about the dinner with the Chinese Dato in Singapore: his house is very large, old, and furnished lavishly with carved blackwood cabinets containing precious porcelain, jade, rose-quartz, etc. Walls are adorned with plaques and scrolls, and outside is a wonderful abundance of glorious orchids in great porcelain pots probably of great value. Though he is so westernised I'm sure the house embraces to some extent the extended family. We had the best Chinese food I have ever tasted. After dinner the party – about ten of us – went to the American Club where we danced for a while. In the party were General Sir Neal Ritchie and Lady Ritchie whom we'd met before. He is in charge of the whole Far East area. They are a handsome couple and very pleasant.

*Johore Bahru, 7.5.49*

We had lunch at the Istana on Wednesday (this Istana is relatively small and very much furnished, but without distinction: the Istana Besar is the show-place where official banquets are given). The Sultan looks very much better than when I saw him last. Though he is a most formidable man he was most charming to us and I have heard that he is capable of great kindness. He entertained us with many anecdotes during the meal. One concerned his arrival by ship at Fremantle years ago when some busy-body official told him he was not permitted to land (that having something to do with the White Australia policy I suppose). HH is a big powerful man and can be fierce, we know. 'You try to stop me,' he told the fellow, 'and I'll throw you into the sea.' The man must have cowed. So of course HH went ashore – and in due course most abject apologies followed. He and the Sultana are going to England soon – he likes living there; owns a suite in Grosvenor House in Park Lane.

We have a new car, a Hudson; the Humber we had was not always adequate for requirements. This one seats seven plus the driver. I'm almost ashamed to be seen in it – I feel like a spiv.

*Johore Bahru, 11.5.49*

On Sunday we lunched with Tunngu Makhota and his lady. Their house is

glorious: parquet floors and rose-pink Chinese carpets; cabinets of carved jade and precious quartz and porcelain; sumptuous chandeliers and candelabra. It is in European style, for Makhota was educated abroad and his two sons attend Trinity Grammar school in Sydney. Makhota had fallen from his horse that morning and seemed extremely stiff and sore. His wife is a minute shy little person. And yesterday we were entertained to lunch by HE Malcolm and Mrs MacDonald in the fairy-tale house they occupy – Bukit Serene – the property of the Sultan who built it for his former European wife. It is enchanting, with a green sloping roof and spread gables. The MacDonalds are a very charming couple, very informal. In fact, ladies do not wear hats nor gentlemen their jackets when visiting them formally on daytime occasions (John does not approve of the latter liberty.)

*Johore Bahru, 20.5.49*

We flew to KL on Tuesday morning, arriving there at 9.15. It is fascinating to fly low enough to get a widespread view of the sea and land below. Surprising it is to see the so tortuous courses of some rivers – how they wind and turn, almost doubling back on themselves. We flew over the coast for much of the way. The sea is generally clay coloured and opaque on the west coast, and from the air the sea breakers appear to crawl lethargically in to shore, with frill after frill of white foam lazily rising and subsiding. Many of the ubiquitous squatter areas were identifiable – areas from which the terrorists draw their food – or did so – as I have explained.

At night was the official dinner at King's House, all very formal and elegant. I was escorted to the dining room on the arm of a tall, typically pukka English gentleman. At the table I found him rather uncommunicative but he did tell me that he would be returning to England very soon. To continue the conversation I asked him what his chosen recreation was – 'Hunting'. So, chaffing him, I said I considered that an ignoble sport and quoted 'the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable'. Taking up the cue he drawled, 'Well, I suppose you chased your husband.' 'But if I did, I didn't *kill* him,' I answered. He: 'Might have been better if you had!' 'Touché!' said I, and 'I supposed you have a gun room with stags' heads – dead of course, accusing you from the walls and on the floor, tiger skins, dead of course . . .' He: 'And shrunken heads – Australian . . .' I: 'Dead, of course . . .' He: 'A bit hard to tell the difference!' I: 'You fell into my trap, I wondered if you'd say something like that!' At that he really did laugh, so I had had the satisfaction of humanising him.

*Johore Bahru, 24.5.49*

This is for me rather 'the morning after the night before'. Yesterday afternoon we went to a large tea-party given by the Chinese Association to wish 'bon voyage' to the Sultan and Sultana. There were several hundred guests of the various nationalities. An orchestra entertained us, and after tea a few short speeches were delivered, then out came the liquor, and some people danced. His Highness looks well but said the wound (on the royal seat) is not healing well. Champagne was served to those who wished, but one old Chinese – like a figure sketched on old parchment – was a surprise packet. His name is Dr Lim, he's eighty-two, has wise round eyes, very sparse hair on top, and thin 'windy' whiskers. One rarely sees

this type: so sage, so scholarly, rather shy looking. So to hear him order a whisky-soda immediately tea was over – and 'before the sun went down' was quite startling. At the invitation of HH I moved from my place beside Dr Lim so that John could enjoy his company. He was soon goggle-eyed at the speed with which the old boy polished off whisky after whisky; the Sultana told me that he gets roaring drunk. It's simply incongruous in such a classical old-world figure.

We expect to reap a bumper harvest from Welfare Week. Apart from the Fair there will be a card evening; cinema shows; sports carnival; a flag-day – and the week finishes with a grand ball in the Audience Hall of the Government Building. This hall is a vast domed arena with mosaic tiled floor and a dais with throne, all in Moorish architecture. It should look glorious with concealed lighting and should hold easily a thousand dancers. If we don't make \$20,000 from the week I shall be surprised. All the community representatives have worked hard and enthusiastically. We have a splendid Welfare Committee and an equally dedicated Anti-TB Committee on each of which there are several representatives of Asian communities. I am so grateful for having such compassionate support from Dr Ismail (I met him one day in a corridor of the hospital and noticed that his eyes were moist as he told me, 'A young Chinese woman is in there dying of TB'.)

#### *Johore Bahru, 27.5.49*

There was another farewell to HH and the Sultana on Wednesday night at the International Club. This was a supper dance attended by three or four hundred people, many from Singapore, including the Australian High Commissioner and Mrs Massey. It started at about 9.00. We arrived at 9.30 and the Sultan's party at 10.00. After a while he sent for us to join him. We danced until about 3.00 a.m. when they left. The Sultana is very fond of dancing and she suggested the Palais Glide. As you know, John is no dancer but she helped him, laughed with and at him – and we all enjoyed it. HH vets whom his lady may dance with: John is OK! We ended the night with the hokey-cokey in which everyone except HH joined. 'It's foolish but it's fun!'

Bruno is in trouble again: the eczema has recurred. For nearly an hour very early this morning I rubbed around his ears to ease the irritation. (He had been running hither and thither in our bedroom, shaking his head, endeavouring to get relief from the itch.) At last, he slept, under our mosquito net. Today I got the European vet officer in charge of that department to come here and see Bruno. He had heard how savage he was with the Indian staff at the animal infirmary – he bit one, making it necessary for the man to take two days off duty. Bruno went to the European vet like a lamb, jumped up on him, gave his paw, put his head on the man's knee and was altogether friendly. But he will not tolerate Asians except the house servants, with whom he gets on well. Now he is having streptococci injections, pills, and a slightly anaesthetic oil applied to the itchy spots – and he is to have two tablepoons of castor oil.

We have a guest at present who is blind – a war victim – and such a sweet person – good humoured, gentle and intelligent, apparently accepting his comparatively recent affliction with remarkable courage and patience. He is here to direct blind education. As he is still in his twenties it is rather remarkable that this sudden,

frightful disability has not caused some bitterness. Perhaps in fact he does suffer some moods of depression but he gives the impression of having come to terms with his condition and is very sanely adjusted.

We are beginning to consider our garden party which as always is to be held on 9th June – the official royal birthday. Tomorrow we shall be going again to KL and at night are to dine at King's House as guests of the High Commissioner and Lady Gurney. We'll stay overnight with the Chief Secretary.

It is a still, dull afternoon and comfortably cool. The big flags in the garden – the Johore flag and the Union Jack – hang limply on the poles but now, as all day long, there are bird calls. The birds with their sweet happy silver voices, one with this call, one with that, welcome all weathers it seems. Some are very musical and a few are quite elaborate in theme. One we heard in Malacca had nine different notes which I made a point of memorising and have, for the record, given them notation. The phrase could very well be used in a musical composition.



The tune the bird sang

#### *Johore Bahru, 31.5.49*

Just a short letter. I have a very busy day ahead of me and that includes going into Singapore. We are giving a supper party this evening for which I want to do some special marketing with Cookie. And I have other jobs to do in preparation for Welfare Week which commences tomorrow.

The Sultan and Sultana sailed on Sunday night. We had dinner with them on board and he gave me a cheque for \$2,500 for our Welfare Fund. I could have kissed him – but I didn't!

#### *Johore Bahru, 3.6.49*

A hectic time: Welfare Week commenced on Wednesday with a flag day and yesterday afternoon at 3.00 the Fair opened and goes on. There are various stalls; mine is selling dress material which the Welfare Department had had in stock, imported at the time when cloth for the multitude was so scarce – all good English fabric. I decorated the stall almost entirely with white crepe paper – three flounces, stuck with pale pink flowers. (Please Pluto, hold your cats and dogs!)

Next week comes our garden party. Invitations have gone out to three hundred people. It is not such a good garden as at the Malacca Residency for this purpose as there are no big shade trees on the lawns; we are going to plant some, for the future.

In Singapore today I met the Padre from Malacca – he was Treasurer of the Malacca Anti-TB Association. He told me that there has been serious unpleasantness between the volunteer almoners there since I left – largely due to

jealously on the part of the husband of one woman: nothing amorous about it. He just wants her and himself to run the show alone. Strange!

*Johore Bahru, 8.6.49*

I am at present in the car setting off for Singapore and will collect my new dress which has been made for me – the one I shall wear to the garden party.

Yesterday the European vet came to the house to take Bruno to the infirmary and there he was partly shorn so the people concerned could observe his skin and the recurrent eczema condition more closely. I believe he fought like a devil, but big Scottish Davie wasn't to be bluffed, and the necessary was done. Bruno looks a sketch and I think he knows it. He is on a diet which restricts red meat. Instead he gets lung or liver, which someone delivers from the Government abattoir. Ugh!

*Johore Bahru, 10.6.49*

The garden party yesterday was quite a success. People were invited for five o'clock. We had police at intervals along the drive to direct the guests in their cars along the outer drive and to arrange the parking. John and I stood at the edge of the lawn and beside us stood John's secretary and the Malay Under Secretary of State, the former to introduce Europeans we had not previously met, the latter to introduce Asians we did not know. We shook hands with about 250 people. By about 5.20 most had arrived so we sat down with our party and then refreshments were served all round. There isn't much shade in this part of the garden but we had some chairs arranged to take advantage of what there was, and a few tables – these were for more eminent and older guests. There is more sociable mingling anyhow if people are not sitting down. The caterers had brought fifteen waiters and we had three of our own staff in the background if required, and I noticed they seemed willing to participate. Refreshments were the usual, and throughout the party waltz music and marches were amplified from gramophone records. It was a very pleasant afternoon; some rain had fallen in the morning and the sky was a little cloudy. After tea John and I mingled, and at 6.30 the National Anthem was played and our guests started to move off. I think a happy time had been enjoyed by all. I loved the visual aspect of the gathering: people quietly moving or grouped around on the green lawn and between the flower-beds created enchanting pictures. European and Eurasian women mostly in pastel colours (my dress was floral, in soft pink), and we all wore light hats . . . Malay women in brighter colours which look splendid with their darker skin, their figured *kebayas* bedecked with jewellery, and some with flowers in their hair; the men in their bold sarongs draped over coloured silken trousers with matching *bajus*, dark velvet *songkoks* on their heads . . . Chinese women, very elegantly gowned in their national cheongsams made of exquisite fabrics . . . the graceful Indian women in their soft-folded bright sarees. And last but by no means least, 'My winsome, handsome Johnny' in a pale-grey sharkskin suit with cream shirt, brown and cream tie, brown suede shoes – and 'a twinkle in his bright blue e'e'. I hadn't been at all excited at the prospect of this party until, when I was having a rest in the afternoon earlier and the technicians were installing the amplifiers, I suddenly heard the

impudent blare of 'A Life on the Ocean Wave'. Then I sat up and hugged myself and decided how jolly it was to be giving another garden party.

We asked a few people to stay on for drinks afterwards, and then all went to the Civil Service Club where there was a card party in progress – part of the Welfare Week programme – and we had a little gamble on roulette. We had supper there and got home before midnight. Tomorrow night will be our grand ball – and that will terminate the great week. As results are coming in it is expected that we will make about \$17,000. People have been very generous: they've given; they've spent – but they've had a royal time – and the money is needed for many improvements to the living conditions of various categories of the less fortunate.

I forgot to tell you in last week's letters that I had, for a short time, witnessed a major operation. We were being taken on an inspection tour of the hospital by the principal medical officer and the matron. In due course we went into the observation gallery situated in a dome directly over the operating theatre. There are seats around and *magnifying* glass windows. The operation in progress was on the thyroid – removal of a goitre I think, and very bloody. I was congratulating myself on my self-control, not feeling squeamish, when suddenly it hit me. I felt horribly faint, my face I'm sure was white and though I said nothing the matron realised and escorted us out and into another room where I quickly revived.

#### *Johore Bahru, 14.6.49*

John has just gone off to his office; it is dull and pleasantly cool, and I can hear the birds in the trees, one 'ticking' like a clock: I feel that any time now it will chime the hour.

Tonight we are going to Singapore to dinner with Sir Ralph and Lady Hone. It is difficult to say what exactly he represents in the administration of the colony – his title is Deputy Commissioner General (Malcolm McDonald is Special Commissioner). Perhaps it's heresy to say so but I doubt if either of them is overburdened, very pleasant though they are.

At the ball on Saturday night – and it was a magnificently colourful affair – I was pleased to see a few Malay women dancing. I had never seen that anywhere before. But I believe the women are intent on achieving some equality, and in Johore they are being encouraged in this by the Prime Minister I have mentioned, the progressive Dato Onn.

I wonder if I told you of an incident relevant to that, in which John was involved shortly before we left Malacca: he reversed the decision of the local (Muslim) religious court about a Muslim divorce. The decision had been made against the woman by which, though her husband had married another woman she, the petitioner, was not free to marry again – and in a way was an outcast. Nor did her husband support her – because she had left him. She appealed, as she had a right to do, to the Resident Commissioner and explained what had apparently not been disclosed before, that the reason she left the man was because of his abnormal sexual demands. It is quite a test case and was widely publicised. We have heard since that Muslim women throughout Malaya were vitally interested in the result of the appeal and applauded John's decision to free the woman. One here told me that they were afraid he would take the line of least opposition and agree with the

religious court. It is all a bit more complicated than I have set out but that's the case in essence.

*Johore Bahru, 18.6.49*

We are going to visit some districts in north Johore next week and on Thursday hope to slip across the border into Malacca and stay one night.

Recently we visited the remains of Sime Road internment camp where John enjoyed that long spell of Nippon hospitality. A friend who was with us was able to locate each individual's 'luxury suite' . . . and on the spot which approximately John's head would have graced, lo! not a 'pot of basil' but a flourishing plant of it.

*Johore Bahru, 18.6.49*

Yesterday afternoon we returned from our tour up north which was made very pleasant for us, and rewarding. First we went to the district of Batu Pahat where John was stationed about twenty years ago. There in the Government offices sat many of his old acquaintances – still at the same desks as when he last saw them! His next and very important inspection was of an Agricultural Station and the padi area which is managed by Javanese. These people have much more initiative and industry than their racial cousins, the Malays, probably because there is such population pressure in their own country, which must stimulate effort. Padi as you know is rice in growth, and most rice grows in water so the padi fields are flooded and *bunded* into square lots. Here the peasants live in houses on stilts among the padi which presents a large checker-board of bright, light green glistening at intervals where the green is not yet above the water. Water buffaloes are used to plough the mud before planting. Sometimes they have a sort of wide rake attached behind, guided by the peasant, otherwise the animals are turned loose in the areas to be ploughed, so that they can churn around to their heart's content. In that way weeds are trampled so deep into the mud that they are drowned. Water buffaloes are comical-looking creatures; they hold their heads forward in a vertical line with the back – and to wallow in mud is their life's ambition (often you see birds perched on their horns, or backs).

To get back to John's inspection: he told me about the place when he returned, and about the *kampong* guards who were posted strategically on the *bunds* through the padi. There are various auxiliary police now including these *kampong* guards who are armed to protect their areas from terrorists. I remarked that in such open country their exposure would make them critically vulnerable. John said that they had not had an attack there but knowing the calibre of the Javanese they would deal with any attackers however many in number. Strangely, that very night there was an assault – none of the guards was hurt, but in the morning a dead bandit was found. They said John had brought them good luck!

While the Tuan was making his tour I was being BA's wife: I visited the hospital, then was invited to the Administrative Officer's house. While there the wife of the *syce* John had had when stationed in Batu Pahat came in with another Malay woman – quite uninvited – justifying their intrusion by claiming to be members of the Women's Service League which claim I doubt. One of them asked me to go to her house which, of course, I did. It was a poor little home but very

clean as they all are; I found something to admire and then left. In the afternoon there was a tea-party for me at the Club given by the Women's Service League. There I saw garments the women had made for the poor – the idea of voluntary work is catching on. After tea I was welcomed by the president, and I replied – just the opening in Malay, the rest in English. How easy it is for me now to stand up and say the appropriate thing. When I first had to speak publicly I could scarcely hear myself stutter for the knocking of my knees! The function ended with a group photograph, as always, then off I went to the football match where John was and where he presented his cup.

After all that, onward to Muar further north, another one-time stamping ground of John's. We arrived at what is called the Senior Officers' Rest House and there in the sitting room downstairs were bowls and bowls of roses – unusual in such bounty in Malaya. Two of the ladies had got them from a nearby hill where someone has them growing, and had decorated the Rest House for us. We had sent our invitations to about twelve people to dine with us there at night and for this obviously one of our guests had lent superior table linen and china so that the dining table looked quite grand. We had a mixed party of Malays and Europeans. Next day John went the round that had been arranged for him and I followed the itinerary organised for me: school feeding scheme; hospital clinic, etc. In the afternoon there was a big tea party at the Malay District Officer's House for about sixty guests – followed by the inevitable group photograph – then it was back to the Rest House to change for the cocktail party at the Administrative Officer's house. Next morning members of the local Women's Service League were entertained by me to tea at the Rest House, after which I went to a Welfare meeting. The last function was a Malay curry tiffin with the District Officer.

This is funny: the headmaster of a big government school in Muar told us that recently he received a letter from an Asian who obviously didn't know English, addressed to SCHOOL GO SLOW, Muar. I suppose the man had copied the sign believing it to be the name of the school.

We couldn't miss the opportunity of visiting our beloved Malacca, as it is relatively near, and we arrived there at about 4.00 p.m. to stay the night with our friends the Doyles, of the Hong Kong Bank. As our car entered their drive our erstwhile syce, Samad, and two of his children who had been hovering on the opposite side of the road, came running to meet us. How did they know? How do one's servants always know in advance? Anyhow it was a very happy meeting for we all liked each other so much. Next morning before breakfast we walked up The Residency hill opposite the bank, and as soon as we reached the old church ruin The Residency servants all started to appear, as if by magic. Our darling Lehar; Lehman; Ah Tong the head boy; Ah Sing in charge of the garden; Perumal who looked after the water tank and the house flowers – all with wives and children – greeted us. Lehar took our hands and put them to her lips and forehead – a gesture of affection I suppose – and said that she had prayed to Allah that we might return. I wish that were possible for I feel I belong there – will never have that affinity with Johore.

I do so hope you are getting stronger. I have read about the awful weather and the power cuts in Sydney. What an evil thing it is for the miners to strike now. I worry about the situation there and am almost ashamed that I cannot take my share

of the responsibilities. I can only hope and pray that your health will soon improve.

*Johore Bahru, 26.6.49*

While we were in Batu Pahat John took me to see the bungalow where he'd lived when he was District Officer, and related the story of his ATTEMPTED SEDUCTION. I transcribe: It was a night for seduction . . . moonlit and magically still. Only the night-jars tocked and the insects hummed their endless chorus from the trees. It was about ten o'clock and he was softly playing his piano when he heard the light tap of sandals on the steps leading up to the house. Her scent reached him before she appeared on the landing, this young Malay woman freshly groomed for the encounter, made up discreetly, flowers in her hair. He knew her as the ex-wife of one of his junior clerks, and a relative of his *syce*. He invited her to sit down, offered her a cigarette and listened politely to her story. Ostensibly she had come to complain about the behaviour of her ex-husband. John assured her he had no authority to intervene in this matter. He asked her where she was staying. With her uncle and aunt, she said. What would they think of her calling on him at that hour of the night? 'Oh,' she said, in effect, 'they didn't know she was out.' In any case, he told her, she should return now. As it was so late she asked couldn't she stay. He told her that would be inappropriate, at which she said she had only been joking. So, ending the interview, reluctantly withal, he told her she'd better stop joking, and go. John thinks it was a ploy to compromise him, inspired by the rascally old *syce*. It was the women of that family – including the temptress herself perhaps – who had intruded into the Women's Service League meeting.

John also told me an amusing incident during his time there. At that time the houses in the districts were generally lit by what were called Tilly lamps – those things with incandescent mantles and fuelled by kerosene which was pumped up. And so it was in Batu Pahat until probably 1935 when at last electricity was connected. Great rejoicings! To celebrate the first night, John arranged a dinner party. When the great moment arrived, ceremoniously he 'switched on' – and it was as if struck by lightning, the glare was so intense. Dinner was in progress, everyone bedazzled into animation, when suddenly 'Phut!' And all was gloom. So, groping through the dark the boy brought out old Tilly Lamp again. So much for 'new-fangled progress!' (Owing to inexperience the service had been overloaded.)

*Johore Bahru, 27.6.49*

I so wish I could urge you to come to us, even for a brief holiday, but I realise the difficulties and that your health is probably not good enough. John right now is playing Weber's 'Invitation to the Waltz' which you like so much and the music for which you sent him.

He went out today to a demonstration of jungle warfare which is part of the training of troops who are to fight the terrorists. The troops were mostly Ghurkas and John said they appeared to enjoy the play. Those who had to enact the part of the wounded or slain did so with great realism. Though the rain was pelting down, he said they lay sprawled where 'shot', head back, mouth open, to all appearances

completely lifeless. Others when acting that they had been hit dropped like stone, and one chap turned a sort of somersault on his head. It was the wettest day we've had for a long time but the officer in charge lent the VIPs, as they were referred to, mackintosh capes. They also witnessed a demonstration of jungle cooking. The cook was supplied with small tablets which ignite easily; he made a fire and boiled water in a length of bamboo (apparently the green bamboo will withstand the fire long enough to boil the water within its hollow). Some of the bamboo which grows here has a diameter of several inches. In jungle cooking that is used for cooking rice, when the bottom 'joint' is reinforced with mud so as to prevent the bamboo splitting. The rice may then be carried in the bamboo, as it solidifies when cooked. The cook also made an apple tart and a rice pudding. His only oven was a seven-pound jam tin.

Today is a public holiday for the beginning of Puasa, the Muslim fasting month, when no food or drink is taken between sunrise and sunset though for the remaining hours there is no restriction.

On Wednesday I have arranged to go out all day with a friend of ours who is the senior Infant Welfare Officer in Singapore. I am to meet her at 8.00 a.m. and together we will go by launch to one of the islands which is inhabited by aboriginal people. There she will hold a clinic for mothers and children, as she does every few weeks there.

Last night I saw a scorpion for the first time. The wet weather must have driven it out of the vine which grows up the outside walls. It was a horrid-looking thing about five inches long, with black body, red legs and head. I saw it on the sitting room floor upstairs and John with some obvious revulsion stamped on it – he has no stomach for anything like that.

The news of the coal strike there and the resultant shortages and power cuts is most disturbing. I can't imagine what you'll do – hope you can get a spirit stove or something as a substitute – it really is too cruel.

We have received an invitation to dinner at Government House Singapore on 7th July. This time we will accept. Some little while ago it was an invitation just to cocktails so we said 'they can keep it' (not to the Gov. of course) and regretted we could not accept.

Our Welfare Week has made \$17,000 in Johore Bahru; about \$33,000 State-wide.

### *Johore Bahru, 13.7.49*

It is a very still, bright early morning; the feathery casuarina trees stand motionless, and the flags hang limply on their poles. I can hear the swish of grass being scythed and the mixed chorus of birds; hens 'kek-kekking' around the servants' quarters and children's voices in the distance. I still greet each morning when I wake, with a sense of gratitude and joy in being here. Very often I am acutely conscious of our privilege – and being privileged – and this awareness of having so much presses me with a moral obligation to contribute. I suppose I am a socialist at heart, believing that all people are equal, so when I see women, in particular, labouring on the roads – and they do – I am beset with feelings of guilt. (They are usually Indian women carrying baskets of stones or earth on heads or

shoulders.) House servants don't really smite my conscience: they usually eat well – to some extent from the employer's larder; don't work very hard; rest in the afternoon; and if we don't behave fairly to them they can leave – and pass the word around making it difficult to replace them. There is no grovelling of servants to masters here!

We are due to leave for Trengganu on Tuesday on local leave. The little boat carries about eight passengers. In Trengganu I hope to see sarongs being woven – and to enjoy good swimming. There, I am told, the beaches are broad white sand, the water a sparkling surf. We intend to spend a week with the British Adviser, Trengganu, then go on to Kelantan.

I'm afraid our Bruno is deserting us for women. There are two little bitches, mother and daughter, living near the back of our garden. They used to come and play with Bruno but a few weeks ago, things being as they are, the friendship 'ripened into love'. Now Bruno takes up guard over our neighbour's house and not another dog dare enter their garden. Of course he feels privileged no doubt because he used to visit frequently before the girls became so specially attractive. It has cost him blood, skin and hair, but he is not deterred.

#### *On board little tub Tung Song, South China Sea, 20.7.49*

We came on board yesterday at about 2.00 p.m. She is a tiny boat, less than 500 tons, but the water is smooth and she is riding comfortably. We have a quite satisfactory little cabin; dinner last night was very good, so we have no complaints. We should reach Kuala Trengganu tonight. Undoubtedly our friends will be there to meet us – the British Adviser and his wife. Hari Raya will be celebrated while we are there – that is equivalent to our Easter Sunday; is the end of the fast and is celebrated with feasting and personal adornment. It is a poor Malay indeed who has not new clothes for Hari Raya. What a joyous sight it is to see them everywhere in their colourful costumes. That is the day too when gifts of cakes are made. (I think I told you about the occasion when we were in Batu Gajah – the cakes presented to us on round trays with brightly embroidered conical covers.)

#### *The Residency, Trengganu, 21.7.49*

We reached Kuala Trengganu last night shortly after 8.00 and had to wait about half an hour for the launch to come and take us off. On landing we were met by our friends. This is a genuine old-type bungalow, very long and low, all French doors and shutters and verandahs. I believe it originally had an *atap* roof but is now tiled. There is a sweet country air about the place.

#### *The Residency, Trengganu, 23.7.49*

What a splendid time we are enjoying – it is a delightful place and the weather has been mild.

Yesterday we drove to a beach about ten miles distant for a swim and curry tiffin. On the way we stopped at a Welfare Home where about two hundred people are accommodated: the old, the incapacitated, widows and orphans, and other

unfortunate people. There were indeed some sad sights though the poor souls seemed happy enough. One in particular shocked us: a boy, possibly sixteen – hard to guess – very obviously a most pathetic idiot, approached us *on all fours* like an ape, and making a rather animal noise. He was greeting us, I'm sure, and was gentle. John just put his hand on him in a caring sort of way; didn't know what else to do. It was terribly disturbing.

Trengganu is the prime centre of the sarong-weaving industry, and at this Home we saw thread being spun and sarongs being woven. The soil is very poor in this area. Fishing is the greatest source of income and the typical sailing, or fishing-boats, called *prahus*, are the most graceful craft I have ever seen; they are slender and curved like a new moon. Some are gaily painted in one or two colours. The fishing boats go out at dawn and return in the early afternoon – a beautiful sight, with their square dark sails fat with wind. Every day we have swum here in the South China Sea in cool green water with a pleasant swell, skirted by seemingly endless stretches of pale gold sand shaded often by palms and casaurina trees.

The *kampongs* appear poor but the people simple, friendly folk, healthy looking. There would be plenty of fish to add to their rice, and as there were more cattle than one generally sees they would have milk also. In the township we bought sarongs at a tiny store providing just room for the three of us but we soon had an audience of four old dears all expressing their views. One, having her little joke, pulled down an ordinary printed georgette headscarf and said (hee! hee!) one of these would be nice for the Tuan! Even here it is known that old sarongs (which are hand woven of course) are prized by collectors so we were followed by cries of 'Sec'n'and, Mem' (second-hand).

This is a matriarchal State. Trading in the markets is all done by women and, I believe, in some areas, as throughout the State of Negri Sembilan, property can only be owned and therefore transferred through the female line – a wise law as it prevents the Malay men from getting into debt through borrowing on the security of their land. (The women are wiser!) John told me that a young Malay clerk in JB when told he was to be transferred to Trengganu burst into tears and said that some woman would get him, against his will!

Trengganu certainly is a back-water. John was stationed here in 1938 as Commissioner of Lands and Mines. He said that during the monsoon season which lasts roughly from November until March, it was entirely cut off from communication with the rest of the country; there was no railway – the only means of entry were by road, or from the sea up the mouth of the river Trengganu where, because of a shallow sandbank, passage was restricted to all but the smallest boats. Even the roads were often cut off by the flooding river. The only telephone was one linked to a police station in the adjoining State. So land dispute cases, which were almost always written down in Jawi script, he kept aside for transcribing and unravelling during that period of isolation. (Jawi looks rather like Arabic.) I can imagine how time stood still.

At 12.30 we set off for lunch on board the cruiser HMS *London*. She is lying a few miles off the coast. (This ship visited Malacca last year when the Captain gave a grand cocktail party on board to celebrate her twenty-first birthday.) One of the treasures on board is one of the original London Bow Bells. We got back here at about 3.00 and now I'm just lying back on the bed waiting for tea. Soon we are to

go down to the *padang* where the navy band of *London* will beat the Retreat, as they did in Malacca last year.

*The Rest House, Kota Bahru, Kelantan, 27.7.49*

We travelled from Trengganu by taxi, but I must tell you more about HMS *London* and Trengganu. I forgot to mention that the Admiral was on board – Rear Admiral Caslon – a very charming man whom John had met in Malacca when he and his wife and nieces dined at The Residency – that was while I was with you in Sydney. Perhaps I told you that many Trengganu residents had been invited to a cocktail party on board. It didn't include us as we'd been on board to lunch and had an invitation for the following night also. Well, a police launch was used to convey the forty or fifty guests out to the ship lying a few miles off-shore. But by the time they were to go back the sea had got so rough that the guests were informed that no one could leave that night – it would not be safe to attempt the crossing because of that long sandbank. This created great consternation, and I believe there were tears of protest. But the Senior Service, equal to any emergency, coped. Arrangements for bedding the guests were completed within the hour. The women all had cabins, fresh pyjamas supplied, even toothbrushes, the men had mattresses or camp-beds on deck. And the babies on shore? I was told that it was about midnight when five mothers were in the telegraph room dictating signals ashore. Two of the babies over whom there was such concern were still being breast fed. So – instructions went forward to the Police Department to go and collect those babies and take them to the hospital for a feed of mother-substitute; to take the night-sister back to the houses where other young children were, to take any necessary care of them.

Next morning the guests were safely returned home, to find all was well. And later, using HMS *London's* prized Bow Bell inverted, as a font, the Naval padre christened two of the babies. Congratulations to the Police! And another victory to the Navy!

On Sunday the Admiral, the Captain, and a Brigadier having a naval holiday, came to lunch at The Residency, and we have been invited to visit the Admiral in Singapore when we return to JB (he's going to stand me with my face in a corner for something disparaging I said about the picture of some stern faced old beaver, hanging in his ship). Incidentally, HMS *London* – this one – was never in action throughout the war. Isn't that extraordinary! However, she was involved in the recent Yangtse incident.

Sunday evening we went to the Trengganu Club. It is built of second-hand timber with thatched roof and upper walls of bamboo strips – all rather primitive except for one square of excellent dance floor which was a present from the Sultan of Trengganu – because he is fond of ballroom dancing. That night, as on every Sunday night, the company did folk and square dances: the Lancers, the Dashing White Sergeant, Petronella, Glasgow Highlanders – and various others.

Also in Trengganu we met a Malay prince who twelve years ago married an English girl in Oxford. He was a student there and she was, I think, a shop-keeper's daughter. She came back to this country with him and was somewhat disappointed in her reception and in the lack of wealth and finery she no doubt expected. They have three children but are now divorced, and Tungku Mahmud

(commonly known as Mickie) is now married to a Malay girl. He was eighteen years in England, having been sent to prep school there at the age of seven or eight. He told us that he often longs for more English-speaking company.

On Monday the official launch took us to an island about forty minutes voyage out. About a quarter of a mile from the island a small motor-boat was lowered into the water and we went ashore in that. Never have I seen anywhere so exquisitely lovely. It was like a fantasy place, an artist's creation of deep-green plush, dented and dimpled into an oval mound, skirted by pale sands that fringed water of heavenly colour and clarity like a pure gem, not quite green, not quite blue, and bedded with pointed, fairy-tale coral of pale green touched at rare intervals with some growth of gentian blue. Air clear, sea clear, sky blue, sun gold . . . the whole of ethereal perfection. Where the little boat beached we stepped onto warm clean sand overhung by palms and leafy spreading trees. Big rocky boulders broke up the encircling beach, creating a few tiny bays. At one end it was inches deep in shells and pieces of coral bleached white and dry. It was to me like something I had sometimes dreamt of as a child – like finding a pile of jewels or glittering coins. There were little silvery sounds of insects in the trees, and the gentle slap of the water on the rocks – no sign of human habitation anywhere, only nature perhaps 'as it was in the beginning'.

Now in Kelantan John remembers something of the time when he was stationed here – 1932 – when it was even more primitive than now. He recalled one particular excursion into the *ulu* when he went to inspect a mining area. He and the Warden of Mines from another state – Kelantan not being equal to such an appointment – set off early in the day with a few labourers armed with *parangs*. For about six miles they trudged along a narrow path through the jungle, the labourers hacking the way through ahead of them; came to a river; travelled in a small boat about another six miles – sun beating down; no back-supports – before arriving at their destination. The inspection done, they had to return the same way, coming to rest late in the afternoon at a rather primitive rest-house, thoroughly exhausted. He said that 'never had a cold bath (old *tong* and dipper) and a *stengah* been more refreshing'. At the rest-house was a third man – a forestry officer. He asked where they had walked and when told he enquired if they had met anyone. 'No, of course not!' He laughed and said that only a few days before in that same area of jungle he had come face to face with a tiger. That was no laughing matter; he described how he felt his hair rise on his scalp and was literally paralysed with fear and stood transfixed for what seemed like minutes. The tiger looked at him (perhaps decided that he would not be good eating) then turned away and disappeared into the undergrowth. He tried to run but his legs suddenly didn't belong to him and every obstacle seemed to claw at him to bar his way – as in a nightmare, he said, observing that he was 'afraid the tiger might change its mind – or perhaps not have a very good sense of direction!' He ended humorously, John remembered, saying 'You see, not even a tiger finds me attractive!' (He was a bachelor.)

John went on to paint me a word-picture of travelling along such a river. The impression I got was of water brown-green with the reflection of trees; the jungle growing right to the river's edge on either side; at intervals, clearings where small *kampongs* were established – and a pervading sense of silence broken only by the

chugging of the outboard motor on the boat, and the staccato humming of insects. How I would love to experience that!

He was in a rare, reminiscing mood and related that years ago the British Government issued a recommendation that Government men who were living with local women should do the honourable thing, and marry them. There were two brothers, each of whom had a Malay mistress; one married his, the other did not. The man who did was overlooked; the one who didn't rose in the service and was ultimately knighted!

*Kelantan, 28.7.49*

Yesterday was Hari Raya – the festival day I mentioned. Next door to the Rest House where we are is the home of the Malay State Secretary. It was most delightful to watch the procession of visitors to and from his house . . . all the lovely colours and colour combinations of the elegant Malay dress. There were pale pink *baju* and trousers with blue and silver sarong; ditto with green sarong; one entirely of pale blue satin; one entirely of pale grey. There came a guest in dark red with sarong of deeper red and gold. There were all the colours, except yellow which indicates royalty.

Our plane is due to leave at two o'clock tomorrow and we should reach Singapore at six o'clock. I do so hope you are feeling better. All my love.

*Johore Bahru, 2.8.49*

It is pretty certain that our leave is fixed to commence in February next. John thinks it will be best to go to Australia first, and we agree that I should precede him. This time we shall have six months leave plus travelling time – about eight months in all.

It is a beautifully cool day, somewhat chill, in fact. The cook's child is playing with a tin; that banging of a tin or clattering of a thrown spoon is an inevitable noise from the back. I suppose it pleases the children – all Chinese seem to love a tinny jangle – and it's harmless enough, so I let it be.

*Johore Bahru, 7.8.49*

Well, I had quite a time with the Queen last night – in my dreams, of course. She was wearing a cream lace dress and a hat of the same, with a large flat red rose under the brim – the hat worn well on the side of her head. We chatted of this and that and she told me that the girl who made her hat had never had a lesson in millinery. All the while I was trying to plant gladioli bulbs in a box of boiled rice. Now I wonder what Freud would have made of that?

From the 13th to the 16th of this month we are scheduled to visit two other districts less far away than our last official tour.

We are giving another hot buffet supper on Thursday night, in the garden, and soon I hope we may give a *satay* party. For this we would engage a few *satay* men who would bring their cooking equipment – and the food – with them, and cook in the garden.

John has three men guests here for tennis this afternoon. It is a hard red court sunk between grassy banks. I can hear the clop-clop of the balls.

He received a letter from the Sultan yesterday, in his own inimitable style. It reads as if typed by himself because it is so true to his way of expressing himself in English. I will give you an extract.

'An X-ray was taken and he found out that the bottom of the wounds are not cleared up. He ask me what I think of it. I said better cut it opened and clear the whole things out.' That referred to the abscesses he had on his royal seat. He had them lanced here but apparently the wounds did not heal properly. The letter was written from Grosvenor House Hotel in Park Lane, London.

I do hope that the power restrictions have eased. I read that a slight relaxing of the restrictions had been possible as a result of the coal which had been produced by the troops. But the reports of clashes between reds and moderates, and between police and reds in King Street is somewhat alarming. Truly, one contemplates the future with some misgiving.

#### *Johore Bahru, 11.8.49*

After telling you something about the Sultan in my last letter I feel I should follow up with the latest as reported from the press in London. His Highness read an account of a woman who was divorced and was given custody of their only child, but husband and child were still in Trinidad and the woman hadn't any money to get the child over to England. She was working to try and save the fare. So HH made great efforts to find the woman, which apparently wasn't easy, and presented her with a cheque for £500. Yet in many ways he's said to be money-wise, and quite hard-headed.

We are going to one of the Districts – Kluang – on Saturday morning early and we expect to be away until Sunday night. We have a very active programme arranged for us there.

#### *Johore Bahru, 16.8.49*

We enjoyed our visit to Kluang. John was on official inspection; I was visiting schools and meeting members of the Women's Service League, etc., and there were the usual official lunches and a tea-party. While at the tea-party, the Malay DO, our host, suddenly said to me, 'I want you to meet my little son!'; and from behind my chair someone appeared carrying a baby monkey – 'Wa-wa' (a gibbon). It is six months old, very dark grey with white around its round black eyes. Its body is about the size of a six-month-old kitten and it has a long straight tail. The fur is soft and slightly fluffy. But, the greatest charm of all . . . it was sucking a dummy! It put out a little hand to me and I picked it up whereupon it snuggled up like an affectionate child, its left arm right around my neck. It was positively the sweetest little animal I have ever, ever seen. The dummy was on a cord around its neck, and how it loved its comforter. I pulled it out of its mouth, with difficulty, in order to dip the thing in some ice cream. But the baby didn't want to part with it and gave a little squeal of complaint. Wa-was are known to be very affectionate and never spiteful. This little creature was offered to me to keep but it would be unwise for such as I to possess, for I can imagine how I would love

it . . . and what eventually would happen to it? If possible, when old enough, it should be returned to the jungle. I believe it was found – possibly the mother had been shot.

*Johore Bahru, 19.8.49*

I forgot to tell you – so taken up with the monkey was I – that at the tea-party in Kluang also were two Buddhist nuns. They were dressed quite like monks, with big wooden rosary beads around their necks, and their heads were shaven. They were not too spiritual to enjoy their tea – and I saw one spit out onto the grass beside her chair something she didn't care for!

Tonight we are going to Nelson House, to the Admiral's cocktail party (where I am to be stood with my face in the corner – so he said when I last saw him on *London*). It is remarkable that so many naval men have such burning blue eyes. Of course the tanned skin accentuates that colour.

*Johore Bahru, 23.8.49*

A university is to be established in Malaya. There is at present, in Singapore, a medical college and Raffles college which gives higher education. The university may be built in Johore Bahru. Much money is required, naturally, not only for the buildings but for the maintenance, staff salaries, etc. So a big drive is to be made in all States for funds. We had the Chancellor and Registrar here on Saturday. The Chancellor had addressed university committee members and representatives from all districts at a meeting that morning, after which the District representatives and the Chancellor and the Registrar came to lunch. There was much lively discussion before and during lunch. The Malays have more than equal competition from the Chinese here and are afraid of it. They lack the industry of the Chinese even if they equal them in mental capacity. There are scholarships which are given to Malays to send them abroad for study. Dr Allen, the Chancellor, didn't spare the Malays about the amount of study their people must be prepared for in order to compete.

We dined again with our very sophisticated Chinese friend – the Dato who is a member of Johore Executive Council. He asked us to stay on after his other guests had gone and we retired to his study for a few more whiskies, on his part anyway. Thus lubricated he became very frank and otherwise uninhibited, got onto the subject of politics and openly accused Britain of pursuing a policy of 'Divide and Rule'. This is absurd as we all know that Malaya is being prepared for independence in a few years hence. But this is a favourite allegation by the Chinese upper-crust who prefer not to believe that it is not so, but that Britain is in honour bound to protect the interests of Malays first, to give them time to catch up with the more clever, money-wise and experienced other races who are fortunate enough to share their country. The bone of contention is that Malays are favoured for Government appointment though it was largely the Chinese who were the source of Malaya's material prosperity. We believe that the Chinese might regard it as advantageous to their business interests to have some of their members on the 'inside'.

It is no secret that in anticipation of independence there is, and has been for some time, a Malay Officers Service which might be said to understudy the MCS and from which in fact some members have been appointed to the MCS. Thus a Malay staff fully trained and experienced in administration will be ready to take over competently when the British relinquish the reins of Government.

We enjoyed the Admiral's cocktail party though it was one of those affairs with about a hundred and fifty guests where you stand for about an hour and a half and pass inconsequential observations. (He didn't stand me in a corner as he had threatened to do!) Now we have an invitation to dinner at Air House as the guests of Air Marshal Sir Hugh and Lady Lloyd – we met him at the BA's house in Trengganu.

*Johore Bahru, 26.8.49*

Last night there was a dance for soldiers; I started organising it a couple of weeks ago and invited all the wives and daughters to come and bring a plate of supper. Naturally, we left husbands at home. The boys were rather shy to commence with but got over that eventually and we all enjoyed the evening. We entertained about 120 men. One came in a kilt, which was the occasion for someone to tell me that soldiers are not allowed out in their kilts after dark! One woman added to that statement: 'not without their bloomers, anyway'.

Just as an example of how 'the best laid plans of mice and MEMS . . .' can come unstuck: In order to impress on Malay children the importance of cleanliness to good health, at the end of the Ayer Molek school term I arranged for a stage illustration. I provided crepe-paper headgear, ugly face masks and vicious-looking antennae, for one group of children; white gear and many balloons, representing soap-bubbles, for the opposing group. The headmaster wrote the script which, of course, had the ugly 'germs' being vanquished in combat with the soap-bubbles. As might have been expected, when they got into action the 'germs' weren't having any, and the performance developed into a ding-dong battle which ended in a mêlée of burst balloons and crepe-paper – if not skin and hair – flying everywhere: a most entertaining, if not exemplary, lesson!

We're going soon to Singapore to buy new lampshades for the Residency. I hesitate to spend Government money on luxuries like that when I know there are bad housing conditions, but John assures me that if we don't spend our vote it cannot be used on anything else and will just go back into the Government coffers. But it assaults my conscience. Some day I'll give you a description of a slum. It does trouble me that people live that way and I wish I could contribute more to their wellbeing. I do what I can so that my life is very busy and by the end of the day I'm sometimes frustrated and weary. But there are great rewards. Night brings coolness and a web of sounds that somehow don't disturb but emphasise the quiet: the toc-toc's vocal full-stops; the silvery pizzicato of tree frogs and insects; the distant throbbing of Malay drums, so appropriately 'Eastern'. For me there is magic in all this that never stales.

*Johore Bahru, 30.8.49*

I feared another baby bird problem recently. We had a terrific storm in the afternoon and when it was over I walked out with Bruno and, passing a garden bed, I saw a drenched baby bird crouching on the earth – it appeared only half-fledged. I picked it up and held it against my body until I had made a nest for it in a little bowl and took it upstairs to spend the night on our bedside table under the mosquito net (if unprotected I think a bat could attack a small bird). When it was dry I could see it was quite fledged except for full tail feathers and some of the trimmings. By 7.30 next morning I had taken it downstairs and returned it to where I had found it. Within one minute the first parent found it, with much joyous fluttering by baby. Soon the second parent came and tried to induce it to fly onto a low branch – but baby didn't follow. So while Mum and Dad were away foraging I put it on the branch to which they had tried to encourage it. Soon Mum found it there and fed it. And so I left them. The day was before them and I have no doubt that with the wisdom God gave them they managed to see their little one safely home.

I have mentioned the small zoo in JB – owned by the Sultan's eldest son Tungku Makota. Recently while on a walk with Bruno we went there. We were quite amused at his reaction to the captives, and at their reaction to him. We had him on his lead, of course. He was most interested in the honey bear, and stood up on his hind legs to see better. The Australian rosellas and white cockatoos also quite intrigued him, with their near-human squarking. Then we visited the tiger. Strangely, Bruno evinced no particular concern – but the tiger certainly did. It came down to the bars of its cage, stood up on hind legs and roared. Then sat back with tongue protruding, obviously thinking, 'What a luscious snack, if I could only get at it!' I was quite frightened – there is such pent power and savagery in that creature.

*Johore Bahru, 2.9.49*

We went to dinner last night at the home of the Air Marshal Sir Hugh Lloyd. It was a very pleasant evening and a good dinner. Lady Gimson, wife of the Governor of Singapore, was on his right and I on his left, and he regaled us throughout dinner with stories of his experiences in India where he spent ten years with the RAF between the two wars. His force was mostly engaged with endeavouring to discipline the frontiersmen. They would come down and maraud villages over the frontier, stealing whatever they fancied, including women. Then the RAF would have the job of dropping leaflets telling them if they did not return the loot, deliver up murderers, or whatever was required by law, the Air Force would harass them indefinitely. They would be given a fortnight or ten days' warning, and if they had not obeyed, the threat would commence to be carried out. Eventually they would obey.

Air House is a large steamlined white house, very new looking, much like a pleasure cruiser. Sir Hugh was in charge of Air Defence in Malta during the war. I have never seen so many medals on anyone's chest as he wore last night; he would be most unsafe in a lightning storm!

*Johore Bahru, 6.9.49*

We had the old Tungku Ampuan – the Sultan's sister – here to afternoon tea on Sunday. I think I told you something about her before. She resembles HH in face and in wit but, whereas his body is tall and straight, hers is small and very bent, though there is less than two years' difference in age between them. She arrived politely at exactly 4.30, dressed as usual in white starched *baju*, natural silk sarong, black cashmere socks, black sandshoes – and her gold anklets. She has only a scanty wisp of white hair which is twisted in a wee 'snail' as the Malays refer to it (their word *siput*) – at the centre back of her head. Her teeth are framed in gold, and she chews cloves constantly. She says of herself that she is 'like a monkey out of the jungle'.

What a memory she has. When she was a young woman she travelled with her husband to Europe and they lived in England, and in Switzerland; visited the European capitals. She can remember, without hesitation still, the names of the London theatres, which is more than I can do without stopping to think. She remembers the names of governors, advisers, and many lesser folk – hundreds of them – whom she has met in her long lifetime; tells you about their wives, their habits, etc. She was speaking of Paris, and I said that people there were naughty, weren't they. She answered, 'Ask the Tuan!' She is very embarrassing with her gifts: we often get some fruit and a cake delivered from her, and on Sunday she brought me 'The American Woman's Cook Book' – a beautiful recipe book in which she has written her brief message, and her signature in Jawi. I think that was because John had facetiously told her on several occasions that he was neglected because I spent my time in Welfare work. We must take her to a cinema show soon. She loves it. One night some friends did just that; it was an exciting film so every quarter hour she had to be taken to the toilet: the excitement was too much for her. After tea John had three other men come for tennis. So the old Tungku toddled down to the courts on my arm and we sat watching the game – more or less. The wife of one of the men joined us and I'm afraid we didn't really follow closely because there were no lulls in the conversation. 'Gossip, gossip,' as the old lady often says – in English.

*Johore Bahru, 9.9.49*

We had our moonlight supper party in the garden last evening. It was so pleasant: a lovely evening, with mixed company. After supper I went over to talk to the Sultan's old secretary ('Castanets'), offered the box of cigars from which he politely took one – but a little later I spotted him smoking a common old local cheroot. He knew I saw and we both giggled as he tried to hide it behind his back. He's a darling old gentleman, but he has loose dentures which rattle away constantly. Hence my secret, affectionate nickname for him.

There will be a two-day holiday soon and we have been invited to spend it on a little island where there is a bungalow. It should be lovely. The days recently are surprisingly cool, with quite a lot of cloud.

Bruno is a father – we think. He certainly did his best to prevent any other pooch from establishing a claim to the honour. And, this afternoon returning from our walk he found a little puppy abandoned in a drain. We brought it home, washed

and fed it, and in due course will try to find it a home.

*Johore Bahru, 10.9.49*

I have a Welfare Committee meeting soon, so will commence this letter meantime. It is a hot morning with an atmosphere somehow reminiscent of a Sydney mid-summer morning. I could easily imagine that conglomerate sound of mingled shouts and cries and laughter and conversation that rises from those stippled spots of colour that are people on a crowded beach. Nowhere in Malaya is that sight, or sound, repeated. There are great stretches of clean white sand on the east coast, as I have described to you, and slightly rolling water. But along those endless-seeming miles of beach scarcely a soul is ever to be seen – only the old Malay picking up dried palm fronds for firewood; the little sailing craft with their bow-shaped outline and dark sails etched on the distant stretch of sea.

From time to time, over several weeks past, in the early hours of morning, I have heard someone coughing and by now I have had so much association with TB that I know whoever is coughing is another victim. Can I find him? I've been keeping eyes and ears open; have asked a question or two of the staff, but without result, yet I don't want to make my search too pointed or I shall drive the cougher away. Most of the people are terrified of discovering they have the disease, so rather than go to the doctor they will continue to cough and spit out regardless of spreading infection. That is not quite so general these days when so much propaganda is being spread to educate the public about TB. But the attitude I quote is still common enough. Yesterday morning early this cougher awakened me and I went out onto the verandah to see what I could see. It was quite dark – about 3.30 – and I couldn't see a soul in the direction from which the coughing came – until suddenly a figure sitting under a tree was revealed as he struck a match and lit a cigarette. He can only be either a vagrant or a policeman! Our police-guards have a guard room in the garden. However, the police are X-rayed before they join the force and at intervals after that. So the mystery remains unsolved.

We are reading Andre Maurois' *The Art of Living*. It contains essays on 'The Art of Living'; 'The Art of Marriage'; 'The Art of Friendship'; 'The Art of Thinking'; of 'Leadership'; 'Working'; 'Growing Old'; and 'Happiness'. It is a book all young people should possess as it contains such warm, sound, humanly-wise counsel.

*On the train to Segamat, Johore, 19.9.49*

We boarded the train at 8.30 this morning and have just finished breakfast. John is lighting his pipe for the first smoke of the day and we are generally settling down for our journey which should end at about one o'clock. Time for a long letter to you – So . . .

The big day – Saturday – was the Sultan's birthday and a public holiday in Johore. The thanksgiving service in the morning was all dignity and splendour. The ceremony was held in the throne room of the Istana Besar. The drive through the Istana grounds was lined with flags, the yellow of Malay royalty being the predominant colour, with blue and red – the State colours. Great beds of alternate red and yellow canna lilies bordered the drive. The entrance of the Istana itself is

up a broad flight of about fifty steps. These were flanked by guards in uniform, complete with swords. I wore my rather smart, but demure new pencil-stripe dress. In the entrance foyer we were welcomed by the Sultan's old secretary, with his percussive teeth (bless the old darling!), and the under-secretary who ushered us into the throne room. The yellow-covered dais with two red plush chairs awaited its sovereign and his consort. Beside and behind the throne stood attendants in white *baju* and trousers and black shiny knee-length sarongs, black velvet *songkoks*, each man holding a gold and silver mace or standard, several holding ceremonial umbrellas – not unfurled. They were of embroidered white silk, I could see, with fringe, and an enamelled blue crown at the top. Everyone who had decorations and medals wore them. Besides attendants in white and black, there were Datos (elderly honoured men) dressed completely in black satin, who carried shorter staffs of silver and gold, or some other of the ceremonial appurtenances. Then there were Malay State officials in their white uniforms somewhat like John's, with brass buttons and bullioned gorgets at the neck – but instead of helmets they wore black velvet *songkoks* with a Malay emblem in steel at the front. There were also two Kathis, four Imams and the Mufti. In order of importance they may be compared with archbishop downward. However, John tells me that their actual functions have no similarity to those of Christian religious dignitaries. The Muslim religious were dressed in ankle-length black caftans, similar to what are worn by Jewish rabbis, I fancy, and on their heads were abbreviated, woven fez caps with folds of white cloth around the base. Several of these men held religious items – one a prayer written in Arabic upon orange satin; another a silver fluted bowl containing black cubes of some incense.

There were about a hundred guests in the throne room, and many others – particularly Malay women – on the open verandahs at either side, only separated from the room by slender pillars. HH the Sultan is in England.

At 9.50 the Regent, Tungku Makota and his wife arrived; he in a white uniform of Lieutenant-Colonel of the Johore Military Forces, complete with sword and ribbons and decorations. He is rather heavily built. Apparently there had not been a rehearsal of his programme, for instead of walking down past the dais and into the room behind, as he should have done, he, in spite of some difficulty, somewhat because of his sword, heaved himself up onto the dais before anyone could stop him, then promptly had to come down again, go into the room behind, and then come forward, in the wake of some court officials, in accordance with Court procedure. He had to stand while the holy men chanted a prayer. The Muslims do not place hands together in prayer, but they are held out, palms slightly elevated, in an attitude of supplication. At the end of the prayer the hands are brought to the mouth.

After the prayer the Honours List was read out and the Honours conferred. Five or six new Datos were created – it is singularly a Johore honour, but may be conferred on anyone whom the Sultan of Johore wishes to recognise. The European principal medical officer was so honoured. The insignia – a many-pointed silver star on a sort of Lord Mayor's chain. There was a lesser honour conferred on humbler people, like long-service police – retired I suppose – and military members: that is the Sultan's Medal. Poor darlings, they mostly wore white *baju* and trousers and dark, short sarongs – their *bajus* stiff with starch, the

crisp whiteness almost incongruous with the rather wan brown faces of most. And they all wore shoes, nearly all new shoes, which probably hurt like the devil, and socks, which seldom if ever would be likely to torture their brown captives again once the ceremony ended.

By about 10.45 it was over, and the guests assembled in the reception hall, for drinks and congratulations. Terraced lawns sweep down to a broad road on the other side of which is the sea – that part of it which is called the Johore Straits and which separates Singapore from the mainland. At 11.30 we went home to have a rest and change before the official luncheon.

I think I have described the Istana Besar to you before and that extraordinary drawing room with its clutter of Victorian museum pieces, and oriental furniture and bric-à-brac, and the curious lounge suite built entirely of enormously heavy glass – from Vienna, I think.

We assembled for a pre-luncheon aperitif and at 1.30 went down to the palatial dining hall. Again, I was seated next to Malcolm McDonald. He recently returned from a visit to Japan and talks with General McArthur; he admires McArthur tremendously. This time the Sultan's gold dinner service was used.

#### Johore Bahru, 23.9.49

We are safely back from Segamat, thank God. John had to go through some dangerous country there – Segamat is a regular bandit's nest. I went on from there on Tuesday by train to KL to attend a Central Welfare Council meeting on the Wednesday and returned by the night train yesterday morning.

There is not much about our visit to Segamat to report but I'll tell you what I think might interest you.

Following afternoon tea on Monday we went by car to two *kampongs* where John inspected the Kampong Guard. They were any age from fifteen to sixty-five, some without any foot covering – but they did their bit of drill smartly enough, the half dozen men in the front rows holding the rifles. They don't each have a firearm, but have a duty roster and whoever are on duty take the rifles for their watch. Malays do not lack courage – they are more than a match for the Chinese terrorists in that respect. From the second *kampong* we went on foot: John, the Administrative Officer – European, the District Officer who is a Malay, the three wives, the *Penghulu* (headman) and a string of armed police. We walked by a ragged, rather overgrown path through what was once a rubber estate, to a large padi area – padi fields are called *sawah*. The padi stood quite high, emerald green, but without any grain as yet. It must have been an amusing sight, this long snake of people mincing like tight-rope walkers along the narrow raised paths, concentrating on keeping our feet – a single line of wobbling humanity waffling above the tall, confident blades of green. Without mishap we reached a little oasis about half-way across the *sawah*. There were seats and a table under a little *atap*-roofed open shed and from there one could look to either side along quite two miles of splendid padi. The padi-fields are, of course, always at a lower level than the land surrounding them, to a greater or lesser extent, as they stand a few inches in water. From either side of this particular *sawah* the land, jungle-covered, rose abruptly to a height of perhaps six feet in some places, maybe forty feet in others.

The picture I want to convey is of an irregular bright green gem deep in a dark plush setting.

We came back at length to the *kampong* where tea was awaiting us in the school house. How lavish these poor people are in their hospitality – and how well they cook. Though we had had tea with our hosts I must say my eyes fairly dazzled at the splendid array of pretty and delicious looking confections set down for us. Such delicacies – many of them – are made of a certain type of rice which is very glutinous, coconut, and sugar got from the flower of coconut or sago palm. That sugar is called *gula malacca* – *gula* is the word for sugar; *Malacca* was once the name used for this entire peninsula. The Malays also use agar-agar, a gelatine made from seaweed, to make jelly confections. I must say I love their cakes, but not everyone does. Tea came as usual thick with milk and sugar.

I told you in an earlier letter that I expected to visit what is erroneously called a Sakai school. This was rather a disappointment – and incidentally, the people object to the term Sakai; they are Jakun and are jungle people. When we reached the *kampong* where the Jakun are being housed, we found that many had left for other districts. A few women and children remained, and about three men. They are more negroid in feature, unlike the Malays, and like the Malays are people of delicate manners. I presented them with a large tin of sweets, cooed over a small baby – and off we went. They would not have been living so near civilization but for the fact that fairly recently they were mistreated and frightened by the terrorists – so they came down there for protection.

#### *Johore Bahru, 4.10.49*

I am feeling very sad – and angry! Quite early this morning I was in the emergency ward of the hospital when a Chinese woman came in carrying the wrapped body of a small child. She was crying pitifully and rocking the little one as in life she had done. The child's face looked like a wax doll. The story is that in the small hours of morning bandits had fired into the shop-house where the family lived – not very far from Johore Bahru – and taken away her husband. A bullet had struck the little girl and killed her instantly. The police can't be everywhere – the devilish bandits have the advantage.

The puppy we found in a drain is sitting under my chair at the moment. Having done all the wee-wee it can it's now waiting for more wee-wee I suppose. I'm afraid this so-called Moses is a girl. I thought she was but John – boob that he is – gave the opinion that she was a boy; he hadn't given much attention to the question, anyway. Bruno doesn't like Moses, Rosie or whatever; Bruno doesn't like anything very much apart from Bruno, us and the Cookie. He has inherited his beauty from his chow ancestor, obviously, and with it goes, what is termed in Malay, a *sombong* personality. The word means 'haughty'.

The Malay language is colourful. For instance: the word *kereta* means a vehicle for transport, so the express train – which doesn't deign to stop at all stations – is *kereta sombong*; the ordinary train is *kereta api* (fire carriage); a detective is *mata gelap* (eyes in the dark); a policeman is a *mata mata* (eyes); *mata hari* – the sun (eye of the day); and thumb is *ibu jari* (grandmother finger).

Today is a holiday in Johore, and so was yesterday. Sunday was not officially a holiday but was in fact because of a motor and cycle race – the 'Johore Grand Prix' which started at about ten o'clock and didn't finish until three o'clock – without a break for lunch. It was very exciting, without any serious mishaps. We had grandstand seats, of course, and I was asked to garland the winners. All nationalities took part and the crowd of spectators lining the route was dense. Most competitors came from Singapore as did many of the spectators.

The Sultan recently rebuked in the press his Prime Minister – 'Mentri Besar'. The Minister has resigned. The Sultan will be coming back for a while in November – there may be all manner of fireworks for they are both very strong-charactered people. Never a dull moment in Johore!

*Johore Bahru, 25.10.49*

We returned on Sunday evening from our weekend on St. John's Island. It was previously a quarantine station but now detainees under the emergency regulations are kept there. It is a most lovely spot, beautifully laid out in gardens. Our hostess is the senior Health Matron of Singapore and we stayed with her in what was the Matron's bungalow. There is a caretaker who acts as house-boy; we took our cook and Kay her *amah* so we had comfortable service and did ourselves very well. We enjoyed delightful swimming in a pool – not in the sea, which is considered unsafe there owing to the prevalence of sharks. The island is only half an hour's journey by launch from Singapore.

We are starting a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals here. Four enthusiastic women have undertaken to get it going.

This evening we are to dine at our Chinese friend's house in Singapore after which we go to a special cinema show in aid of the university fund. He is a wealthy man and entertains in fine style – grander than we could afford despite our allowance. It is primarily the Chinese who have wealth in this country, and I must say they are very generous hosts.

To celebrate the Regent's birthday there is to be a tea-party at his house on Friday, and a dance at the International Club on Saturday night.

And John has a touch of tennis elbow!

*Johore Bahru, 28.10.49*

We had another buffet supper party in the garden last night. An hour before the scheduled time the garden lights were tested as usual and, horror of horrors, there was no light. Urgent summoning of the electricians and PWD people! It was discovered that wild bees had nested in the cavity at the base of the lamp stanchion which contained the fuses – or some such – and caused whatever it was. How awful it would have been if during the party we'd had a blackout! (I expressed the opinion that the bees had been planted there by communists!)

Friction between John and the military hierarchy, personified in the Brigadier – not Hedley – who wants to use the police – already seriously understaffed despite repeated requests to the Foreign Office to augment the Force – in areas which John considers are distinctly Army responsibility. The dispute was referred to the High Commissioner whose decision was in complete agreement with John's.

*Johore Bahru, 31.10.49*

This morning I am to attend the marriage of an Indian girl in the Welfare Home. It is rather shocking, until one gets accustomed to it, that Indian marriages – and Chinese too – are mostly arranged, without any fondness and sometimes without even acquaintance, between the contracting parties.

I have not yet found a wife for our Mandor as he would like, but have now written to the Chief Social Welfare Officer on his behalf.

Moses – so named mistakenly – is still with us, but adaptations of the name such as Rosie, Mosette, don't seem to have 'stuck'. Now John has given her another name, one which comes to the tongue readily, but is indelicate . . . it is 'Modess'. Isn't he a wretch!

We shall be off early tomorrow for Batu Pahat, Muar (both official visits) and then across the border to Malacca – just to stay with friends overnight. We shall have to return to JB promptly; mustn't dally outside our State for long in these troubled times. The murders and mayhem still go on. Some time ago the terrorists thought up a terrible device: they strung wire taut across roads known to be used by security forces, at a height which permitted the front of the vehicle to pass underneath but met the necks of men standing behind. A number of men were cleanly decapitated in this way before the warning signal could reach all vulnerable quarters. Such hate, such violence! But one must bear in mind that the murderers are so few, and good people so many.

I dream about you, I know you're not well – and here I am helpless to do anything about it but pray and send my love to you – and to you all.

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*In the first week of November 1949 I received cabled news that my mother was seriously ill, so I flew home. (I had felt vague unease about her since I had dreamt that she was a spool of silk which I held, that the spool was turning rapidly and the thread was running out.)*

Following are extracts from John's letters to me

*Johore Bahru, 11.11.49*

My darling Jean,

I wish your telegram would come!

We had another grand concert last night. The pianist in the Liszt concerto was terrific – the rows and rows of skipping octaves in both hands just took one's breath away. On the way home we were thinking of you in the clouds. They all came in my car and I had a nightcap with the Gordons before setting out for the *ulu*.

Had an unexpected visitor in the evening before going out – another 'boy friend' of yours – Mr Evans from Singapore. He had seen the report of your impending departure and hurried over in the hope of seeing you. Wasn't it sweet of

him? It was unfortunate I was going out and couldn't entertain him for long, but I will invite him to my next party.

*Johore Bahru, 5.12.49*

The Police Commission has arrived in Malaya. They are coming to Johore from the 11th to the 23rd and are staying with me. The Commission consists of Sir Alexander Maxwell and a retired civil servant of the Home Office, and the Chief Constable of Kent and the Secretary of the London Metropolitan Police. The Sultan sent me a copy of a letter he had sent to Creech Jones asking that an ex-Malayan policeman should be added as Gurney, and Gray, Head of Police, were both from Palestine. Very sound, in my opinion, but nothing has come of it. I thought it better the Commission should stay with me than at Bukit Serene; I may be able to tell them a few home truths.

*Johore Bahru, 24.12.49*

Yesterday old Dato Haji came to wish me a happy Christmas and presented me with a calendar with the photo of King George and a very pretty little purse, I think it's a lizard, with a zip, for you. Wasn't it kind of him? If you can find time I am sure he would appreciate a little note from you.

I called on Tungku Ampuan on her birthday. She was very thrilled that you had remembered the event and showed me the folder you had sent her.

Jane and Margaret are downstairs arranging a Christmas tree – a branch from one of our conifers – for this evening. How I miss you!

*Johore Bahru, 27.12.49*

Well, my darling, I wonder what sort of Christmas you have had – if Mum maintained progress you would have had a happier time than you thought possible.

We had quite a successful party, I think. Anyhow it went on until 1.30 a.m. We didn't seem to do very much but everybody was very happy – though it felt to me rather hollow without you. If you had been here we could have done our star turn: 'There's a hole in my bucket'. The treasure hunt went well, although I suppose there was a lot of good-natured cheating. Margaret suddenly tumbled to the anagram and won the prize.

The Christmas pud. was good but I don't know what happened to all the charms Elise said she put in, as hardly anybody discovered any. One wonders if it is possible to have swallowed a pagoda without knowing it. However, so far as I know there have been no casualties.

I haven't had any reply from Dr Rawson about finding a wife for the Mandor, although I sent him a reminder. Poor Mandor!

Not much more of the year to go; then I'll be able to talk about seeing you 'next month'. I love you most truly.

*Johore Bahru, 3.1.50*

Looking at my diary I find the first item of interest is Mosette/Modestina – erstwhile Moses. I invited the Renwicks to tea and introduced M. who, of course, wriggled appropriately. Mrs Renwick was immediately captivated by her black nose and bright eyes, so now she has found a good home. The guttersnipe went off in her motor car. Indeed, I wouldn't have minded keeping her if I hadn't been going so soon. She is an affectionate animal – not like some others I know but wouldn't mention.

We are having a meeting of the new State Welfare Committee on the 12th. The roofing of the hall at the Leper Camp has come up for consideration again. The District Committee is now asking the State Committee for \$3,000. I am visiting the Camp with Dr Cameron on Thursday and will meantime try to get hold of the correspondence. However, it seems to be a good cause and I think we should pay and then argue if need be.

Miss Fernandez flew home on the 1st. She asked me to give you her love and said you had saved her life. She was on the verge of collapse when you came along and shouldered all her welfare burdens and made everything smooth.

Have you seen the New Year's Honours? If so you'll observe that ——— is at last a Sir. What a blessing he got away before the Japs came and so was able to be a member of the Planning Unit which produced the wonderful – soon discredited – Malayan Union. I regret that, and that others have been omitted far more worthy than some who have been honoured. That's how it goes!

Tunku Makhota in a recent conversation with me became very confidential and said he heard Dato Onn was horrified that Johore had accepted H. as acting . . . I suppose that is on account of his connection with C. (he was his secretary) whom Onn had refused to accept.

*Johore Bahru, 15.1.50*

I'm missing you horribly. Political trouble continues in its all too familiar mindless way. Dato Wong Shee Fung visited the Majeedie Detainee Camp yesterday and was attacked by the detainees. He didn't come to any real harm but in the course of the fracas the guards shot and killed two detainees.

*Later:* Hall of the Police came down enquiring into the attack. It seems some of the detainees wanted to know why, since we had recognised the Communist government of China, they were still being detained, and when Wong Shee Fung told them that that had nothing to do with him they became abusive and started to use big sticks which they employ for carrying the food tubs. There were about thirty of them, and Hall thinks they might have finished him off if the guards hadn't fired.

Mrs Emmett tells me your wool is a great success and that a lot more of the patients are taking up knitting. They are making pullovers and the colour doesn't seem to matter, so you needn't worry about it. I will write to Lady Gurney before I leave and tell her what the idea is in case any more arrives.

The Masseys were at S.Q.'s dinner party. Massey asked me to send his regards to 'the beloved'. He has asked the Australian Wool Board for more wool for your patients.

*Johore Bahru, 20.1.50*

Dr Lawson tells me they must recommend that K. should go on leave within the next two or three months otherwise he will break down. Another victim of Gray who, far from giving credit to the over-worked police force, or showing any understanding or support, seems to get sadistic satisfaction from making their lives even more difficult. No matter what their problems are he is unapproachable. Perhaps the Sultan had Gray's measure with his forthright remark, remember? 'You're another one from Palestine: a bloody fine mess you made of that!'

The Mandor tells me a potential wife has been found for him at Seremban, so he went off last night for a week. Presumably will bring the lady back, if he finds she is fair.

*Johore Bahru, 23.1.50*

The Police and the Army in Johore are very pleased with themselves today. Yesterday at Labis the Ghurkas, acting on police information, killed twenty-two bandits and wounded another five out of a gang of thirty-nine. That's the biggest bag there has been anywhere in Malaya. Knight adds that, of course, no congratulations have been received from Gray.

McVilby and his escort were ambushed the other day while on their way to a squatter area in Segamat. They were on foot, fortunately, and chased the bandits, but there were no casualties on either side.

The Indians are celebrating their 'independence' by a tea party in the Audience Hall of the Government Offices on Thursday and Dr Sherman has asked me to say a few words. Perhaps I shall remind them that there is really no independence for any nation; that in fact, cooperation is a better idea. I haven't worked it out yet.

*Johore Bahru, 26.1.50*

I have not long got back from celebrating the Republic of India. There were about 450 people; the tables were tastefully set out by Robinsons, in the Audience Hall. I was pleasantly surprised to hear the generous tributes that the speakers paid to Britain, and how the British Constitution was held up for admiration. If Pandit Nehru thinks along the same lines all should be well.

It's about time I was off, as the servants are quarrelling. When I came home the other day the caretaker and Ah Ling were having a very wordy battle. The former accuses Ah Ling of not giving him enough cleaning material, oil for the floors, etc., and that Ah Ling makes *untong* out of it. Ah Ling says all three of them are against him – probably he has been taking all the profit and now they are kicking! Anyhow, I hope they will carry on until I go.

*Johore Bahru, 28.1.50*

I read that a tornado struck Sydney on Wednesday, killing seven people. I expect your mother's house would have had it full-blast there, between harbour and ocean, so I hope all of you and the house escaped damage.

It was quite a small luncheon party at Bukit Serene. (Perhaps I omitted to tell you of the invitation.) Baillie MacAshlan of Glasgow was there. He knows a lot about local government and has been sent out by the Colonial Office to talk about it (he told me he was in the shoe trade: doesn't seem very relevant!) Also there were Mr and Mrs B. from Singapore; the Chinese lady who wears all those jewels; her husband the manager of the Chinese Overseas Bank – and Tan Cheng Lock. T.C.L. told the lady with the jewels all about your charms. Had you been working on him??

The unfortunate Mandor returned yesterday, without a wife. He said the lady who was recommended to him was suffering from a skin disease which would take six months to cure if she went into hospital. So he drew the line at that. He tells me, however, that there are said to be plenty of eligible women at Seremban and asks if I'll write a *surat* for him, so will try again.

*Johore Bahru, 8.2.50*

This morning Father Chin called on me and gave me a prayer book for you because you had done a lot for his orphans. Whatever assistance you obtained for them is still being carried on and he is very grateful.

Tungku Makhota has asked me to a farewell luncheon at the Istana on Sunday – a male party, I believe.

Nobody has been able to find a wife for the Mandor yet. I had a reply from Shearer to say women of marriageable age are snapped up before he can lay hands on them – so to speak – and that his orphans are all too young.

Ah Ling came in distress a few days ago to say that nine of his chickens had died during the night. I had the vet along and he says they have a disease that often affects poultry in this country and wipes them out wholesale. All the survivors have been inoculated, but there may be more deaths before the injections can take effect. Ah Ling's distress appears to be all the greater because none of the cook's birds have died. I suppose it is rather a blow just before the Chinese New Year, which is on the 17th – and which I shall fortunately escape.

*Johore Bahru, 10.2.50*

I'm so excited at the prospect of being on my way to you soon. I am to go on board the *Westralia* on Tuesday 14th – having signed a declaration that I shall not complain about austere food, inadequate bathing facilities, etc., etc. – as if I weren't used to all that sort of thing in the recent past.

Ah Jee, now boarded out as you know, came to see me last night as he heard I was going away. I suppose the doctors are right about him but he doesn't look at all ill. Mrs Rees is giving him eggs and milk – he seems quite cheerful.

Good night, my Sweet. You, I hope, are by this time lying oblivious in the arms of Morpheus. Would that I were Morpheus!

*Note: John's leave commenced in March 1950, when he joined me in Sydney. My dear mother died on 30th March 1950.*

*In April we left on Orcades to spend the rest of our leave in England and Scotland. We returned to Johore on 1st October to resume our former duties and undertakings. The following chapters are drawn from our diary records; from a few letters to friends and relations, which they kept; and from recollections alone. The fact that in most cases they are less detailed, less 'vital' than the letters to my mother does not, I believe, need to be explained. In order to preserve continuity, however, I have presented all in the style of letters. Precise dates for most are either not available, not necessary or have been omitted deliberately.*

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*Johore Bahru, October 1950*

Our servants certainly welcomed us back very warmly. They emphasised that they had not had a happy time during our absence.

We were shocked to find the dining room and morning room floors had collapsed, apparently under the weight of people doing Scottish dancing, the saboteurs being white ants – sneaky things! (Or perhaps Communists!!)

It is disappointing indeed to know that the emergency is as serious as ever. Still there is not enough support from the Colonial Office – and perhaps insufficient expertise yet in jungle tactics. The wretched terrorists are, of course, hard to get at – and as fast as some are killed, doubtless they're reinforced from China. But, they won't win, so it is all so wasteful.

Unfortunately, the miserable emergency has become somewhat of a preoccupation. Last night, during a party given by Malcolm McDonald at Bukit Serene, a message was delivered to the Governor of Singapore who was also a guest that rioting had broken out in Singapore. We were all aghast. 'Communists,' we concluded. There was a stunned silence, then the Governor hurried away, of course. Soon we discovered that the cause was something quite different: just a little Dutch girl, Maria Hertzog. Some of the story is obscure, but briefly it is that her mother before going away presumably had given her into the custody of a Malay family in 1942, believing, no doubt, that she would be safer with them. Naturally enough, during the eight years with her foster parents she had been brought up as a Muslim and, in fact, had lately become betrothed to a Muslim. When the Dutch mother arrived recently to claim the girl, which apparently she had a legal right to do, the authorities concerned allowed her to be placed in a convent for the time being until the case can be formally heard, in court. To the Muslim community this is unjust and has religious importance – so they are up in arms. Radio and press are buzzing with reports of the rioting; it is serious. People are really afraid, for there is fear of the disturbance spreading through the mainland. So John has asked the Mentri Besar, and senior Malay members of the Executive Council, to use their controlling influence in Johore.

Yes, we were happy to come back after our leave. It is really home to me now, more strongly felt since Mama has gone and the family home is to be sold.

It was gratifying to find that the various committees and voluntary welfare undertakings have been active as before; these are now so well established that they continue on their own momentum, largely – or so it seems.

*Johore Bahru, June 1951*

Dear N.,

How nice to have a long letter from you after such a long time. As you want to know something of our social activities I will mention the latest which was our garden party on the King's birthday – an annual event.

This year, because it fell during the Muslim fasting month – food being taken only after sundown – it was held in the evening and was very pleasant. The evening was cool, starlit, and with a gentle breeze; our garden was softly illuminated, and HM Marine Band supplied delightful music from a discreet distance. John and I stood at the edge of the drive and welcomed the guests as they arrived – about 250 members of all the resident nationalities (normally there would have been more, but people from up-country were naturally unwilling to travel after dark owing to the emergency). What a lively kaleidoscope they made as they grouped, and moved, over the muted green of the lawn. The Malays – both men and women – in their special occasion clothes are perhaps the most colourful, though Indian sarees are also brilliant; both races are fond of quite vivid shades which they wear so well. The Chinese cheongsam also looks gorgeous, the women often so slender; so soignée. All these people were most decorative. We had a few chairs scattered about; and among our guest was our delightful old friend Tungku Ampuan – the Sultan's sister. She was escorted by HH's eldest son who always treats her with affection and enormous respect.

We shall be with you next year. Meanwhile, love to you all.

*Johore Bahru, 1951*

Luncheon today at Bukit Serene, to meet the Maharani Vizianagram (what a lovely anagram that would make!)

The bandits made a foolhardy assault on the remotest Resettlement area, at night, hoping to break through. They were raked with machine gun fire from the guards in their corner turrets. The bandits fled, leaving four dead.

Malcolm McDonald, a very relaxed and amusing host. (It is reported that to entertain his guests he sometimes walks downstairs upside down – on his hands. This was not one of those occasions.)

Now there's friction between him and the Sultan. HH learned that Malcolm sometimes brings Dyaks from Borneo to stay at Bukit Serene, and indignantly told him to get out of his house, that he resented those jungle Dyaks putting their bottoms on his chairs and sleeping in his beds. Malcolm can't find another suitable house yet so HH has sent PWD engineers to cut off the water supply from the swimming pool at Bukit Serene. That's just the first move!

Malcolm is in fact far too democratic. Audrey McDonald dislikes his Borneo jaunts and is not at ease with such exotic people. She told me of going once – probably the first and last time – with him to one of the 'long houses' where families of Dyaks live together. Their hosts were providing refreshments for them

when she noticed that one of the men making sandwiches had a skin complaint – the skin hanging in ribbons from his arms. Of course, she had to accept the sandwiches. She pretended to eat them but had to hide them somehow when not observed. She was becoming desperate when she noticed a narrow space in the floor through which she could surreptitiously drop them. As soon as her plate was empty more sandwiches were brought and she was persuaded to take another one. So she continued to slip them through the space. That was very successful until a foraging rooster found the cache on the ground below and began loudly calling his harem to the feast. Her hosts wondered what the excitement was all about, looked over – and her subterfuge was betrayed.

From time to time John and I visit the Leper Settlement which is on the outskirts of JB. Many of the sights are quite shocking. Most commonly fingers or toes are reduced to stumps; sometimes the nose of the patient has been eroded; faces are lumpy and swollen, and many are badly crippled because of the damage to the feet. Altogether, it is a horribly disfiguring disease, as everyone knows. But there is much chatter and laughter among these people. They have their own rooms and personal possessions; the Settlement covers a large area and is now quite a farm, with vegetable gardens, pigs and fowls. The residents now recognise us and are loud and cheerful in their greeting. Some of the women have sewing machines and make garments and make and repair bed-linen, for which they are paid. The men, apart from farming, do odd jobs. In fact all receive a little money from Government and they seem to go about their lives in the normal way of people in a village. To my sorrow and surprise there are quite young children among them. It is comforting to know that leprosy can now be arrested and rendered non-contagious. Death is often from TB which is, I am told, a related disease. Today I went to the Settlement and took some magazines which an English-speaking young Chinese had asked for. I reached his bed, surprised to find it empty and looked around inquiringly. Then another English-speaking Chinese announced quite casually, 'He's dead and gone, Mem.' I felt sick, and shocked at the apparent callousness – but Asians are said to be more fatalistic than we.

Recently the Welfare Committee proposed a Sports Day for the lepers and all manner of competitions were arranged for which oodles of prizes were provided – fortunately. Some of us went along to join the fun and distribute the laurels. The function was an unrehearsed comedy. The contestants quarrelled, cheated, pummelled and yelled. One old fellow who hadn't raced at all, and couldn't have, suddenly presented himself at the tape and declared himself the winner; the tug-of-war developed into a free-for-all; in the hop-skip-and-jump one chap's trousers fell down but there was no stopping him. He did a sort of kangaroo hop, leaving them behind – and showing his. He finished the course and won a special prize, let's say for 'bare effrontery'. In the sack-race two paired young women accused each other of being responsible for their fall, and while they were on the ground flailing around in their sack, a half-grown pup appeared and started dragging at it, delighted with their struggles and their screaming, much to the ecstatic amusement of the spectators. They were a good-natured lot withal, everything they attempted was with great enthusiasm and lots of noise.

At the end of the day every contestant got a prize: soap or a bar of chocolate, sweets or a knife, or a piece of cloth, and they were happy. Then came the party

with cakes and ice-cream and soft drinks and I'm sure a jolly good time had been enjoyed by all – including that crazy pup, the real clown of the occasion. He didn't get anything, except perhaps a kick in the pants.

I experienced a few moments of terror recently. In the morning John with the High Commissioner and the Mentri Besar and a police escort had gone out to one of the districts – a dangerous area. (What a fine bag for the terrorists!) Well into the afternoon John was still not home and I was beginning to get concerned when I heard feet running upstairs and our *syce* Amat called 'Mem'! I rushed out to him. He was panting and I thought instantly of the 'riderless horse'. I felt my face blanch, 'Tuan?' Quickly he assured me it was all right, that the car had broken down, that he had come back in a police jeep while the others had crowded into another vehicle but had to get Sir Henry to an airstrip before returning to JB. Oh, the blessed relief; especially when at length John came safely home.

The demands of my various commitments seem to increase and I feel it is all becoming too much. A lot of my time is still occupied with the almoner's work, but funds have now been provided for the training of two local girls who will eventually take over from me. This is necessary in any case as John is due to retire within a year. In addition to that work there is the Anti-TB Committee, the General Welfare Committee, Animal Welfare – and the School Feeding Scheme. Apropos the latter we discovered that it is necessary for some responsible person to supervise the distribution of meals at the school, to make sure that the full quantity of the food – meat, fish and vegetables for which welfare money is provided, is in fact, *all* of it, distributed to the children. I got this money allocated and organised the scheme after the women who conduct the health clinic at the biggest school reported that many of the children were undernourished: some came to school without having had any food at all; some had merely been given a cup of coffee; some just a few spoonfuls of rice. The parents pay only a few cents for the school meals, or if they are very poor, nothing at all. Malays love fine clothes and will spend money on them instead of on food. The Chinese, on the other hand, wisely give priority to food.

Members of the Welfare Committee have been busy organising more playgrounds for children. There are perhaps eight now open to children of labourers and less privileged people; smallish areas but equipped with the usual things that give exercise and pleasure to children.

*Johore Bahru, 14th March 1951*

John attended the Council of State. There were 31 members in all. The Acting Mentri Besar presided. His opening words:

'Before I give you a short review of the matters affecting the Administration of the State during the past year, I feel that I am most ungrateful if I do not express my appreciation to the Police, the Military, the Air Force, the Special Constabulary, Kampong Guards, planters and others for their services in defending democracy against Communism for the last two years.'

Matters reviewed included the State Departments under the headings of Medical, Public Works, Agricultural, Education, Religious, Town Boards, Forest, Drainage and Irrigation, Police, Mines and Labour.

*Johore Bahru, March 1951*

A recent example of ill-mannered Army arrogance: at official functions it is protocol for the British Adviser's car to depart first – he being the direct representative of the Crown. On this occasion the Brigadier's car was driven up ahead of any other, and the Brigadier was driven off first. John ignored this rudeness but the Judge protested in no uncertain terms. The Brigadier was required to apologise.

Despite lack of adequate support from the Colonial Office, a mighty undertaking is accomplished. Resettlement of the 150,000 squatters throughout this enormous State, under John's jurisdiction is now regarded as finished – I feel that he as administrative head, Sjovald Cunnyngame-Brown who pushed through the undertaking with such courage and good management, the Resettlement officer, and all who worked so hard to see the job done, should be congratulated. John is recommending Sjovald for the honour of OBE. He never does, never will, seek any kudos himself.

At the Welfare Home not long ago we met a fourteen-year-old Chinese boy who was not settling down satisfactorily. He had no education, little was known of his history – and he wasn't telling. I think he had been picked up as a vagrant by the police and brought to the Home. We suggested he might like to come under our personal care, to train as a house servant and be paid a small wage. He was not in our service for very long when our head-boy came to me and said, in effect, 'Madam, you should not keep this boy here, he has bad thoughts.' He told me that the boy had explained how easily he could climb the drain pipe to the upper storey and murder us in our beds. John thought it might be simply bravado, but it might not, so he had better go. We shall ask the police to keep an eye on him and try to find him some occupation in which he can be supervised.

I have become aware that there is more recently some palpable anti-Colonial impatience manifest by a few of the more educated Malays. That is natural enough. Quite unfair, however, was a letter recently published in one of the English language newspapers, which virtually accused the Welfare Committee of excluding Asians. This is staggering in view of the fact that Europeans, and I in particular, have tried in various ways to involve the local people in welfare work. The accusation was very easily answered. I wrote a letter which was published in the same newspaper, over the signature of our secretary, a young Indian, Mr Dass, pointing out that there was no personal gain or glory in treating children's sores and suppurating ears, for instance; in going into the probably infected homes of TB sufferers and visiting the lepers; in spending much of our time and energy – all voluntary – for the benefit of local people. In the letter an invitation was extended, once again, to Asians to offer their services. None applied! Incidentally, our *syce* asked me one day recently as he drove me home if I were paid for my work. I was shocked, and let him know it. Then I explained that Christians believe that we had a duty, imposed by Christ, to help the poor and the sick wherever we found them, and to expect nothing in return. He clearly accepted that.

There was quite a considerable attendance at the Red Cross Ball – many people having braved the 'dangers' across the causeway, to be there. There was a gratifying mixture of various national communities; the hall looked splendid and

the band – and the supper – were excellent. Various items were auctioned to swell the fund, one being a wire-haired terrier puppy. As soon as it was put up I told John we must buy it, for I do not believe that non-Europeans, many of them, have the same understanding of the needs of animals as we have – and it was such a little thing. So the bidding began and John, nudged by me, topped each bid until at \$200 (something) Bobby, with a pedigree, was knocked down to him. Bobby, like all young creatures, is very sweet but he is either a mini, or a runt – and I suspect the latter. No matter! Snooty Bruno, when introduced, tried to ignore him and pretend he wasn't there, but Bobby had never seen anything so heroic in all his life and tried to demonstrate his admiration instantly, only to be given a snappy rebuke. After a few days of this undiminishing affection Bruno is softening, takes the puppy's head in his mouth, and sometimes rolls on his back with Bobby on his chest. So, not even old 'sombong' can resist a baby!

### May 1951

On the 19th we travelled to Mersing by road and there boarded the State launch *Regulus* for an official visit to some of the islands which are part of Johore. Our Cookie came with us to provide the meals and, of course, there were a couple of crew members. These islands are in the South China Sea. They look exactly as one would expect, some prettier than others, but all with pale sands, leaning coconut palms, small timber houses on piles. Most have a copra industry so there were piles of dried coconut shells in the *kampongs*. We had to go ashore in a dinghy because the water shallows to the beach in every case. The Penghulu would always be there to welcome us and we then went into his little house and met his wife and children. (Malays always remove their sandals before entering their houses – a most hygienic practice.) We swam at some of the islands, and on one were given the loan of snorkel and goggles so that we could view the coral. The shallow water there suggested to me pale lime jelly in its colour and clarity. Below were what looked like miniature finely architected cities; a fantasy land of white carved and sculptured buildings with tall cathedral spires and, at intervals, gardens of gentian blue flowers – or so it seemed. To perfect the fantasy its denizens were beautiful fishes: butter yellow, black velvet, multi-striped. As I slowly swam over I felt like a sort of Gulliver. I was reluctant to leave that enchanted Lilliput.

### Johore Bahru, 1951

Sylvia is with us from Sydney. I went to a Welfare Committee meeting in KL after which we had both been invited to King's House to lunch.

Today's jaunt was rather more dramatic and funny: John made an official visit to one of the nearer districts, and to provide Sylvia with more local colour we took her with us. This time the three of us travelled in our car – John seated in front with Ahmat – preceded and followed by several armoured vehicles. Sylvia is to leave us the day after tomorrow, and she eagerly wanted a Chinese straw hat to add to her exotic collection (she has a hat-wall in the house at Palm Beach). We had been keeping our eyes roving for possibilities, and were well on our way home almost biting our nails with desperation – just she and I (we hadn't told John) – when at last, outside a tiny village shop-house, we saw some of these hats in a rough pile. It

was, I felt sure, our last chance. On impulse I ordered Ahmat to stop the car (I knew John wouldn't have done so). 'What the hell?' he demanded. 'Sylvia *has* to buy a Chinese hat!' He was fuming – but refrained from being impolite. Anyhow, outside this fly-blown establishment we'd stopped not only the official car with its two flags flying, but four great armoured vehicles – though the drivers of them couldn't have guessed why. Instantly, out onto the road poured a do-or-die dozen khaki-clad police, all action-ready, rifles at the alert. Consternation! Women and kids emerged from every crack, the kids being pushed behind their mums, all agog with apprehension, and behind, in the darkness of the several shop-houses, we glimpsed some furtive scurrying. Was there to be a shoot-up? An arrest? No, good people, just two mad European women wanting to buy a coolie hat! Thus Sylvia got her treasure – and a good story to go with it (and I'll bet Ahmat and the police gossiped later about the enigmatic ways of white women). What I got, as can be imagined, was a red-hot ticking-off. So I put on my 'mea culpa' face and promised never to do it again (a safe enough promise) and afterwards Sylvia and I had a lovely guilty giggle, so like when we were youngsters.

*Johore Bahru, 1951*

The problems people have! Some time ago we formed the Johore Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Recently I, as secretary, received a letter from a lady in Singapore asking for our help. She is unmarried and has a teenage Chinese girl as house servant. She also has a chimpanzee and the animal, which recently attained puberty, is taking an embarrassing interest in the young girl. So the good lady feels she must get rid of him in some kind way. She asked if we would recommend asking Tungku Makota if he would accept the chimpanzee to live in his zoo – and if so whether members of the Society would take it for joy-rides in their cars, as it was accustomed to. Naturally our answer was NO and NO. The chimp is partially paralysed from polio, having been used in medical experiments, and saved from destruction by this owner. It is a dilemma.

One of our members organised a ball and raised enough money to buy a van for the collection of stray cats and dogs, or those reported to be unwanted. Sadly, most will be put down, and we regret this, but that is the kindest thing to do. This work of collecting stray or unwanted animals has accelerated since we formed a junior branch called 'Animal Helpers' in all the schools. Just about every child wants to join. The subscription is 10 cents – or nothing – and they get a badge and the children promise never to be unkind to any living creature, and to report to some member of the Society whenever they know unwanted puppies or kittens may be collected. I do not drive the van, but have taken my turn, as I think I should, at collecting these unfortunate creatures, particularly as it was my proposal in the first place. One such half-grown puppy which was tied to a coconut palm in a *kampong*, though seemingly quite docile with others, savaged me (that may be explained by a difference in body odour – European, or Asian). Anyhow, someone produced a hessian bag to hold around the pup and I managed to get it in our car to the veterinary hospital. I warned the Chinese assistant there of its ferocity, but it went to him like a lamb! I was quite disturbed about the scratches on my arms in contact with a not very clean bag so I swabbed them with Dettol – and I'm none the

worse. One afternoon I came home from a meeting and saw a shopping bag hanging from a hook in the servery outside the dining room. There was movement inside, and there I found four new-born kittens – left at the servant's quarters by a child. I phoned one of the hospital doctors at his home – as it was late afternoon – and at his suggestion (he is a member of the Society) I took the kittens to the hospital where he chloroformed them. It's horrible, but necessary. Now the other women members who collect the animals say it is inappropriate for me to do so – so I am exempt. One day since then, however, I noticed a pup cringing under a low awning in a street where I was walking. It was obvious something was wrong, so I asked a couple of Chinese seated nearby if anyone owned it. They said not. So I picked it up and immediately it hid its face under my arm. I took it to the vet hospital and later one of the staff telephoned me to say it had a rare complaint which made light unbearable. Poor little thing: they gave it a lethal injection.

*Johore Bahru, 6.10.51*

This day brought catastrophe. People of all races are stunned by the news that Sir Henry Gurney has been murdered! And the evil-doers are rejoicing, no doubt. He was a very able, clear-headed, likeable and courageous man. If only he had taken greater precaution to protect himself! but his determination to carry on in the normal way, refusing to surround himself with massive security which would acknowledge the power of the terrorists, proved fatal. He was travelling with Lady Gurney to the hills, flying the flag on his car, when they were ambushed. There was a police jeep in front and one behind, but that was of no avail against a hail of machine-gun fire. Like the gallant gentleman he was, he leapt from the car, thus attracting the gunfire to himself and away from those in the car. He died on the road. The fact that he frequently made this same journey to the hills, at about the same time of day, could almost be regarded as a dare – but of course it was not meant to be. Perhaps, rather, it demonstrated rashly a contemptuous dismissal of the contemptible – typically British. Oh, those venomous, despicable, bad creatures! None of them should live – they've taken the lives of too many good people. (One was a MCS man – a sincere, caring good man with a young wife and a baby. They lost their elder child with polio only a year or two ago.)

I learned of Sir Henry's death this afternoon when Audrey, Malcolm McDonald's wife, arrived at the small hall where I had arranged an art competition for which she was to present the prizes. This was the work of small children and I had organised it to stimulate the interest of the young 'Animal Helpers'. Immediately, she took me aside and told me that the report had just come through. I'm sure she felt sick at heart, as I did, and it was difficult for us to behave in the expected way.

Perhaps *now* the Colonial Office will accept the seriousness of the emergency and provide the forces and wherewithal for which Government has been asking since the trouble began.

*From a letter to the children*

This is Halloween. I wonder if the fairies will be about? Here, at full moon, on a still night, I feel it could almost be so. Sometimes then I go and sit in the garden on a low step of the sundial, my arms around Bruno on one side and Bobby on the other. They feel the magic too, I believe, for they sit motionless and simply look and look, spellbound. The moon and the stars seem to hang very large and low and the light has a peculiar silvery luminescence; there are flower-scents; the casaurina trees appear to be waiting, watchful, and not a thing moves. There is a strange feeling then of physical 'suspension' almost as though we are in a vast bubble, in space. Not far away, upstairs in the house, Uncle John is usually playing gently. These are moments of unforgettable beauty and beautiful peace. I store them away in my consciousness, deliberately – to remember. Perhaps some day, though we shall have gone, you will come to Malaya and be able to experience something of what I try to convey to you and you will remember.

Much love to you, my darlings, from U.J. and Auntie Jean.

*Johore Bahru, 1.12.51*

Well, at last, the juggernaut moves and the Colonial Office has realised that Malaya seems to have a slight problem, which it condescends to investigate. Today we had a luncheon party for Sir Oliver Lyttleton, Secretary of State for the Colonies; Paskin of the Colonial Office; General Briggs, Director of Operations; and a few others. They are here to assess the emergency situation – and, at last, the full extent of what is required to combat it. Yes, at last – *two and a half years late!* And it required the murder of Sir Henry Gurney to prompt it.

Some suitable person must now be appointed to follow Sir Henry and to take overall command, and Lyttleton asked John if he thought General Montgomery might be approached. John said it would not be the role for Montgomery.

Incidentally, Sir Oliver told me an amusing story about an experience in the Middle East somewhere, I think, towards – or at the end of – the war. Army personnel had been billeted in some of the European houses for some while when two dear little rather elderly French ladies in black bombazine asked for an interview with him. Theirs was one of the houses occupied. Demurely and sweetly they asked him, as commanding officer, if he could please have their house returned to them soon: it had been their home for years and all their dear possessions were there, etc., etc. He was touched by their situation. Of course! Arrangements would be made straight away. How could he refuse! And their house was vacated for them . . . then he learned what kind of house it was!

Tomorrow the visitors, and we, will be guests of the Sultan at lunch in the great dining hall of the Istana Besar; I hope the gold plate will be used.

*Johore Bahru, December 1951*

We took Tungku Ampuan to a dance recently at the Club. She likes to see people dancing, the women's skirts swirling out 'like umbrellas' as she says. Playfully, John asked her if she would dance with him. Laughing she replied that she'd look better on the back of a buffalo! Can you beat that! She has such wit and personality, is so entertaining to be with. She is also tactful and shrewd, which she

demonstrated to us in a very nice way. Not long after we returned from leave in England John told her – apropos what, I can't remember – that though he had bought me there a pretty pair of ear-drops I didn't wear them because my ears had not been pierced, and I still delayed having that done. When next she came to tea with us she presented me with a tiny parcel . . . little gold sleepers, as much as to say, 'Now, go and have your ears pierced and wear your husband's gift!' And that I did. She often sends us a gift of cake or fruit, always wrapped not in tissue but in a square of floral fine cotton which is always neatly hand-hemmed and I'm sure the hemming is done by little Chinese orphan girls she has adopted as part of her household.

I don't feel very amiable just now – in fact I'm furious. As I have recorded, we have a good, active Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Now, a perfectly sensible plan within the Society has been wrecked by a tiny minority. Almost unanimously it was agreed by members that we would propose to the Government Veterinary Department that it accept the SPCA van, provide the fuel for it and be responsible for its maintenance, but that our voluntary drivers would continue as before to collect stray animals. This was a foresighted move to establish the service ultimately as a regular function of the Department, thus guaranteeing its survival when Malaya becomes independent and most Europeans move out – for there would be few, if any, Asian volunteers. After due consideration the Veterinary Department accepted responsibility. Then an English couple – not distinguished for their intelligence – through an equally stupid old lawyer, challenged the decision. So, as there was dissension, the Veterinary Department withdrew. I think the English couple felt that some kudos was being lost to them – they weren't sufficiently articulate to advance any cogent reason, and the old lawyer's tangled verbiage didn't make any sense at all. So, now there is no guarantee of continuity. But the small-minded are no doubt hugging their personal petty victory.

*Johore Bahru, 6.2.52*

King George VI died. On the 8th Princess Elizabeth was proclaimed his successor. There have been commemorative services in all the Christian churches, expressions of admiration for the late King, and of condolence from the Rulers.

*Johore Bahru, February 1952*

A new High Commissioner was appointed last month – General Sir Gerald Templar. John met him at King's House recently and we gave a dinner party for him shortly afterwards when he was introduced to various people in key positions here. He gives the impression of being very able – and quite ruthless – which may or may not be a good thing. He may well be too eager to demonstrate the new broom sweeping clean, and in his paramount assertiveness, and unfamiliarity with all the nuances of life in this country, be unwise in some of his judgements. Anyhow, let's hope he will be more fortunate than his two predecessors – I think he'll take care of that. He certainly will be more fortunate in this all-important respect: he will get from the Colonial Office all the support that was denied Sir Henry Gurney and the administration here despite their repeated appeals.

*Johore Bahru, March 1952*

Our little delinquent Bobby has a pedigree and he seems to know it – in one respect. He imagines he is, at the very least, an Alsatian – a formidable defender of the establishment. Sometimes vast PWD lorries carrying soil for the garden, or some such, come along the lower drive, whereupon, full of righteous fury, he flings himself upon the intruders challenging them to stop. Which of course they do. Then he attacks them by trying to bite one of the tyres (they're about two feet high and he's about ten inches!). Someone then has to go and rescue the beleaguered lorry by removing its dangerous assailant, hackles raised and growling. Recently this valiant fellow joined his hero Bruno in fighting a dog outside the back gates. I was in the garden, heard the commotion and witnessed the comedy: Bobby was, naturally, attacking the rear portion of the enemy as it ran. Then Bruno, a clumsy dog, fell while in pursuit into a shallow ditch. And the brave lieutenant? Yes, where was he when his Captain fell? . . . Screaming blue-murder and running like hell! It was hilarious. Two police guards standing near the gates saw it and were literally doubled up with laughter: Bruno upside down in the ditch and Bobby the brave, ears back, mouth open and *howling* – beating it madly along the drive . . . home. I'm sure he's a little potty for when we come home after even a short absence Bruno makes a great fuss of us while Bobby makes a great fuss – of Bruno!

John has just bought a Citroen to be for our own use when he retires this year. In due course it will be sent to England ready for our arrival, but will not be used meanwhile.

General Templer proves to be the epitome of the brusque Army type, more inclined to be overbearing than diplomatic, nor does he have any experience of the nuances of an Asian country or culture. John is in disagreement with him; Templer would have him touring around the State considerably more than John thinks necessary or wise. He believes that his place is primarily in his office, available for consultation at all times especially in this climate of recurrent crises. Templer quotes this theory of 'showing the flag' when in fact the presence of the British Adviser, or the Queen herself, would be of no great concern to the people when all that matters to them is the presence of protective forces. In the Districts are John's representatives – the District Officers. The important thing is that he be at all times at the other end of the telephone.

Personal security has reached its peak under General Templer. He has wisely had King's House and grounds surrounded by guards and barbed wire, and is fully protected wherever he goes. On the other hand he arranges a lot of publicity for himself and for Lady Templer; the press photographers are always present!

And now when John travels up country – and I suppose this applies to any prominent official – he goes in an armoured vehicle, and when I go with him I travel in another armoured vehicle. Previously we went simply with a police escort. I must say I do feel a bit humiliated having to adopt this extreme measure – it somehow gives a certain 'respectability' to the thugs and acknowledges their power. So I well understand Sir Henry Gurney's contemptuous dismissal of their threat, rash though it proved to be.

*Johore Bahru, 22.5.52*

Two days ago ships of the Portuguese Navy arrived at Singapore and we were invited to a party on board – for 6.30. Guests were to be collected from a jetty and conveyed by launch to the ship. This was not well organised, but eventually, in relays, we all got away. On our coming alongside a ladder was lowered from the deck and fixed to the launch, for our ascent. There was a very strong wind blowing and the sea was pretty rough. I was accorded the honour of first on the ladder (or perhaps it was a case of ‘That doesn’t look very safe – better let Mother go first’) and was part of the way up when, ‘Mama Mia’ – or whatever it is in Portuguese – ladder and launch parted company, and there I hung, swaying. My first thought was, ‘Thank God I’m wearing a narrow dress’ for with the wind up – lit. not fig. – all would have been revealed, and I couldn’t have done a thing about it. Nevertheless, I was reminded of that almost universal maternal injunction to daughters, in effect: ‘Be meticulous about your underwear whenever you go out . . . you might have an accident!’ Always the optimist, I wasn’t worried; just continued to haul myself up carefully until several pairs of hands helped me on board. (If this had happened in the British Navy the Captain would have gone gallantly to his quarters and shot himself. But I didn’t hear a shot – except the popping of corks.) We were served cake and wine – and within an hour or so we all went home . . . how did they ever acquire an Empire?

*May 1952*

I am desolated to learn that our good and faithful young Indian who is – or was – secretary of both the Welfare Committee and the Anti-TB Committee is now a victim of the disease. How cruelly ironical! However, his illness is not far advanced and he will have all the modern, healing treatments known, as a patient in JB hospital. The new drug Streptomycin is being administered with great success, but it cannot be usefully applied to all cases. The TB patients in JB hospital know about it, and some who are not having that treatment have asked me to use my influence with the medical staff on their behalf, believing, it seems, that there is some deliberate discrimination. I have kept faith with them and mentioned them to Doctor who has assured me in each case that Streptomycin would be of no help to them. I can only tell the poor souls that it is not suitable for them, concealing the most common reason – that their condition is too far advanced.

It is obvious that the twin dominant causes of such widespread TB infection are habits and housing: Chinese and Indians will *spit*; they have large families; live crowded, and sleep with all windows firmly closed to keep out evil spirits. Many are poor, but none are excluded from assistance if they need it – and there is no unemployment problem, so it’s not a matter of enforced malnutrition or neglect. Constant efforts are being made to teach people and to encourage them to have medical checks – but it’s all slow.

There is now a proposal to build a great central TB hospital in KL. Lady Templer, wife of the new High Commissioner, who has shown great eagerness to support anti-TB work and various welfare undertakings, is the prime-mover. In my view it’s a colossal mistake and I understand it will go ahead against the advice of the Director of Medical Services. Lady T., being so newly arrived in this

country, apparently does not realise, or will not accept, that the local people when they are ill especially, want their families around them, and are often frightened of hospitals anyhow. Obviously relatives couldn't afford time or money to go and comfort the sick one so far from home. Perhaps like her husband she is inclined to discount advice from those who have long experience here, regarding them as *passé*.

Lady Templer's hospital will cost perhaps millions of dollars; it must also be staffed, which means withdrawing qualified people from smaller hospitals in the various States or attracting them from other countries – probably both. So, for many of the little people from the villages or *kampongs* there will be less access to the best treatment, at the local level. The money and expertise this venture will require, if applied to establishing more small district treatment centres, would more adequately answer the people's needs.

I'm afraid the Lady Templer TB hospital, though no doubt it will look imposing and, of course, carry the Templer name (they're not noticeably modest), will be a white elephant. I sincerely hope not, and against all odds I wish it success.

*Johore Bahru, July 1952*

John is to retire soon, after more than thirty years in the Service. There will be final official visits to the Districts; the passing on of leadership of my various undertakings; finding homes for Bruno and Bobby – Bruno is the problem; helping to place our house servants, who cannot be persuaded to stay on with our successors, having been unhappy with them when they deputed during our leave. Our lovable, laughing *syce* Ahmat has been engaged to drive for Johore Bahru General Hospital – I wish we could take him with us. The girls who were appointed to continue the almoner's service will do so, probably well enough, until a professional almoner is appointed – I hope. One girl is Chinese; the other Malay. I had reason to chide the Chinese girl lately for allowing a sick man to stand until she could attend him; it hadn't occurred to her to make him comfortable. (How can you teach compassion?)

During our farewell visit to Segamat a luncheon was arranged by the local Malayan Chinese Association. We were seated at a handsome table of pale satinwood with a revolving centre. Towards the end of the meal the President of the Association rose, made a suitable and very flattering speech – and said the Association would like to present us with a parting gift, a dining-suite similar to the one at which we sat. This was embarrassing because members of Government must not in any circumstances accept gifts. John therefore thanked the Association but reminded them of the injunction. Their spokesman answered, in effect: 'Everyone knows that the British people in Government never take bribes, and we know the rule against "illegal gratification" – and we're glad we have honest Government – but as you are about to leave Malaya, what harm can there be in accepting a tribute of our esteem?' John thanked them again and expressed appreciation of their gesture but insisted that, although we were about to leave the country, still we must refuse. There was a brief, uncomfortable silence, for our refusal caused them loss of face. Then I had a bright idea: 'If the Association wished to honour us, what we would like most was to have a little temple built in

the grounds of the Leper Settlement.' (We had been trying to raise funds for this as I had been unhappy about the fact that there was no place of spiritual comfort there for the inmates of whom perhaps 95% are Chinese. Some of the lepers we had met had died in the Settlement hospital, usually of TB.) I suggested that if they wished they could put a small plaque on such a temple to commemorate the occasion of the gift. 'A great idea! Yes! Yes!' and they would 'put a LARGE plaque on the wall'. They were all enthusiasm.

*In a very short time the temple was built complete with 'LARGE PLAQUE' and was financed by the Malayan Chinese Association, State-wide.*

*Johore Bahru, July 1952*

Charles Moses and a delightful Mr Bronner, also from the ABC, are here and staying with us. Charles Moses remembers me well from past acquaintance! They should learn a lot about the political situation and John wants Moses to invite Malcolm McDonald to broadcast to Australia a review of the emergency. The unwarranted nature of this banditry is still, I'm sure, not thoroughly understood or accepted in Australia.

28.7.52

Today we went to say goodbye to our old friend Tungku Ampuan – the Sultan's sister. We were rather sad knowing that we shall never see her again. She presented me with a very beautiful sarong length – about five yards of golden-yellow silk, bordered with a delicate pattern in gold thread. The fact that it is yellow – the royal colour – has a subtle significance. This silk was hand-woven to her instructions in an institute she inaugurated some time ago as a means of livelihood for poor Malay women. What a glorious gift! I think, rather than have it cut into a gown, I shall keep it as a lasting memento of a lady of unforgettable character.

29.7.52

To bid us farewell a splendid luncheon was given by their Highnesses The Regent of Johore, Tungku Makhota and Ungku Tun Aminah his wife at the Istana Besar. Most flattering, but no gold plate!

*Johore Bahru, 31.7.52*

Today I said final goodbyes to the patients in the hospital and the staff, and to staff and children at the big school where the feeding scheme goes on, and children at the other schools, and to staff and children in the Welfare Home, etc., etc. And I officially opened the new Jean Falconer playground for children of workers at the General Hospital in JB. There have been dinner parties and luncheons and tonight we are to attend a farewell function at the Civil Service Club. It is to be a 'fish and chips' supper, everyone to wear their shabbiest clothes (for fun, and because all our clothes except those we shall wear tomorrow will have been packed).

The goodbyes to the children, and to my dear TB patients in hospital in particular, moved me to tears. At the women's ward there was a sweet posy of flowers for me, and at the schools their equivalent of an illuminated address was presented, and a hand-lettered goodbye – all the more touching because they were so humble.

I am desolated by all the parting. I feel affection for the Cookie, and for the second boy in particular – a sweet natured man. And how can I tell the heartache of leaving Bruno. We have been advised very firmly that we may not take him into Australia. I delivered him to the home of our friends – and I feel that he knew. Meekly he stood chained; meekly accepted my tearful goodbye, looking at me sadly, and did not attempt to follow.

*Johore Bahru, 1.8.52*

Several of John's past, and present, staff have written expressing their admiration of him as a wise and just administrator and as such a helpful, approachable person. In one such letter one of his former senior officers wrote: 'I want to thank you for . . . taking the whole ultimate responsibility but quietly standing back so that your young officers should have the limelight. There are a lot of people who have wanted to say just those words to you.'

The Sultan's dear old secretary arrived early this morning with a bunch of artificial roses in a 'made in England' vase for me, and a tobacco pouch for John. I took a photograph of him and John, a table decorated with his vase of roses between them. He was very tickled! And playfully I admired his bow tie, whereupon he took it off and presented that also to John.

We left the Residency at 11.00, our successors roaring up the drive with apparent urgency to get installed.

Friends in Singapore made us welcome for the next two days before our departure.

And John has had made for me a very beautiful pair of diamond ear studs.

\*Incidentally, we heard later that John's successor after quite a short time in office died of a heart attack. Perhaps he succumbed to stress!

*On board Tijibadak, 3.8.52*

I could not leave Malaya without expressing what is so deeply in my heart: my profound gratitude for the happiness and the privilege of having lived in this beautiful country – and with a husband of such fine qualities. He is so lovable, so humorous; erudite yet unassuming; with the gift of instant evaluation of situation – or person – and unfailingly wise in his decisions.

My most cherished memory shall be of the joy of hearing his footsteps hurrying upstairs in late afternoon eagerly to hug me, and then to feel the tropical warmth of his shoulders and back through the linen jacket as my arms went around him. Our precious unity embodied in that brief embrace I believe, I hope, I shall be able to recapture to the end of my life.

*On board Tjibadak, 3.8.52*

There are flowers and telegrams and other little tributes in our cabin, and we have said goodbye to well-wishers who came to see us off. As the ship pulled away John and I left the deck and have come below for we both felt we could not bear to watch the coast fade from sight, infinitely sad as we are to leave behind the country and the people we truly love, and did our best to serve.

Selamat Negri Malayu!

WHEN I AM OLD

When I am old and assailed by loss  
I shall have all these riches to emboss  
The faded fabric of my life:  
A treasury of memories  
Of sights, sounds, scents and people I have known  
Memories fused into my blood and bone  
An imperishable part  
Of me . . . Malaya – where I left my heart . . .

JF 1952

*Bobby was given to friends in JB. We were not wise about Bruno. Friends agreed to adopt him but he was snappy and kept returning to The Residency. So we arranged for our erstwhile Cookie who loved Bruno to have the SPCA send him by air to Spratts Kennels in England to await our expected arrival there the following year. Apparently he accepted one kennel-maid only but would not be handled by anyone else. After six months we received a letter reporting that he had a growth (where he had previously been injured), so we wired our consent to have him put down.*

## AN EXTRACT FROM 'REPORT OF THE DEBATES AT THE FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HELD ON 12TH JULY 1956'

*THE CHIEF SECRETARY (a Malay)*

'The withdrawal of the British Advisers makes it necessary to amend the Federation of Malaya Agreement . . .

' . . . The Bill now before the Council . . . marks the end of an era which began with the appointment of a British Resident in Perak in 1874 following the Treaty of Pangkor between Her late Majesty Queen Victoria and His late Highness Sultan Abdullah of Perak. There were serious disorders in those days and law and order was at a discount. And yet that was only 82 years ago – not much more than the span of an average life time. The almost unbelievable transformation which has taken place since then in health, in education, in communications and in the general amenities of life, is due in no small measure to the foundations of sound administration laid in the early days by the first British Residents and the British Advisers and by the high standards set by them and by their successors in office. [Applause]

'I think Honourable Members of Council will agree that it can be regarded as a tribute to the success of their work that it is now possible, after such a relatively short space of time, to provide for their withdrawal as one of a series of measures being taken towards independence next year [applause]. *These men loved this country and have given it devoted and able service.* In return they have over the years won the affection of countless people here . . . I felt it would be Council's wish that something should go on record on this occasion when the formal step is being taken to bring the Advisership system to an end.'

*THE MENTRI BESAR, SELANGOR*

'This Bill . . . is truly a historic piece of legislation. When it does ultimately become law, one of our last important links with the old order will have passed away, namely that the offices of British Advisers will be withdrawn. Malaya in her time has seen many of such players make their entrance and exit from the Malayan stage . . . I am sure we can still remember with gratitude and affection such men as Hugh Clifford . . . They have contributed a great deal to the advancement and the development of the country.

'Sir, our British Advisers are modern counterparts of these officers. We who remain in the service can assure them that they will always be remembered as our colleagues with affection . . . we pay tribute for the important part they have played in the administration of this country.'

*DATO HAJI MOHAMED EUSOFF:*

' . . . I can vouch for and associate myself with the sentiments that have been expressed . . . about the devoted and self-sacrificing service of the British officers who eventually became British Residents and British Advisers . . . that in the science of administration and in dealing with human beings, I owe all my training in my association with them . . .'

**DATO SIR CLOUGH THURASSINGHAM:**

'... I am sure everybody feels and particularly my community, the Ceylonese, that they owe much to the guidance of the British Officers in the years gone by. They were invited into this land to advise Their Highnesses . . . They have left behind a tradition of impartiality and fairness . . . by their hard work and earnestness left an example to the entire service . . .'

**MR FOO SEE MOI:**

'As a Chinese Member. I wish to add my tribute. The British Advisers not only acted as Adviser but as peacemaker . . . exceeded his duties and all for the good of the country.'

Full independence was declared in 1957.

## POSTSCRIPT

Despite unlimited resources of manpower and munitions supplied to General Templer – and his confidence – the emergency continued to a lesser extent for fifteen years – long after his leadership ended – and has gone on with sporadic raids and killings, particularly north along the Thai border area, even to the eighties. (Johore remained a trouble area for a long time.) In this respect, the following extract from a report in the Sydney Morning Herald of 17 January 1985 is relevant.

The Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr Mahathir, has urged China to end its backing of communism in Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir, who hopes to visit Peking this year, said yesterday: 'We would like to see China publicly withdraw its moral support for communist groups in Malaysia . . .

The Government has said Peking ended *material* support to the Communist Party of Malaya when China and Malaysia established diplomatic relations in 1974 . . .'

I believe it is appropriate here to refer to Han Su Yin's book *And the Rain my Drink* which, because of her reputation as a writer, might be accepted as representing fact. In this book – rightly labelled 'Fiction' – she assumes the role of apologist for the Chinese Communist terrorists and presents their young members as beautiful 'idealists' who had little alternative. (It might be remembered that it was the young 'idealists' who committed the most blood-thirsty and destructive excesses of the so-called Cultural Revolution in China.) The story presents a distortion of the reality and of the nature and attitudes of both the British and Malays, descending to a level of prejudice unworthy of Han Su Yin's intelligence.