SINGAPORE TRAGEDY

By

S. E. FIELD

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FOREWORD

It is the 20th day of February 1942, and I am on a large Dutch liner speeding to safety from the Japanese menace. The sapphire blue waters of the Indian Ocean foam whitely behind us. We curve continuously and the noise of crashing crockery resounds as the great ship heels. A sleek grey destroyer circles round us—our guardian angel. Overhead hovers a giant bomber.

There are more than five hundred souls aboard and we are depressed and sad. Uprooted from Malaya, Borneo, Sumatra and Java, we have seen death strike again and again. Our life's work, possessions, loved ones and life itself were unwilling pawns sucked into the maelstrom of war. We do not seek each other's company. Anxious fears beset us for those scores of thousands left behind. We wear our lifebelts continuously and sleep in our clothes. And this fine Dutch ship has said good-bye to the land she calls home, for the Japanese onslaught has begun.

I was living amid the spires and minarets of beautiful Kuala Lumpur when the enemy struck. The peace of Malaya had stolen my heart, but confusion and disaster rolled over us like a tidal wave; 30,000 Europeans were washed away from the life they had known and 5,000,000 bewildered Asiatics cowered under the noise of planes and the crash of bursting bombs.

This is not an official record; it is simply an intimate personal story of the experiences of a New Zealander who, at thirty-seven, seized a chance to go to exotic Malaya to find out everything he could about the so-called luxury-

loving Malayan, and the land about which so many writers have raved. I went as a worker, a seeker of beauty, and a student, but above all as a lover of life. I fell in love with Malaya. I spent a year in government service. Then I experienced sixty-two days of war, finally escaping to Java on one of the last steamers to leave immediately before the Japanese invaded Singapore island.

When, in 1940, Singapore beckoned, I felt I might see more of the world and the war. Both these wishes were gratified beyond all expectation. I was fascinated also by the prospects of this blank page, but recent happenings made it impossible to stay in Singapore and write these words. Rice and water did not appeal to me. Besides, I had had a row with my Japanese hairdresser, who is now, doubtless, governor of the state of Selangor, and I am getting into the habit of travelling two thousand miles for my next hair-cut. But I am not worried yet. An Indian holy man told me in Singapore during February, when the Japanese were massing in Johore prior to landing on Singapore island, that a bald headed man would unconsciously save my life—he did—and that, if I were quick, I would die at the age of seventy-five. Perhaps it was just as well that the yogi did not tell me how fast I should have to be.

So much confusion exists about what actually constitutes Malaya and its polyglot peoples that I have attempted to condense into as few words as possible a composite picture of Malaya, showing its incredible development, its value to the war effort, and above all, the happy existence and diverse control of the 5,000,000 people—Malays, Chinese, Indians and Europeans—who lived, apparently, in unquestioned harmony.

Having sketched the background, I have attempted a picture of the life of a European in Malaya from January to December 1941. This covers not only facts and figures, but also the swirling, surging cloud of impressions which made my pleasure or my pain.

All figures are taken from the Malayan Official Year Book, 1939.

Before the passing of a war tax on incomes for the first time in the history of the Federated Malay States, I was employed in the Federal Secretariat in the Exchange Control Office. In February 1941 I was gazetted as a collector of war tax. It was then decided to appoint an officer to interpret the tax to the public, and I acted throughout in charge of the office of Public Relations. Government then appointed a standing committee of leading members of the government and unofficials (a Malayan term) to advise on the basis of income tax for 1942. I was appointed secretary. Representatives of the Chinese, Indian and Malay communities served on this committee, which held twenty-seven meetings and completed its deliberations just as war broke out. The meetings afforded me an interesting insight into the ramifications of government.

While I was stationed at Kuala Lumpur, my duties took me to Singapore, and I seized every chance to travel through Malaya.

The story of my life in 1941 necessarily covers the birth and development of a new government department formed to administer income tax in the F.M.S. In itself this was a tremendously interesting experience, but the intricate web of some 80,000 threads spun around taxpayers and potential taxpayers was rudely broken when the tragedy began. Where are those 80,000 now, and what countless billions of dollars have topsyturvied out of control?

The Japanese invaded Malaya on 8 December. I kept a diary of my experiences in Kuala Lumpur up to 9 January, and in Singapore from 10 January to 6 February. My notes record the bewilderment and struggles of an insignificant person who is fortunate in that, whatever he lost in those last days, he still possesses that for which we are fighting and for which he personally would sacrifice life itself—freedom.

This is a gloom ship, not because she is painted a sombre grey, or speeds along blacked-out at night, but for five hundred other reasons. Six of these are reclining near by on deck. Most are women and they do not know where their husbands are. Perhaps interned in Singapore, scattered from Ceylon to Australia, or—hideous uncertainty—missing.

A Chinese walking by was once a millionaire. Bombed outside Singapore, his ship sank and he was plucked out of the sea after floating for ten hours. From a fortune of 8,000,000 Straits dollars, he is now reduced to the clothes he stands up in. Another Chinese puzzles me. Extremely intelligent, aloof, watchful, he carries a fortune in jewels. He lives in the hold, with me and three hundred others. This morning, in the gloom, fire flashed from a handful of diamonds. His face, as I surprised him, was twisted with fear. Behind every passenger is a story.

A deck passage—meaning hold—cost me 260 guilders. This boat is one of the luxury ships of a famous Dutch line. Shortly before we sailed, the ship was sheltering up a river on the Sumatran coast and fifty-five trained "boys" from her crew disappeared into the jungle. Our new boys are amateurs, though professional plate smashers, and giggle all the time. One European woman in a de luxe cabin at 1000 guilders complained of the service, and received the stiff reply from a Dutch officer: "You are paying to save your life, madam, not for service."

What irks some is the presence of Asiatics in cabins. Several ship's crews, including Filipinos, have cabin quarters. Footling worry! European women are in the hold too. We are given a good cold Dutch breakfast, but some complain that they are thirsting for a good hot cup of tea. Small items of personal discomfort are filling our minds again.

Most of these passengers are more unfortunate than I. They have lived in Malaya for perhaps twenty years. The treasures of a lifetime have been left behind. Abandon a beautiful home at half an hour's notice, knowing that it

will be looted within the hour, and see what it does to you. It plucks at the very roots of your being. I hope that in the pages that follow I can picture to you the quality and temper of these people, the life they have led in Malaya, the advantages they have had and the toll that the tropics demand.

The travelling journalist, the fleeting novelist, the enthusiastic newcomer and the seasoned Malayan all have their points of view. I believe that the ideal time to write about Malaya is at the stage when one's critical faculty is still unfettered and one is not too used to the many blessings that sate the appetite. In Malaya I made it my business to learn as much as possible from all kinds and creeds. I wanted to discover where the real control lay, how effective it was, and who were the real participants in Malaya's enormous wealth. In fact, this book was partly planned before the Japanese launched their treacherous attack, and has been modified by events.

As I write, a gentle zephyr kisses the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. The tragedy of Java is swiftly gathering. It appalled me to walk the streets of Batavia only yesterday and see bonny Dutch babies and girls in that bravely smiling paradise. The Dutch said: "This is our home. Men, women and children—we stay, but you must go. We will fight to the last."

We British should be humble before the Dutch of Java.

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PART I
BEFORE THE JAPANESE CAME

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO MALAYA

MALAYA, I was told in New Zealand, would do me good. I I should like it. So I took a passage to Sydney, where my steamer slid under a single-span steel bridge costing ten millions and weighing over 50,000 tons.

Said a Sydney business man as we gazed upwards in wonder, "They dredged another fifty feet under the bridge to give clearance to the masts of the *Queen Mary*." We laughed.

I fell for Sydney. Visiting the camera obscura in the dark room on the lofty bridge pylon, I felt like an Aladdin watching the heartbeat of a virile city. The cold marble slab in the centre of the sealed room glowed with warm blue sky, sun-flecked water and busy life. Warships were grey and sleek, ferries fussed ahead of creaming wake, and traffic sped unceasingly over the bridge.

The zoo fascinated me. They showed me a Malayan tiger. Magnificent in black and gold, he ignored the wondering human. Was he thinking of cool deep jungles, wild flesh and succulent durian? Then I peered up at a swaying elephant. The sagacity of a hundred years gleamed in his small eyes. Big ears waved gently. Next, I saw Malayan monkeys and snakes, to pass on to noisy, coloured birds. A huge scarlet-beaked hornbill flapped impotently. Later I was to see them flying in bomber formation over the jungle.

Then for a few days I lounged in an easy chair in the

Qantas flying-boat *Carpentaria* and watched the world spin by. Ever changing seas gleamed like frosted silver, or glittered dully like white flecked ribbon. I circled above Darwin one golden dawn and, with unfathomable feelings, saw Australia sliding away.

For three and a half hours we were a modern version of the Ancient Mariner, watching an empty shimmering sea which resembled nothing so much as a pewter dish. Below, so imagination told us, were sharks, giant rays and sea snakes. We stayed 5000 feet up and kept cool about it. Water, water, everywhere, and not a drop to drink. We shattered the ancient story and pressed a button for the steward and iced drinks.

The island of Timor sped towards us. We kissed the sea at Koepang. Here the grim future was to see a shot-riddled Qantas flying-boat drop to its final resting place.

While we stopped the heat made us gasp. Then we lifted once again to cooler air.

The mountains of Bali looked peaceful and serene. Java skimmed below like a millionaire's chessboard. Canals and paddy-fields vied with rubber plantations and jungle. Here were tens of millions of people living in apparent security in one of the richest treasure-houses of the world. We touched Java at Sourabaya, and spent several hours there.

We visited a hill station in the late afternoon and bathed in a cold, crystal-clear swimming pool, a heavenly interlude. Then down to heat-drenched Sourabaya again where lived 23,000 Europeans and 255,000 natives.

Magnificent homes, even then camouflaged against air attack, were set off beautifully by orchids and shrubs. The bewitching after-dinner hour led me on a stroll. Whole Dutch families reclined under exquisite electric light shades on luxurious settees in front of the houses. Radios blared in the open in guttural Dutch. Good food and warm tropic air had intoxicated me.

The usual card left in my room that night said:

Arrangements for to-morrow. You will be called at 4.45 a.m. Coffee will be served. Notes may be cashed. £ Australian equals $5.90 Straits and £ sterling equals $7.40 Straits. The car will leave the Oranje Hotel at 5.30. The flying-boat will leave the airport at 6.00 a.m. and stops will be made at Batavia, Singapore. Breakfast on board. Lunch on board.

On the flight from Sourabaya to Batavia, nine mountains of 10,000 feet floated past. Below, every inch seemed devoted to the cultivation of rubber, sugar, tobacco, rice, tea, cinchona and coco-nuts. Tapering lattice derricks marked hundreds of oil wells. Bitumen roads criss-crossed the island. Canals gleamed like silver ribbons.

We saw little of Batavia with its population of 350,000 natives, and 35,000 Europeans.

There was once a queen of whom a poet wrote, "She sometimes counsel took and sometimes tea." To sense the story that was Java, pass it by, and write of food and artificialities, seemed bathos indeed.

Thousands of islands glided underneath. The Sumatran jungle appeared. Here were gorillas, snakes and swamp. The sun was reflected strangely out of the watery depths, like a ball of fire.

Islands again. Hundreds of native craft. A junk flaunted rust-brown sails against sapphire sea.

Then Singapore rose above the skyline. My heart beat quickly as I looked at the sprawling city leaping at me. Here was the focal point of East and West, where countless races had warred since the dawn of time. On those seas Marco Polo had voyaged, then Francis Drake, and Saint Francis Xavier had carried the cross of Christianity in the last of the crusades against the Moslems. But all the early strife had vanished. Peace and prosperity had built a mighty city. To-day, Christian and Moslem lived in harmony, pouring the wealth of bountiful nature out to the world.

Here was the southern door to India, the gateway to Australia and New Zealand, the island fortress that pro-

tected the treasure-houses of the Indies, and the bastion built to secure the freedoms and liberty of the individual. And here was the publicity island of the world, the island that popular opinion said was full of unimaginative tradition-soaked pundits who sold chandhu opium to the natives; of whisky-swilling planters who had sleeping Malayan dictionaries; of tightly knotted old school ties; of smells and prostitutes; of guns so huge that they had to face south since, had they faced north, the blast would have pushed Singapore island over to Java as a gift to the Dutch. And this was the island where I never saw chandhu, or raw opium, or a whisky-swilling planter in bed with a native woman, or guns—much as I peered at the horizon.

Then the giant bird glided as gently as thistledown on to the warm waters of the harbour. Singapore, crowded and mysterious, absorbed me as easily and effortlessly as she had millions of others before me.

A quick jump from southern New Zealand to the southernmost tip of Asia. From the coldest swing of the seasons to eternal summer. Down under, ice was stored on mountain tops and in gigantic glaciers—glaciers which gouged granite as if it were cheese. A glacier lasted for ever. Here in Malaya ice was expensively manufactured in fifty thousand frigidaires, to tinkle in a glass and vanish in a few seconds.

I felt I was doing likewise. Heat and humidity—surely I was going to burst.

I have confused recollections of a motor drive to the Adelphi Hotel; the glistening ribs of ricksha pullers; streams of cars; throngs of Chinese, Indians and Malays; the calm expression of a man who looked like a Christ; the glittering eyes of a Sinhalese who hovered like Ali Baba over gleaming treasures in the hotel jewellery store; and the wailing reed played by a snake-charmer from India, fol-

lowed me in my dreams as I tried to sleep in the afternoon heat.

That evening, acquaintances called. Jones was an accountant in government service. He had spent five years in Malaya and was typical of the average Englishman. His companion was employed by a large company controlling rubber estates. He had a roguish look in his eye and his name was Graham.

"Singapore wakes up at night," I was told. Apparently this meant lit up—and we had some drinks.

Then we went out into brightly lit streets. Crowds thronged the main thoroughfares. I was grateful for the cooling rush of air as the car sped through the night. The icy, air-conditioned cabaret made my skin tingle. My brain cleared.

Music throbbed enticingly. The enormous building seemed unending. Several hundred couples were on the floor. A book of coupons was handed to me.

"See the tables just off the dancing floor?"

"Yes," said I, and my eye appraised the girls.

"They are taxi-dancers. You give a coupon and have a dance. That's all."

I took in the scene.

Complexions ranged from coffee black to peaches and cream. Chinese boys were busy with trays of drinks. A few—a very few, European women were there with escorts. Cigarette smoke screened the dancers and hung heavily in that cold air. On a dais an Asiatic band thumped a rhumba, jiggled a one-step, blared a fox-trot or a waltz. Quickly, because time was money. Work this out for yourself! Twenty-five cents for a dance; twenty dances an hour; a hundred taxi-dancers; thus several thousand dollars change hands. The taxi-dancers take one half. Some make big money. They squeeze your hand, too. It may be worth ten cents to them.

The mixture of Malays, Chinese, Eurasian and Indian dancers seemed unreal, even after a few dances.

"Do you like Malaya?"

Always that question. Malaya, as I see it now, after an intensive if short study, can be crowded or lonely. One's personal devil can thrive here. The test is on all the time. A man may throw his soul to Malaya and preserve his liver with gin pahits or whisky stengahs; or his whole being may expand and learn to understand the muted throbbings of Asia's millions. In this land of eternal sunshine, everything is offered lavishly. Leisure is a necessity; yet even leisure is exhausting. Malaya could be a place of academic delight, with its unending material for research, for economic analysis; yet unfortunately, it seldom has been. There are amazing mixtures—social snobbery, government autocracy, heady wealth, dignity with poverty, modesty and humility, contentment gleaming unobtrusively, and lust rearing its ugly head.

Yes, Malaya can be casually accepted as a prostitute or wooed subtly with an artist's appreciation. Whatever one does, Malaya is an exacting mistress and too few have the courage, or see the necessity, to discuss the problems that really matter.

My stay has not yet extended over many years, and for me countless questions remain to be answered. Some are as old as time and as baffling as the mystery of life. I have read many books on Malaya. They range from the delightful potpourri to the informative official tome of contemporary history. But I have missed, so far, an interpretation of the art of living as applied to Malaya.

The stories are transitory, fragmentary. They portray a pleasing interlude. The table is set, as it were, a world famous curry is being served, and a good time is being had by all. But the indigestion of to-morrow is ignored.

Malaya puts her mark on all who go there. Her lovers often sound a note of defensive independence, an under-

current of defiant questioning, when asserting their bondage. You are told that humid Malaya, thrusting her puny length into warm shallow seas two degrees from the equator, is considered to be a modern paradise where the tired European may live out his days, his senses subtly drugged with ease, luxury and forgetfulness. Is that a sign of decadence?

Whence come the Malayans* and from what class of society? What material and invisible chains hold them here? That European woman is brave—her children are in Australia. Surely Malaya does not take more than she gives with so lavish a hand? And what of the winter of life, when the Malayan opens the door of his hothouse and ventures timidly forth into a changed world?

There is one class of book on Malaya in which the highlights glare so luridly that the tranquil beauty which holds the soul in bondage is obscured. The sun is portrayed as a dangerous ball of fire; palms are for ever silhouetted against royal-blue skies; the tropical moon fills the star-strewn heavens; the women are dangerously fascinating; and the European toils languidly, if at all, while vice bubbles unheeded.

Actually, one can lie out naked in the sun for an hour on that blissful Sunday morning; there is never a sky without some cloud or haze; the moon—well, it is romantic in any country if the company is right; and the European works very hard.

In purely descriptive writing the jungle is the snag for many. Its living stillness, silent awareness, that gleam of sunlight, that one waving frond, demand and so seldom get fine writing.

But to go back to my first night in Malaya and answer the question. I chuckled to myself and issued a challenge—the challenge I had come five thousand miles to carry out.

* Malayan as used throughout these pages means persons of purely European blood. The indigenous peoples are Malays.

"Malaya is a fascinating country on which to write a book."

"What! When you don't know the country? That would take ten years at least."

Jones had the type of analytical brain that can be the limitation of a trained accountant. His approach to a topic of this nature was factual, unimaginative. "But you would not attempt to write a book on Malaya?" he added.

"Yes."

"Impossible."

"I agree, from one point of view."

"So you can define distinctions already?" No sarcasm was intended. There was simply an impersonal curiosity, want-to-place-you feeling, about his attitude.

"It depends on how you look at it."

From a nearby table a Chinese girl rose languidly. Almond-shaped eyes, starry bright and set in a piquant face, lingered on mine. Studied nonchalance, willowy grace and perfect poise combined to give an impression of a fatalistic acceptance of life. Dancing was her business. I felt that she was without fire, an artist without art, a perfect body without passion.

Graham was getting lit up. "You bet it does," he said. "Depends what you are going to write about. For instance, how does this title strike you—'Malaya, Land of Butterflies and Prostitutes'—but believe me, it is harder to chase the butterflies." Rising carefully to his feet he made his way towards the dancing floor.

"And how do *you* define Malaya?" My question surprised Jones.

"Well," he said, "it is a Crown Colony in Singapore, Malacca and Penang. It also comprises four Federated States, five Unfederated States and produces large quantities of rubber and tin."

"And there are Sultans, harems, elephants and tigers,

snakes and crocodiles, together with every nationality and creed under the sun?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Millions of Indians, Chinese and Malays, billions of dollars, squeeze and graft, unexplored jungles, Sakais and poison darts?"

"What else do you know?"

"Just that for a start, but oh boy, what a start!" I glanced at him speculatively and continued—"Please answer this: What is the economic structure of this country, and how is it run? Who really participate in its enormous wealth? In what respect is it self-protected from the danger of attack? What is the secret of the harmony which appears to prevail among so many races, and what test will that harmony stand? But I warn you that these questions merely open up dozens of others."

Jones stared at me, then laughed.

"Very well, professor; I have never worried about it and I don't know who has. Singapore is impregnable, you know."

"So I am told."

A specialty turn came on to the floor. An almost naked Burmese girl circled and swayed into the spotlight. Shapely thighs gyrated and gleamed, and above a slim waist small breasts danced under a wisp of silk. Her shoulders swung as she stamped on bare feet. Her eyes shone and a fixed smile grimaced widely. I was repelled. There was no native artistry in this hip-swinging, bosom-arching, artificial abandon, no slow development of a deathless story. The onlookers clapped and cheered—derisively, I felt. Suddenly the whole scene struck me as irresistibly comic. A man could stay ten years here and these artificialities might seem pleasing, even artistic. His jaded senses would need whipping, if he did not leave this land. But surely life in Malaya was more substantial than this. I reminded myself

that this dance was not the real Malaya—this did not typify the call of the East.

"And you are really going to write about it?"

There we go again. A question occurred to me.

"Are you married?"

He actually blushed. "I will be next month. She leaves Canada shortly."

"Good. Splendid. Comparisons are odious, but—there is a woman. You will not even begin to know her ten years from now and yet you have written a book about her. In that book, a chapter air-mailed each week, you have built a castle in Spain; you have interpreted a heroine to her fingertips; you have told her exactly what she wants you to; you have dwelt on impressions; you are in love with her. It is a best seller for its public. As for me—I'm in love with life. Why shouldn't I write a book about it?"

We looked at each other. Our friend was on the dancing floor with the pretty Chinese girl and our last book of coupons. Was it he on whom her look had lingered? I continued.

"It all depends on the point of view. To me, first impressions are the undiluted essence of life. I want to write of impressions, not opinions. Opinion is often dogmatic, and the very word reeks of argument."

With difficulty, I kept back a spate of words, for thoughts provoked by the tragic disaster of war continually filled my mind. Ideas crowded and clamoured for expression. But why should I seek to inflict my philosophy on a comparative stranger, although instinct told me he was a friend? Why should I drag answers from him on those vexatious questions which so few want to face?

Man lacks vision. With all his wonderful gifts he so often does those very things which lead to disillusion and despair. But, though life is said to be a continued and inevitable disillusionment, I will not agree. Life is a never-ending

miracle. Those who retain the breathless ecstasy of first impressions know how to live.

I felt that Jones's thoughts were far away. Surely he could have done much better than follow the career so inevitably grooved for him.

He smiled. "We probably are strange to a new arrival," he said. "We appear to drink, have innumerable servants, and to lead a life of ease and luxury. But there are penalties, of course. We must forget about a good many things. We ignore to-morrow. Malaya can be a very pleasant place to live in, as you will find."

"If war comes to Malaya?"

Scorn and amusement were blended in his look. "The Japanese will not come. They will not dare. We do not take them very seriously out here."

CHAPTER II

SINGAPORE SKETCH

I WAS looking for the tailor, Wing Loong.

Blinding airless heat. Natives of every hue in vari-coloured costumes filled the shaded footwalks. Sweating ricksha pullers threaded expertly among the throng. A few Europeans were shopping. Midday, Saturday, in Singapore. And every day.

Newspaper boys by the score.

Perspiration flowed. My thick flannel suit felt heavy, stuck to me. Deformed beggars were everywhere. An emaciated Indian extended withered arms, holding a tin cup. A sightless Chinese, hearing my heavy step amid shuffling slippers, called out. Ingratiating Indian salesmen cajoled as I passed their shops. Goods were heaped everywhere. All shops were wide open to the street. A smother of silks, best European and American goods made by Japanese firms, Burmese bracelets. A magnificent silver-mounted tiger skull attracted me. Price $750. "No thanks." Translucent jade contrasted with carved ivory.

Filthy Chinese provision shops displayed dried fish crawling with maggots, sacks of rice, Chinese food of every description. Next door was a goldsmith. His glass windows looked odd. Cases shone dully with yellow metal. A few steps farther on was a coffin shop. Then fat-bellied laughing Buddhas mocked. A Sinhalese caught my eye. "Best American and British goods, sir."

I eased a soaked collar and joked, weakly. "Cure for perspiration?"

"Yes. Plenty."

But he was in doubt. Soon the counter was piled with every conceivable brand of lotion and aids to artificial beauty. An unintelligible jargon poured from his lips and a twin with gold-filled teeth appeared through a curtain, then dashed down the street. In a few seconds he was back, holding a jar of a well-known cure for constipation. He took his defeat philosophically.

Natives slept on the footwalks. Semi-naked Chinese children, faces dabbed with rice powder, peered at me curiously. Gutters were five feet deep.

And with it all, a variety of smells. Rich and pungent. Continual hammer-blows on my olfactory sense. Beyond imagination. Unutterably putrid. I shudderingly rejected thoughts of putrescent corpses, food riddled with worms.

Two Europeans passed. Neither wore a hat. I exuded friendship, but they brushed past, faces blank. I might have been a coolie. Curiously, I looked after them.

My fingers felt swollen, greasy. Ah, there was Wing Loong's dark portal. A spare Chinese sized me up impersonally. His hair was clipped very short, almost shaven. Shirt without collar. Crumpled white trousers. Slippers on bare feet. His manner was attentive but not obsequious. My eyes were hot. I peered at samples of linen and cotton twill and finished up by ordering ten suits. Later, I bought dozens of sets of underwear and a large suitcase.

My legs dragged. Not speaking Malay, I could not engage a taxi or ricksha. With difficulty I staggered back to the hotel.

Jones called. "Still like Malaya?" he grinned.

"Too blasted hot."

"What have you bought?"

I told him and said, "Suits will be ready to-morrow."

"How much?"

"Eight dollars fifty each."

"Not bad. And the suitcase?"

"Fifteen dollars."

"Not so good. Any questions?"

"Yes. Have a cold, cold drink?"

"Thanks."

"Boy!"

Jones laughed. "The call of the East! You are coming on."

"Order beer," I entreated.

"Dua beer," said Jones, to the sleek Chinese boy.

The broad bladed fan whirred from the ceiling. Iced beer cleared my head. The cold glass in my hand clouded. A glass of beer, I found, cost sixty cents, or 1s. 3d. I tipped ten cents.

"That is the idea," said Jones.

A first drink never hurts you. Most people have a second one. Drink, I was told, was necessary. I listened. I found it always interesting to listen in Malaya. Heat was flowing through me again as the insidious beer took effect.

Jones chuckled quietly. "Listen to this," he said. "A friend of mine had a peculiar experience the other day. He is married and lives with his mem—wife to you—in a house out in the suburbs. Arriving home one afternoon, he did not enter the house as usual by the front entrance, but walked in through the servants' quarters at the back. Imagine his surprise when he saw the second boy, a Chinese of some fourteen years, with his eye glued to a hole, watching the mem having a bath. Angrily, he gave the boy a hiding, and asked what he meant. 'I have looked every day,' said the boy. 'The cook wants me to tell him when the mem steps out of the bath.' 'What?' roared the husband, and yelled for the cook. Blandly, the Chinese listened to the charge. His eyes opened in astonishment. 'I ask him,' he admitted. 'He tells me. Then I know when to make the afternoon tea.'"

Fans buzzed. Green pot-plants bent slightly to the

artificial breeze. My clothes were glued to me. People sat near by. Even to my untutored eye, the various nationalities were obvious. The indifference of everybody aroused my interest. I saw a European sitting alone. He looked uncomfortable, even as I. His eyes moved curiously. I wondered if he thought the same of me as I did of him. Throughout the lounge there was an air of sophistication, boredom, that grated on my eager susceptibilities.

Stepping into the blinding light, we drove to Clifford Pier. A fat, greasy-looking chettiar gave me $8.45 for each pound sterling. The nominal rate of exchange was $8.58. One dollar equalled 2s. 4d. British currency. I was struck by the shrewdness of the Indian. His large eyes flashed intelligence and humour. Currency was his business. His quickness and innate sagacity made me wonder.

Large modern buildings adorned the waterfront. Behind them were tumbledown Chinese and Indian shops. The Colonial Offices and the Victoria Memorial Hall had an air of tradition and solidity. A statue of Sir Stamford Raffles stood in front of the hall, and the poised head and outstretched arm typified a dream of empire come true.

As we sped through the streets, the old and the new passed us with bewildering rapidity, squalor amid extravagance, poverty amid splendour. We stopped outside the salt water swimming club, and I wallowed like a porpoise in deep cool water.

A pot of tea was heaven. A westering sun kissed my skin. Ships passed near by. The hot, sweltering city was several miles away.

I asked a question. "Where are all the guns one reads about? We have been over most of the city and miles of waterfront and I have not seen a thing."

Jones said, "That is one subject we do not discuss."

"But have you seen any in your eight years here?"

"No," he admitted. "But you will hear them."

"And I do not see any preparations for war. The big

departmental stores are smothered with plate glass and there are no slit trenches. I saw camouflaged roofs in Sourabaya, but I see none here."

It was December 1940. Japan was shrieking her dreams of empire.

The next night I travelled 250 miles in the air-conditioned express up to Kuala Lumpur, capital of the Federated Malay States. The steel rails bisected vast tracts of rubber and jungle.

CHAPTER III

KUALA LUMPUR

The bustle of life in the early morning fascinates me. The federal capital, Kuala Lumpur, has many government buildings the arabesque lines of which are the admiration of all who visit it. Indians, Chinese and Malays, intent on business, stream along the roads. They ride in buses, cars, on bicycles; many just walk. Thousands are employed in shops and offices and their white suits are usually freshly laundered. The Malays often wear colourful sarong and baju. Chinese and Indian coolies are to be seen by the hundred. Dirtier and scantier clothes are their portion and the humble sandal or slipper their foot-gear. More often, they have bare, calloused feet. Around the government offices one sees Tamil women wearing multi-coloured robes and, as like as not, bracelets and ear-rings of gold. Ricksha pullers thread their way among the ever-weaving throng and keep a sharp eye open for the tuan's car driven by the seemingly reckless Malay syce. Huge rain-trees splash the road with cool shade, but the glare, at eight in the morning, is not noticeable. In the centre of the town, at the junction of two rivers discoloured by tin washings, a Malay mosque pierces the sky with a dream of spires to vie in beauty with the vivid green of lofty coco-nut palms. Chinese and Indian girls and many Eurasians pass by. And contentment rests on every face, no matter of what race or religion, for harmony prevails.

High government officials are deposited under the clock tower and the diminutive smart syces whir the cars around

the building to the many garages. I have no syce and thereby hangs a tale. The thirty odd syces who gamble through the office hours decided that the true union rules, properly applied, should automatically find me a syce. Bachelors as a rule do not bother about a syce, or chauffeur. My car inexplicably refused to go. The petrol tank had to be taken off four times, electrical connexions were broken and even the armature had to be rewound. I had mysterious punctures. I was told of similar boycotts and of cars hopelessly scratched. Only after the police were informed did the trouble stop, but my bills totalled more than $100. A syce, by the way, received $20 per month. You speedily find out that you cannot change a tyre in Malaya and retain that immaculate appearance so proper to a government official.

Several conversations with acquaintances outside government circles amused me. Here is the gist:

"You are very fortunate to be in government service."

"Why?"

"You are accepted socially, a government servant is never sacked, be he never so bad, and you get all sorts of allowances."

"Such as?"

"You are supplied with free houses, furniture, cheap medical services, free travelling facilities for your wife and children (if any) when you go on long leave, allowances for children, and a big fat pension."

"So you suggest I should take it easy?"

"Of course. You must get your annual increments and you will get on in government only if you are a 'yes man' and show no initiative. You must not show any personality or hustle—the man higher up will not like it."

"So I must lose my individuality?"

"Yes."

"And you think that it is a good thing to be in the government?"

"Why not?"

Never had I worked so hard. I was informed that while I was registered in the Volunteer Regiment I was not to be allowed to go into the periodic camps. I was not even issued with a uniform. The income tax enactment had not become law, but we had a nucleus of a staff already building up a card register of property and share owners.

New-year's eve was, of course, spent at the Spotted Dog.* It was unthinkable that any one within thirty miles of Kuala Lumpur should do otherwise. When the fateful strokes of midnight boomed forth, I kissed Margaret Jones a happy new year. Her husband didn't worry me, nor the fact that I had only just met them. My fourth stengah neutralized him.

Pageantry, brilliant lights, music, drinks. "Happy new year." The 1st of January 1941. Poodlefaking. Everything was at hand for joy and happiness, except that there were too many men without wives. Six hundred and fifty Europeans making whoopee. The glittering throng was visible far and wide. On the padang (grass space) outside the wide open dance floor, white-clothed Asiatics moved ghost-like in the gloom, eyes gleaming with interest.

I saw an acquaintance. "Have a drink, Smithy?"

"Thanks. Here's to 1941."

The European women were bright-eyed, exquisitely gowned, many in fancy dress. The thought of war was never so far away; no scene was ever gayer in peace-time. Drinks, good food, comfort, attentive servants, and prosperity, enfolded all in a delicious haze. Various members of the dance band moved around the crowded floor, saxophones buzzing throatily. Streamers described multi-coloured arcs. Dozens of ceiling fans sent cooling streams of air down to heated brows, bare shoulders.

* The Selangor Club was commonly known as the "Spotted Dog" or, more simply, the "Dog".

White mess-jackets contrasted with black evening attire. Khaki-clad officers added to the surplus of males. One such officer, eyes hungrily watching some of the feminine visions on the floor, said to me, "Nice war we are winning."

"How do you make that out?"

"Our presence here is immobilizing two million Japanese."

"Modesty. That's what it is. One hundred million yellow Japs! Have another drink."

Pettit made the suggestion first. With a roguish glitter in his eye, he said: "How about a trip down Batu Road?" There were four of us all told, and a laugh went up. I was puzzled. Pettit pulled me to my feet and waved my questions aside. "Come along and find out," he said.

Outside the Dog, it seemed as if the world stood still. Towering palms were silhouetted against a sickle moon and the air was cool. The lovely lines of the government offices on the far side of the padang were etched in circles and spires, and the charm of Malaya tugged at my heart. But this was not the time, apparently, to appreciate beauty so intangible, and we tumbled into a car.

Batu Road was just around the corner and we soon pulled up outside a small building bearing the sign "Ohayo Hotel". Pushing our way in through swing doors, we came on a motley scene. A very fat Japanese woman smiled and jabbered in Malay to Pettit, who went through an eloquent pantomime. He called her "Missy". On a sort of dais behind her were some half-dozen girls who took not the slightest notice of us. They were playing some kind of card game. One was asleep using the hard Japanese head-rest; but the girls were not Japanese. The mixtures seemed to range from Tamil-Siamese-Chinese to Javanese-Malay.

Then I knew. This place was really a brothel. Pettit was speaking. "Do you like the look of any of these girls?"

I glanced at Missy. She would have drawn the eye anywhere for every reason other than physical attractiveness. Immensely fat, she was not more than five feet in height,

and she must have weighed at least twenty stone. Her eyes were shrewd with the experience of some fifty years, wary, and filled with an appreciative twinkle which was largely put on. An air of complete competence gave her a briskly business-like look. I felt like a boy who has been caught playing truant from school. One girl was staring at me. She was small and dressed Malay fashion. Her hair was brushed tightly to the back of her head and wound in a knot. Her black eyes were ready to smile or remain indifferent.

"Missy guarantees the girls."

The Eurasian turned to her cards again. The others with her did not seem alive. The air appeared dead, lifeless. The bottle of beer which we drank tasted warm and flat.

"Missy will get you a pure Chinese. Just say what you want."

"No thanks."

"Pretty lousy lot. Let us try the Corner House."

Down the street again. I was feeling tired, sleepy. "What you want is a couple of stengahs," I was told.

Curious, I wanted to see these places. The Corner House was also run by a Japanese. "Probably a spy," someone whispered in my ear. But this Missy was the soul of tact and one felt entirely at ease. Clearly, prostitution to her was a perfectly natural business. Malaya was a land of men. Men must have women. She had the women. If the man paid for a room he could stay the night. Of course, the girl would expect five dollars. I was amused at her broken English, at her shrewdness. I found myself alone, and went in search of Pettit.

"Bring Abbi," he was saying. I insisted on staying with him on the pretext that I knew little Malay. Lying on a bed in the room was a Siamese, sheet drawn right up to her chin, her huge dark eyes flashing fire. Pettit talked, then looked at me speculatively. "This one is pretty good." The girl eyed me resentfully and I burst out laughing. No

wonder the girl was annoyed, when two tuans argued in her room about the merits of an absent Abbi. She was very pretty, in a full-blossomed way. Her skin looked satiny, light brown, and her eyes were liquid pools. I said hullo, and the evidence of my ignorance of Malay caused her to chatter animatedly to Pettit. Like the girls in the Ohayo Hotel, this one looked unreal. Then she smiled at me. Her teeth were stained with betel nut.

Missy appeared at the door, nodded down the passageway and disappeared. I walked back to the other room. There, facing me, stood a lissom girl of about twenty. She was Indian, with a strain of Siamese. Her carriage was superb and her eyes large and lustrous. The face was long and oval, the nose sensitive and perfectly shaped, while the mouth was exquisitely curved.

This girl, with her magnificent head of hair, would have excited attention anywhere. I moved over to her, watching her eyes. Slowly, she smiled. Restrained, slightly sensuous, her look challenged mine. "Abbi?" I asked. She broke into a torrent of Malay. "T'ada Malay," was all I could say. She moved to my side, took my arm and waited.

"Abbi has taken a fancy to you."

I swung round. Pettit was laughing at me. "She is the best in the F.M.S., as passionate as they make them, and if I were you . . ."

I disengaged her fingers. "No."

"What?"

"Not to-night, anyway." I felt caught out; smiled at Abbi whose white teeth glistened as she disclosed their perfection. The girl knew what I said. Pettit then thought he must liven things up. Striding over to Abbi, he whispered in her ear. She shook her head. Catching her sarong, he pushed her from him. The clothing unwound to her waist disclosing a matchless figure with firm, perfectly shaped breasts. The waist was small and a hip curved provocatively. For a moment she stood immobile, then

haughtily robed herself. Her eyes were slumbrous with anger and she would not look at us.

"Funny thing," Pettit drawled. "Asiatic women are quite modest. Now what about it? I'll wait."

Now, if a man discovered such a woman by himself, he would not carry on a conversation with a gramophone. But I have never been amenable to suggestive discipline. My refusal was taken as a matter of course. "The longer you stay out East," I was told, "the whiter the women become. And the Japanese women watch their girls and know their business. Pick up a girl at a dance hall and look out. But these places have a goodwill and Missy values her custom."

CHAPTER IV

SELANGOR GOLF CLUB

I QUICKLY found that life in Malaya attacked you in a subtle way. The heat demanded the utmost concentration on whatever you were doing at the moment, whether at work or play. It was difficult to accept life easily. Six months were to pass before I became properly acclimatized. To begin with, I scorned the afternoon siesta so beloved on Saturdays and Sundays. Later, it was one of my greatest pleasures.

My partner in my first game of golf picked me up in his car and drove down to Circular Road, to turn in at the Selangor golf club. A beautiful clubhouse lay in the middle of the finest links I had ever seen. Thirty-six holes. Near the tenth tee some twenty or thirty grass tennis courts nestled among high fences festooned with a purple convolvulus and a kind of wild honeysuckle. By the ninth fairway lay a fifty-metre tiled swimming pool of chlorinated, filtered water.

Stepping carefully on to the grass, I found that it was real, and squatted to look at it. Each blade was firmly juicy. Springy, translucent, it was the finest carpet I had ever seen—and New Zealand is famous for its grasses.

My last game had taken place 5000 miles away on a gale-swept course with snow-filled bunkers and muddy greens; this one on a perfect paradise and greens like velvet. And a golf ball sat up, screaming to be swept away. But while the ball seemed to fly well I could not make it stay hit.

Heat slowed my swing and quickened my donations of sundry ball chits. The first week-end I played fifty-four holes, and took a week to get over it. Each hole was a perfect test of golf. The green carpet in that golfer's paradise extended in every direction from the clubhouse, as far as the eye could see.

"What are those trees?"

"Casuarinas."

Tall and graceful, they were a dream of beauty—except when I drove into them. Our caddies were a source of never-ending interest. Some grinned like Cheshire cats, others were impervious to our Sunday morning wit. Some could judge a shot as well as the world's best; others were poor club carriers.

The New Year Tourney was a great success. I didn't win, but it is really the chaps like me who create a champion. I lost a ball several times and signed pink chits. You sign for everything out East. Except, so I am told, for an Asiatic woman. You sign chits at hotels, restaurants, and clubs, which include a visiting member to Penang or Singapore. Your credit is good, too. You just please yourself. At the end of a month you receive fat envelopes full of duplicate chits. Then you make out a cheque, for there is plenty of cash or credit at the bank. My cheque to the golf club was anything up to $100 (at 2s. 4d.) a month, or £15 New Zealand currency, depending on late nights and putting touch. I never can play decent golf after an early night.

The sensitive plant amused me. It grew in profusion along the ground, much like some kinds of clover. Touch any part of the plant, and the leaves with which it is smothered fold up tightly. You never found the sensitive plant on the cut fairways. I did often—in the rough.

Snakes were seen occasionally. Tamil women engaged in weeding the ground would flutter in agitation—Asiatics fear snakes—and a grass-snake might be seen travelling at

an incredible rate. To my astonishment, snakes undulated sideways.

Black and emerald butterflies could be seen winging along, as well as bright yellow and flaring pink ones. Ants would climb on to my ball and commit suicide. Once my club hit a wasp. It zoomed around with an angry buzz and four golfers ran as from a Japanese bomber. Three strings at once have been known to kill a man.

Women frequented the links a great deal, sensibly dressed in shorts, or divided skirts. Some played very well. They were restricted from playing on the championship eighteen.

Several hundred cars would be clustered under the trees down by the syce telephone extension, waiting for their owners. The Malay chauffeurs gambled the hours away, or slept heavily in the cars. I used to wonder what they did at night.

A vast multi-coloured umbrella kept the sun away at times, but often it had to be held with both hands for a tropical thunderstorm. Once I was in a winning position in a match and had got away a good drive down the eighteenth fairway, when several great drops splashed down. Running down the fairway, I tried to finish. I took fourteen for the hole.

In the evening, as we rested after a round, a truly Malayan note would be struck by white-clad Asiatics walking in from the bar at the fifteenth. First a Chinese boy, trousers clipped tightly at the ankle, and then a tall Tamil wearing a tattered garment and carrying on his head a large white bucket filled with ice. I remember how once I nearly hit the Tamil with a full drive at the beginning of a round as he set out across the tenth fairway. The tall Indian swayed, the bucket swayed, we swayed with laughter, but to his credit the *tukan ayer* did not once touch the bucket with his hands, and it weighed a good fifty pounds.

A hot shower after golf loosened tired muscles. Powder obviated prickly heat. It was luxury to change into dry

clothes. Then we became worshippers of Bacchus or nature.

To sit in a rattan chair and watch the ever-changing witchery of the sunset made me feel very humble. Roseate hues would kiss the far-off mountains as if they were a shimmering blaze of orchids, then gradually the colours would pale to pastel tints, to deepen again into the softest purply blue. As the light faded, lanterns near our tables would glow with orange and the Virginia creeper would be mysteriously outlined against red brick and cream rough-cast. Fireflies would float past. Around us voices tinkled. At eight-thirty every one would be gone. No, not really, for was not to-morrow always the same?

More than half my leisure time was spent at the golf club. On Sunday mornings, as a variation from golf, I joined the sun worshippers at the swimming pool. Delightful discovery. I could lie for two hours out in the sun. I stayed as brown as a berry. Then to plunge into the cool water and see the drops sparkle like diamonds as one swam. Occasionally I played tennis, and the balanced swing as one served, leaning back, racket sweeping behind and up to hit the white ball silhouetted against blue sky, was joy indeed, even if watered liberally with rivers of sweat.

After a shower, one could go to the air-conditioned picture theatre at 6.30 or the late show at 9.30. You just pleased yourself. It was always there.

CHAPTER V

CURRENCY CENSORSHIP

PENDING the passing of the War Taxation Enactment, which was a tax on incomes, I was employed in the Exchange Control Office of the Federal Secretariat. I was soon steeped in the atmosphere of government.

My first day on duty coincided with a Federal Council meeting. The pomp and ceremony outside the building as the Sultans arrived was like a page from history. A guard of honour made up of a company from the Malay Regiment paraded as smartly as if they were the Guards at Buckingham Palace. Heels clicked, rifles clashed as one, while the sun flashed simultaneously from fifty bayonets. My eyes opened in astonished admiration.

The road in front of the long government building had been barred to traffic. Thousands of natives watched. The black velvet cap of the Mohammedans was most noticeable from my vantage point on a balcony right below the clock. The four Sultans then drove up at suitable intervals. Commands snapped out, rifles swept forward to the present.

The Sultans wore magnificent sarongs woven with cloth of gold. I longed to walk around with a camera and colour film, for this was part of the pageantry of empire.

In the Exchange Control Office investigations arising out of censor control were my special pidgin, and many and varied were my experiences. Money transactions inside the sterling bloc did not worry me, but attempted transfers to China, Java, U.S.A. and other countries incurred my official

wrath under the Emergency (Finance) Regulations. At the same time remittances to places like Hongkong, Egypt and Pondicherry were not easy to define, at first.

The Chinese are a thrifty race. Their savings of numerous Straits dollars were matched only by the number of their multitudinous relatives, many of whom lived in China. The government permitted remittances to China for genuine family maintenance up to a certain amount, and many attempts were made to go beyond the regulations. A favourite dodge was for a so-called benevolent or church society in China to solicit donations by circular. An agent would act in Malaya, but the moneys, as like as not, were merely deposits against future withdrawal when the payer went to China to retire and die.

The authorities also allowed $500,000 Straits to be sent to China each month in aid of the China Relief Fund to allay the distress caused by the Sino-Japanese war, but here again I suspected various collection societies. The Chinese experienced no sense of doing wrong. Conservation of exchange meant nothing to them.

A great deal of good was effected by the permitted transfers, because a Chinese coolie in Malaya could make a whole shilling a day, whereas I am told his brother in China earns twopence for the same period. The subsequent tragedy of Malaya is therefore felt keenly in the interior of China, where a destitute relative may now be without the means to buy food.

A Chinese father living in Kuala Lumpur purported to have a son student in a monastery in Saigon. I intercepted a $100 draft and wrote to the father asking him to call, since he had no permit to remit. A week later an air-mail letter was intercepted from Saigon containing—to my astonishment—my request to the father, and incidentally damaging his case very considerably. The letter, when translated, said among other things: "These exchange control officers are very shrewd and you must be very careful.

Please send money to three fictitious sons care of the following chop."

On another occasion, a syndicate operating from India was forwarding air-mail letters written in an obscure Indian dialect, outlining a manipulation whereby Indian rupees were converted to Japanese yen via U.S.A. dollars in Manila. A profit of no less than 30,000 yen was alleged possible for each investment of 100,000 yen.

Remittances relating to fictitious goods were also queried and several Indians and Chinese were reposing peacefully in jail when war broke out, doubtless meditating on the sin of being found out.

When Chinese or Indians were brought in for interrogation, I was struck by their extreme nervousness. Of course, they knew we had the proof, but their fear seemed out of proportion to the offence, until I realized that deportation and banishment from rich Malaya was a punishment indeed.

Most offences by coolies, however, were committed in ignorance. Chinese remittance dealers abounded, and the banks also operated separately. There was nothing to prevent a Chinese from using several remittance dealers or banks and also, which was done, fictitious names of remitters and remittees. I could not understand why the government did not have a system of registration not only for remitters, but for all Asiatics in Malaya. A Chinese name is spelt phonetically and when "Chiew" may be "Tiew", where are you? Many Chinese had numerous aliases.

Work commenced punctually at 8.30 a.m. and went on until at least 4.30 p.m. with just one hour for tiffin. I worked very hard indeed and was fagged out after examining some dozens of real Chinese puzzles a day.

CHAPTER VI

TAXES AND COLLECTORS

EACH afternoon during January, I studied the old 1919 Income Tax Ordinance which had been applied in the Straits Settlements in the last war, and which was to be the basis of the F.M.S. War Taxation Enactment of 1941. The daily newspapers, in view of the coming issue in February as to whether income tax would be imposed or not, were very lively indeed. Harsh criticisms of the principle of a direct tax on income filled many pages.

The cases for and against were fairly simple. Alternative proposals to the so-called iniquitous revelations arising from a direct tax were heatedly advocated in the form of additional export taxes on tin and rubber. A learned honourable advocated a system of taxation in which partnerships were not taxed. He was a member of a lucrative partnership. The basic principles of a graduated tax on income were lost sight of and I was first of all highly amused at the play.

The application of the tax meant just this. Tax commenced at 2 per cent on £560 sterling ($4800 S.S.) a year and increased in a progressive ratio up to 8 per cent on incomes of £2333 sterling ($20,000 S.S.) and more per annum. You will agree with me that the rate could hardly have been lower, and yet the thunderous noise which reverberated throughout Malaya was matched later only by the Japanese bombs. I refused to accept the publicity at its face value. While inome tax had never been introduced in

the Federated Malay States, it was utterly incredible that residents of Malaya should enjoy possibly the highest standard of living in the world and at the same time growl about an apology of a tax, when less fortunate millions were not only paying a good 40 per cent of income, but were being bombed at the same time.

As the days went by and bitterness increased, I felt more than a little disgusted. The influences at work were clearly affecting sane, level-headed men whom I respected, and I was amazed. When I was questioned by acquaintances and friends I merely replied, "The question is—are we at war, or are we not?"

Up to a point, the Malayan might be excused. In the Federated Malay States he had never known tax, and innovations, the world over, meet with a hostile reception when they are considered to infringe on the liberty of the individual.

Income tax was being applied to Malaya in 1941 to provide for the defence of the country and the cost of the war. This was the richest part of the British Empire, the war had been in progress for eighteen months and the Federated Malay States had never known income tax!

To the south of Malaya, the residents of the Dominions of Australia and New Zealand were burdened with high rates of tax. Nearby Ceylon, India and Burma had tax ordinances, likewise Hongkong off the China coast.

Most of the European residents in Malaya were on a salary basis and a great proportion received a substantial yearly bonus. Naturally, owing to the great fillip supplied by the war, Malayans were enjoying extremely prosperous conditions. During 1941 some rubber companies paid out dividends of over 100 per cent.

Burdekin, a friend of mine, was manager of a rubber estate some twenty miles out of town. He was forty years of age and married. At twenty-four he had been engaged through an agency house in England and his first contract

in Malaya was for five years, after which he had five months' leave (passage paid) on full salary. Subsequent contracts shortened to three years and his present salary was $800 per month. He was provided with a bungalow free of rent and usually received a bonus of 10 per cent. Thus his annual income was approximately £1300. His liability for tax was £78 (6 per cent).

Thomson was an assistant on a rubber estate. His age was twenty-five and his salary £700 per annum. His assessment for tax would be £14. Smith, who earned £550 in a year, would pay nothing.

A Chinese multi-millionaire paid £8 for each £100 of net income. There was no super tax or excess profits tax.

Criticism of the suggested tax on income flooded the newspapers.

The 21st of February dawned. To-day was the Federal Council meeting when the vexed question of income tax was to be decided, and I was given the privilege of attending in the capacity of a mute but very attentive listener. I can still see the gathering in my mind's eye. His Excellency, the High Commissioner, Sir Shenton Thomas, presided over twenty-six members representative of the Federal Secretariat, government departments controlling essential services, one official member appointed by the High Commissioner and twelve unofficial members appointed by the High Commissioner. Under the constitution of Council as outlined, the High Commissioner of the Federated Malay States wielded a tremendous power and his influence was incalculable.

In a country like Malaya, where the resident had no vote or nominative power, the integrity and efficiency of the government had to be kept at a high level. Everything depended on the government. There was no doubt that the vast riches of Malaya, and the incredible development of the country, both in resources and population, had given rise to problems far greater than when the last of

the great governors ruled. Never before had there been greater need for firm leadership and inspired vision.

Before nightfall the sixty-five clauses of the War Taxation Enactment 1941 had become law.

The newly-appointed Collector-General had had a somewhat remarkable career. Commencing service in the Federated Malay States as a detective, he was placed in charge of the Estate Duty Department in view of his special qualifications as an investigator. Many people were envious of his rapid progress and I heard many criticisms. You may gather that criticism seems the special prerogative of the Malayan.

Next morning I was called in to the C.-G.'s room. "I want you to handle all interviews and letters of application from Asiatics for about 130 vacancies for clerks and examiners," he said. He smiled. "And there are about 140 waiting to see you now."

These were only the beginnings of over 800 applications. Letters came in by the score every day and the interviews commenced by being extremely varied and interesting, and I nearly ended up by my interviewing myself. Memory can be a capricious thing and I have a retentive memory for faces. Yet when the seven hundredth applicant arrived—an Indian—complete with dark visage, oiled black hair, flashing teeth, ingratiating manner, and clad in the inevitable white suit—I felt that the mother of the quintuplets had nothing on me.

This experience taught me a great deal about Malaya. The average applicant was a real credit to the educational system applied by the British administration. The ages showed a wide variation, since many government pensioners desired a job in the new department. Many of the letters received were most humorous. Here is a real gem written by an Indian Eurasian of seventy:

Sir, I wish to apply for the position of assistant examiner. I am full of perfection and know everything. I know how to do all work

without trouble to me and having had 54 years in Government service, I have reached the age of discretion and appreciate red tape. I know how to do the honours to and from and I hope to have the honour to be . . .

And here is a sketch of an interview which I had with a Chinese of about twenty years of age:

With some asperity, I glanced from an unsupported letter of application to the eager hopeful standing at my desk. His brown eyes gleamed supplicatingly, his teeth glittered with gold.

"You want a position as an examiner?"

"Yes, sir."

"But where are your credentials?"

"My brother, sir, is a B.A."

"Oh."

"My brother is very clever. He then studied accountancy."

"But what has that got to do with you?"

"Brother passed with distinction. He left his position . . ."

"And doubled his salary."

"Yes, sir. He then left his new billet . . ."

"Now look here . . ."

"And is now earning a hundred dollars a month in Singapore."

I eyed the dense brother coldly. Dozens of applicants were waiting outside, but his was a mind with but a single thought. Earnestly, and with an air of modest nonchalance, he added, "Feeling confident that you will appreciate the reflected glory that is mine, I have come for the job."

Like a war-veteran applicant who wrote in to say that "as a warrior he had extensively travelled with monotonous rapidity and now wished to settle with safety," my hero kept moving on the path of reflected glory. He was resurrected several times in humorous retrospect when the flood of applicants ebbed and flowed in a seemingly hopeless stream.

Another applicant wrote, "For twenty years I held all

the keys of the Sarawak treasury containing never less than $500,000. Therefore I am full of trust and do not know bad thoughts. Please give me a job." He was successful.

At least a dozen "failed B.As" appeared triumphantly in front of me. Their air of conscious superiority almost gave me an inferiority complex.

One Indian tabled a copy of a lengthy document. "Sir," he said, "I am an informer. A certain chettiar died, and his estate was sworn at $50,000. I drew up this petition and proved that the assets totalled over $5,000,000. I was given a reward of $5000."

The wording of the document was worthy of a judgment given by the Privy Council of England. I suggested that his talents would be wasted in a government department.

The places of birth of the applicants ranged from southern India and Ceylon to China and Hongkong. In the past they were master of everything, and in the present, lord of nothing. Collectively they could plant and run rubber estates, mine tin ore, grow tea, build houses and roads, sell insurance, run sawmills and shops, sail ships, teach children. There were ex-police interpreters, soldiers, solicitors' clerks, and government pensioners from all over Malaya. One confessed to being an astrologer, and he showed me his charts for reading the stars. For every question I could ask, they could put a hundred. For instance, the following. Can you speak Malayan, any of the Chinese dialects, or Tamil? Have you been here long enough to understand properly the Asiatics or the customs of Malaya? We may not know double entry book-keeping but we can use the abacus, and we know how the Chinese merchants and chettiars compute profits and compound interest. Do you? Have the Chinese or Mohammedan years 365 days? We have a wonderful underground system of information and can find out anything. For instance, we know what your salary is and the terms of your contract. We know

you suspect your dhobi is a rogue and we know the answer. We know how much money you have in the bank and we know all your friends. In fact, we know what your friends think of you.

Most of the applicants were prostrated with nervousness. One had to be brusque with them, but fear, I found, could be allayed a great deal. Their imagination would run away with them beforehand.

Stenographers were the main difficulty. Some of the Chinese girls who tripped into my room were an artistic delight. But the harsh commercial machine threw them out. One Indian girl was so shy that she giggled all the time and was hopeless. Yet her certificate showed a speed of 150 words a minute.

The salaries offering in the positions ranged from $55 up to $100 per month.

I was gazetted as a collector of war tax.

I am not going to dilate on the statistics and principles of income tax. I am interested in the man rather than the figures, whether he wears cool sarong and baju, cotton vershti or the white clothes of a European. The range of activity of the people of Malaya and their background seem fantastic and incredibly romantic.

There is the seeker after gold in the unexplored jungles of Pahang, where fabled King Solomon was once deemed "to derive portion of his total income". There is the tin miner in nature's treasure-house, the Kinta Valley, richest in the world; the cultivator of rubber who jabbers in Tamil and Malay to his native staff; the pilot of outbound ships bearing pilgrims to Mecca, or bringing newcomers, planters and others returning from long leave; merchants, goldsmiths, shop-keepers, property owners, professional and salaried persons. All pursue their various ways in harmony. There is the wide colour band, blurring from coffee black to white; and the religious tolerance which is perhaps the secret power of the white man, tolerating all things from graven images to the European's unseen God.

CHAPTER VII

HELPING TO SAVE FACE

THE country seemed full of troops. One met officers and men everywhere, whether at the links, swimming pool, tennis courts or hotels and private homes. Good fellows. But I used to get into trouble. "What do you think of Malaya?" was a favourite question and quite a few unburdened their souls to me.

The people in Malaya, I was informed, were selfish and spoiled. The cost of living was far too high.

This was hardly fair. The average European, in Malaya, contrary to popular belief, works very hard, and entertaining is an exhausting and expensive business. Many people of my acquaintance were very active in this connexion and it was understandable that there should be a gap between resident host and soldier guest. It was interesting that most of the troops loathed the country. Leisure time, little money and few facilities killed Malaya for them and they viewed life with the eyes of one passing through, whereas those who live there often have the mental attitude of virtual exiles.

An incident occurred which shook the Selangor golf club to its very foundations. Officers had the entrée to the club—for a consideration—but other ranks were beyond the pale. One day an officer saw a private taking his ease in the sacred precincts.

"What are you doing here?" he thundered. "Get out at once."

Gently the private informed the irate officer that he was not only a long-standing resident of Malaya, a member of the local defence corps, but also a vice-president of the club. The officer, unfortunately, stood on his dignity. The committee demanded, and received, a suitable apology. The so-called stiffness attributed to the club may have been due to a very natural fear that the entire property might be compulsorily taken over by the military. Officers of high rank were numerous. I played tennis with a youthful colonel, and golf with two brigadiers.

Work demanded all my energy. New offices were required to house the 147 clerks of the War Taxation Department, comprising Income Tax, Companies, Business Registration and Estate Duty. We inspected various buildings. Then commenced the stupendous task of training the personnel. As regard Europeans we were hopelessly understaffed, there being only three at this stage.

The creation of this new department had raised problems. The immediate difficulty, it transpired, was the tactful interpretation to a hostile public of the inquisitorial War Taxation Enactment. This covered everything that might go wrong. Also, explanatory statements had to be prepared, translating legal verbiage into common English.

So I became Public Relations Officer, and there commenced one of the most interesting phases of my life. In less than three months, I was to issue a number of explanatory memoranda and deal with over 10,000 inquiries. Never was any one so quickly steeped in the commercial affairs of an exotic and colourful land. Had I the choice of any position in the whole of Malaya, this was the very job. I learned more of the diverse peoples of the Federated Malay States than others might in twenty years. I was the problem man and I dealt with questions ranging from the liability of the trustees of a minor who was heir to an undivided productive property, to owners of race-horses and winners of lotteries.

One day I had two interesting interviews—one with a Chinese millionaire, the other with a chettiar money lender.

The Chinese towkay gave a friendly salutation as he took a chair at my desk. His eyes, alert, lively, speculative, gleamed through gold-rimmed pince-nez. A well-fitting tussore silk suit hung easily on his spare frame.

"Can you advise me on my liability to tax?"

I smiled. "Of course." His long, sensitive fingers, tapping nervously, were a clue to his personality.

"My income is over a million dollars and I own rubber plantations and tin mines."

"Do you keep accounts?"

"Not always." His eyes were making keen appraisal, impersonal, testing, reflective.

"They can be made up out of the records."

The fan revolved quietly overhead. Reflections gleamed and spun in the glass-topped desk.

"Income from tin and rubber is exempt?"

"Yes. War export duty is paid and is equivalent to tax."

"I am also a trustee in several estates." His father, he explained, had left property, the income from which was paid to a wife and children. "My father died twenty years ago. He came from China when quite young."

So my interviewer had started life as a millionaire. The story of his family might well form a theme on which to trace the startling commercial development of Malaya.

I resisted a desire to ask personal questions. Riches alone had not produced the personality and thrust of this man. His type was not uncommon. Skin smooth, ivory tinted. When speaking, words poured staccato from thin lips. A tooth gleamed gold. Articulation explosive, yet precise, conveying an impression of fiery coldness—a sort of impassioned logic. This man was not imaginative or a visionary but acted with sure business instinct. The Chinese are essentially realists.

"Any other income?"

"I own shops and houses."

"You will return a schedule of properties and rents."

"Moneys from racing?"

That was more difficult, but still quite simple, I explained. We went into facts and figures. There was a cordial contact between us. I appreciated his incisiveness, his sense of humour, his understanding of my mode of reasoning. By which you may gather that in many respects I like the amazing Chinese.

So passed a constructive half-hour. He wanted to satisfy fully his obligations under the enactment. I wished to ensure that he would not be paying more tax than was properly chargeable. In theory the equation is always good.

But I am still sitting at my desk and another visitor is shown in. Despite his enormous bulk, slippered feet make no sound on the concrete floor. A thin white cotton shirt, open at the neck, hangs loosely over a torso that is a wrestler's dream. Small gold studs do the duty of buttons. A shawl of the same thin material is draped over the shoulder, from which rises a thick muscled neck, a good twenty inches in circumference. His head is shaven. The skin is the shade of soot and shining beads of sweat glisten as they course freely down. His eyes hold mine in a slow steady stare in which is apparent humility and submission to the all-powerful clauses of the enactment.

He is a chettiar from India. A money-lender, practising the profession for which his sect is famous. I call a Tamil interpreter, who, it would seem, is almost mesmerized by the gaze of my visitor.

The eyes are large, wide-set, slightly prominent. The head, well proportioned, suggesting high intelligence, is thrown well back, enabling the chettiar calmly to scrutinize my clerk even as he has appraised me. I listen to a quick exchange in the low-pitched, not unpleasing dialect.

"He wants to know if he has to pay tax."

"Does he make $4800 per annum?"

"No, but his employer does."

"And where is the owner of the business?"

"In India."

"Permanently?"

He could not be sure, but he thought so.

I gazed thoughtfully at the chettiar. He looked as steadily at me with his wide-open, intelligent eyes. He was not asking for information and he knew that I knew it. Doubtless, in conjunction with others of his kind, he had studied the vexatious enactment as fully as I. I could imagine them going over the sixty-five clauses and the twenty-seven rules, word by word. They had greater reason, in a personal sense, than any collector of tax, for one of them might make over a quarter of a million dollars a year, or in sterling, thirty thousand pounds.

This chettiar knew what he had to do, but he wanted me to tell him. A perfectly logical attitude, and one which had my entire approval. We carried on a slowly worded conversation, and our eyes spoke reams. Wordlessly, I told him he was a jolly rascal. His eyes gleamed approval. I expressed polite concern over his difficulty in explaining to his principal in India, and at the word "India" his eyes lit with appreciation. So passive was he, so receptive his attitude, that he was never on the defensive. He was never surprised. His tolerant acceptance of government autocracy seemed to imply, in fact, that the benevolent powers-that-be would continue to favour those who were best able to look after themselves.

This money-lender from India was the antithesis of the last man to sit in that chair. Each was the product of thousands of years of conscious development. Each had his philosophy, his wisdom, his faults, his innate appreciation of the subtleties of life. Each recognized the other for what he was. Each flourished exceedingly under British rule. The Chinese was a finely tempered instrument, a worker,

a creator of wealth, a transformer of swamps into paddy-fields, an extractor of nature's riches.

The other had mastered the art of living on the exigencies of human nature. He filled the gap between effective demand and desire. He supplied a soothing drug to ease embarrassing pain. His power was great. He controlled millions and he affected millions. He supplied everything that money could buy—at a price. The sweating ricksha puller mortgaged his muscles; the merchant his goods (but never his goodwill); the gambler his luck; the opium smoker everything but his dreams—all for a price.

This chettiar had patience, as they all have. There were no drumming fingers here. That heavy hand, with the curiously light-skinned palm, lay inert on the desk. Why should he want to toil on the land, to sweat in tin mines, to produce any goods, when a substantial portion of the wealth was so generously proffered? Compound interest worked every day and night for him. No need for him to leave his house. Thus no slender grace was his. He ate and drank as and when he chose. His mighty muscles were as soft and slow as his brain was agile and cool. His gargantuan girth shook to his rumbling mirth. For people brought him money. They brought their troubles, too, and as invariably took them away. All at a price. The banks are powerful in any land—this man was a bank.

And no matter whether a man was a scientist, an explorer, a musical detective, an "elephant exterminator", or a European, Asiatic, or Eurasian, I listened to his story.

Each tale seemed confined to hard facts condensed into bald figures. Here was a never-ending drama of development, hope, accomplishment or failure; or perhaps of stagnation because there was no real effort, success being too easy. The story might be effervescent with humour, dead with indifference, dull with despair, or unexpectedly entertaining—as when a tired-looking Chinese came to me

once saying that he felt entitled to a deduction from his tax in respect of his twenty-seven children.

I am ever amazed at the optimism in human nature; the innate sagacity, preoccupied tolerance, and fatalistic endurance of the slings and arrows.

Malaya, so aptly named the Golden Chersonese, is the richest portion of the British Empire. The Chinese, astute, tireless and inscrutable, make millions. There is a terrific gap between the cost of living of the European and Asiatic, and between their standards of income. This could form the basis of an economic extravaganza which would touch problems that would astound the average white man. And a Chinese, by the way, is not just a Chinaman. He may be, for instance, a Hokkien, Hailam, Kheh, Cantonese, Hok-Chiu, or Teo-Chiu. The explosive popping sound that emanates from a Chinese seems always the same to me, but the dialects have a wider difference, I am told, than the languages of Europe. In addition, there are the Straits-born Chinese, of whom many thousands cannot read or write the sign pictures of their forefathers. They do not even speak Chinese, but the common language of Malaya, which is romanized Malay.

And from India, one sees Sinhalese, Bengalis, Klings, with their flashing golden-toothed smiles, seemingly indolent and ingratiating ever. The chettiars, too, from Southern India—they are the money-lenders and keep their books with abacus and a weird system of symbols. The jingle of coin to them has quasi sharps and flats unknown to our masters of music. There are also Sikhs and other Punjabis who have been attracted to Malaya by work of a military nature. Almost half of the small Japanese community is in Singapore. They are hairdressers, shop-keepers, photographers and fishermen.

Then, of course, there are the Malays. A passionate gentleman is a good-mannered Malay. Sensitive and intuitive, he is to be envied his calm acceptance of life; but

it is a moot point whether the Malay has not been hopelessly spoiled by the British.

I felt even at this early stage that I was beginning to understand some of the ways of the East. I noted how the Europeans lived a life wholly apart from even the cultured Chinese, Indians and Malays. The perception, shrewdness and reasoning powers of the Asiatic seemed to be completely ignored. In particular, the Chinese were a power in this land; yet their force in an economic sense was neither marshalled nor directed.

I devoured every book I could find on Malaya and the Chinese and the Indians. The fatalism of the Asiatic seemed in some respects beyond the grasp of the insensitive European.

And while thousands of Malayans wrestled with declarations of income, khaki-clad troops still poured into the country to man the borders, and fighter planes droned overhead.

CHAPTER VIII

ORIENTAL OFFICIALS

WE well knew, as the staff increased, that we had to find larger premises than the temporary office in Clarke Street. Eventually we commandeered a portion of a magnificent school building known as the Victoria Institution.

A hundred clerks were placed behind lines of tables in the spacious school hall. The whole of one wing was taken over. Nineteen typewriters were bought. An Asiatic tuck-shop sprang up overnight in at attap (dried palm) garage and did a roaring trade.

Seldom have I seen such an imposing structure as the Victoria Institution, and the location on the top of a hill was the finest in Kuala Lumpur. Vast playing fields stretched a thousand yards on every side and the front of the building was set off by lines of graceful palms. The aluminium-painted clock-tower was visible for miles.

The school continued its work. Here, some hundreds of Asiatic and European boys were taught up to senior Cambridge standard. Three European and some fifteen Asiatic masters were presided over by Mr Gates.

It was amazing how quickly our staff was trained. This was due to the Collector-General's flair for organizing. The training was so thorough that it was possible half way through the year to hold compulsory examinations on the law relating to income tax. A series of lectures was delivered beforehand to the entire staff by one of the officers. I wanted to give them a talk, but it was thought that too

many cooks would spoil the broth, so I contented myself with three private talks to the twenty-seven clerks in my unit. Knowing that the other man was covering the machinery of the enactment, I confined my lecture to tips on how to go about answering questions. My unit scooped all the top places. Result—promotion lost me the cream of my staff.

I was amused by the number of cars owned by Asiatics that streamed every day up the long drive to the office. They were few to begin with, but increased to at least thirty. Many cars would be packed with either Chinese or Indians. I visualized animated discussions on the cost of petrol. But most of the staff travelled by bicycle, and the coloured sarongs of the Malay clerks streamed in the sun as they rode up the drive.

My telephone rang all day. A European bank manager might ask whether income received on behalf of an oversea client made him subject to tax, or a Chinese might wonder why he had to render returns to both Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. Solicitors and chartered accountants were not above asking questions.

Listening patiently to an anxious voice, I would say, "I will post you explanatory memorandum number three. You will find your problem answered in paragraph three on page two." What a job I had in preparing those explanatory memoranda! One ran to ten thousand words. I tried to puzzle like a European planter, scheme like a chettiar and be as coldly logical as the Chinese. Long-term trusts, I found, were very common with the Chinese. But memorandum number three, or five, as the case might be, kept them quiet. These were published in the newspapers. For my part I felt almost an authority on interpretation.

Malays formed about one-third of the departmental staff. They were not the best workers. An air of dignity invested their every action and they were conscious of their protected status, for Malays could rise to the ranks of the

Malayan Civil Service, a privilege denied to most Europeans.

Our six peons, or office-boys, were Malay youths of some fifteen years, the age when all bubble with mirth. They spoke English fluently. Abdul always answered my bell on the run and his merry eyes and flashing teeth as he looked eagerly for instructions were a happy stimulant. When taking an interview, I would sign to him with three fingers and memorandum number three would be brought in without a word. But the peons gambled. Their salary was $15 a month (or £1 15s.). For an investment of two cents (a halfpenny) in a sweepstake on a horse race, Abdul collected $100, which was more than six months' salary. Unfortunately, he had borrowed the two cents from Rahmat, a fellow peon. Abdul's piratical tendencies showed up and he took flight. A complaint was made to me which raised a delicate problem. Gambling was forbidden to peons in government service. Clearly, Rahmat, the peon who complained, also valued $100 above his connexion with the government. I cross-examined him sternly. Rahmat then confessed that he was not a partner and had made a loan only, and I obtained a written statement which was forwarded to the Collector-General. But something else was worrying Rahmat. The next day he came sobbing to me. "Sir," he said, "last year I borrowed a bicycle and the police thought wrongly that I stole it. My aged grandmother believed me and gave a guarantee for my good behaviour." He gulped and choked. "I will lose my position. Please pardon me," he wailed, "and my grandmother is very ill." His tears would have melted a heart of stone. I interceded successfully. Later, I heard that the truant peon had fled to Ipoh. He was bombed and sped to Singapore where he gave me a large smile in the street one day.

A Malay was among the three stenographers who dealt more or less competently with my dictation. They were paid varying rates around £2 a week. Abu came from a good family. A billowing green sarong covered at least two

square yards of floor, and he also wore a baju and a velvet cap. Innately courteous, he resented a quick command and his deep brown eyes were nearly always serious, even sulky. Occasionally, I got a smile out of him and an engaging personality would peep forth. His slim brown fingers fluttered over the keys as he touch-typed at great speed.

Very few Malays came in for interviews. Sultans were exempt from income tax and those in government employ, in common with Europeans and everybody else, received their salary less tax.

A Malay held the high position of secretary to the British Resident and I met other Malays in government service who were very quick and competent indeed. Mostly, however, they preferred to live quietly in their houses and kampongs and were not prominent in the bustle of city life.

During the year I happened to be a field judge at the school sports. The prizes were given out by the Tungku to the Sultan of Selangor. She was about five feet in height, old, and as thin as a match; her face was deeply lined and she wore a beautiful sarong. Fine gold bangles were on her arms and ankles. Her air of dignity was superb and she did not see my Leica.

On another occasion, Sir Shenton Thomas took the salute at a parade of Australian soldiers on the padang. Europeans crowded the Dog verandas and many of us were seated on the lawn. A number of women of the royal family attended the Sultan. They were young and incredibly small. Their large black eyes were alive with interest. Brooches in gold and rubies gleamed on dark-coloured sarongs. Their hands were exceedingly fine and their carriage very erect. But a keen sense of humour fought with shyness and they giggled a little with embarrassment.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says of the Malays:

In ordinary circumstances, the Malay is not treacherous and in many instances men of this race have risked their own lives on behalf of

Europeans who chanced to be their friends. They are courteous and self-respecting. Their code of manners is minute and strict and they observe its provisions faithfully. The Malays are indolent, pleasure-loving, improvident, fond of bright clothing, of comfort, of ease, and dislike toil exceedingly. They have no idea of the value of money and little notion of honesty where money is concerned. They frequently refuse to work for a wage though in some need of cash, and yet at the invitation of one who is their friend they will toil unremittingly without any thought of reward. They are addicted to gambling and formerly were much given to fighting, but their courage on the whole is not high if judged by European standards. The sexual morality of the Malays is very low but prostitution is not common. Polygamy, though allowed by their religion, is practised for the most part among the wealthy classes only. The Malays show a marvellous loyalty to their rajahs and chiefs.

Acts of homicidal mania called amuck (*amok*), which word in the vernacular means to attack, can in some cases be traced to madness *pur et simple*, but the typical *amok* is usually the result of circumstances which render a Malay desperate.

Their conversion to Mohammedism from paganism took place between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries A.D. Upon the bulk of the Malayan peoples, their religion sits but lightly. Prior to their conversion to Islam the Malays were subject to a considerable Hindu influence. Throughout, the superstitions of the Malays show this Hindu influence.

The Malays were long famous for their piracy. They are now peaceable fisher folk. Inland, the Malays live by preference on the banks of rivers, build houses on piles some feet from the ground and plant groves of coco-nut, betel nut, sugar palm and fruit trees around their dwellings. Rice, the staple food of the people, is the principal article of agriculture among them.

The Malays made gunpowder and forged cannon before Europeans arrived.

The Malays were happy under British dominion. There were no Malay coolies amongst them, and they did not engage in trade to any extent. A benevolent government controlled the finances of all the states, paid allowances therefrom to the rulers, and found positions for those of good family. The Malays formed the nucleus of the police force of the country, and woe betide a motorist who as much as flaunted a worn motor tyre.

The Malay is physically well proportioned and always conducts himself with great courtesy. He observes the white man and the Chinese exhausting themselves with hard work, but prefers to keep aloof. Riches do not tempt him, and who can say that his philosophy is not the best? He should not be confused with the few Sakais who live in the depths of the jungle and who use blow pipes and poison darts.

My previous conception of the Malays as head-hunters, greasing their hair and skin and filing their teeth, was entirely wrong.

The Indians differed greatly from the Malays.

Panikkar and Appaduray, my Indian stenographers, were amusing contrasts in every way. The former came from Malabar. He had a fixed idea that nothing in life was perfect and least of all my command of English. Large jaundiced eyes flickered with pain when I split an infinitive and every phrase dictated bore his very earnest scrutiny. I would see him scowling over a well thumbed dictionary. His quiet triumph when he found that the future imperfect tense should have been the present subjunctive was intriguing if unsettling. But his reasoning, which was perfect in theory, was wrong in practice. He hoped to climb to fame on my faults and not on his merits. So he did not deserve the rise asked for. When the bombing started, his near-black skin changed to an incredible green. Every time his typewriter stopped clicking, his teeth took up the tale. Poor chap! He said he was shivering with malaria. He often interpreted for chettiar money-lenders who came for interviews, and the sight of two Indians carrying on an intense discourse on taxation was most interesting.

Polished and urbane was Appaduray, who was born in Malaya of Indian parents. He faithfully reproduced my dictation whether it made sense or not. The phrase "in a sense" would become "innocence" and I had to clear my

throat and enunciate with exaggerated distinctness. His letter of application by the way, included the following, "As a wise man said, an ounce of knowledge is greater than a whole library of common sense."

When I was laid up with a bad attack of flu, he called at the hospital with condolences and mail. Later, during the war period, he disappeared after a raid and when he reappeared a day later, reported, "I really had influenza." An hour later he came in again and said, "Sir, I am not a warlike man."

The only clerk with whom I had trouble was Maniam, an Indian of about forty-five. An extraordinary facility for words was his, and he had published a book and edited a vernacular newspaper. He delighted in putting up voluminous minutes and antagonized every one. He had a weak chest and coughed hollowly with imploring eyes fixed on mine, but his indiscretions outweighed my sympathy and he went.

Indians were amenable to discipline, but lacked speed. They were good psychologists. Elderly Indians were hopeless in the office. I have often observed one in a day dream while sitting at a desk, his eyes unseeing even when I looked straight at him. I felt inclined to inquire how a Hindu could believe in reincarnation when he did not exist in the present. But sarcasm was something I carefully avoided with all Asiatics. I frequently observed that it was either over their heads or completely misunderstood.

Many of the shop-keepers and traders in the town were southern Indians who were highly intelligent and showed a wonderful appreciation of the law of supply and demand. I shopped, in common with many Europeans, at Gian Singh's. Comely Indian women customers in coloured silks and wearing gold ear-rings and bracelets here argued volubly with gesticulating attendants.

CHAPTER IX

THE UBIQUITOUS CHINESE

A Chinese brought me my morning cup of tea and slice of papaya. Another waited on me at table. Chinese pullers carried tuans everywhere in red lacquered rickshas. At the office, Chinese clerks attended me more efficiently than those of any other race. Chinese boys hovered round me at the clubs. A Chinese dhobi washed and ironed over 300 articles of clothing for me for one month for seven dollars (16s. 4d.). Chinese bank managers consulted me about income tax, and solicitors regarding their clients. Chinese doctors never complained about bad debts. Chinese rubber planters disclosed their millions, and Chinese miners of tin ore presented accounts in the sign pictures of their forefathers.

Various Chinese sold me a radio, made me a pair of leather shoes to measure (for 15s.), a book-case, and rattan furniture; and Chinese framed my pictures of snow-clad mountains. Thousands of Chinese coolies swarmed everywhere, rich and happy on a shilling a day.

Chinese petition writers produced picturesque examples of English for those who could not write. At the post office I used to see one listening attentively to an interminable string of words, then his serious eyes would light up with sympathy and understanding. Brown fingers would type at incredible speed.

Jones, a friend of mine, was going to England to join the R.A.F. His Chinese boy, one Chen Fah Min, went to a

petition writer and poured a tale of patriotic fervour into his ear. At the proper moment Chen presented this letter of farewell:

Several days more and we shall depart. For two years I have worked in your house. I find you both excellent masters as well as benefactors. Now you have to go back to render service for your country. No words could express my deep regret.

It is for democracy that Britain is fighting. China has fought for more than three years for justice. Our cause is not different from yours. During this age only war could terminate war. It is for peace we are fighting. Hitlerism must be crushed. He is the most notorious robber in the world. No state can thrive on the suppression of the truth and justice. The vice of Hitlerism must be eradicated. I have the confidence that democracies shall obtain the final triumph.

As I do not know how to speak English I could only express my gratitude towards your kind ways of helping me. Good luck to you I humbly pray.

Ever your faithful servant,

Every evening, the Chinese and others flocked in thousands to the Bukit Bintang amusement park, and clustered under the myriad lights like moths around many candles. The park was Chinese-owned. All manner of entertainment was offered, proving that noise was inseparable from the common pleasures of East and West.

On the night of my first visit a European talkie with open-air sides is featuring Jack Benny and quick laughter from the Asiatic audience vies with the voice from Hollywood. Not far away is a Chinese picture theatre where earsplitting screams tell of a villain's death. From the Malay and Chinese theatres come the clashing of cymbals and the high piercing sound of actors' voices. These theatres are especially interesting. Gorgeous costumes hang stiffly below waxed faces and an air of great good humour pervades everybody. The slain remove their own corpses, property men walk aimlessly about the stage and vendors of sweets do a roaring trade amongst the chattering audience. Nobody seems to be taking any notice, but then everybody has seen this play a hundred times.

In the Malay theatre I saw a play which was suspiciously like a version of *The Merchant of Venice*.

Dance music roars from a crowded dance hall, where taxi-dancers of every conceivable mixture are in great demand. Noise bursts from this park in happy waves and the lights gleam at the dark sky.

But then I see a quiet scene. It is a Malay dance called a ronggeng. The music is muted. Comely girls with perfect figures sway up and down on a raised platform. Male partners keep several feet away, matching their steps. I smile in retrospect. Once at a tin mine I took part in such a dance.

Farther along, under hissing naphtha flares, some hundreds of Asiatics are barracking willing boxers. Thudding gloves, glistening bodies and bobbing heads weave round in a swirl of sweat. Chinese matched against Indian, Malay against Filipino; and the fighters have courage if nothing else.

Restaurants are everywhere. One can buy a delectable dish of *mee*—a Chinese dish of spaghetti, bamboo shoots, small pork cubes and sliced prawns, the whole garnished with soya bean sauce—or any other Chinese dish. Most of the tables are in the open air.

The Chinese women strolling about wear tight-fitting sleeveless neck-to-ankle dresses slit at the side, but many also wear Malay sarong and white lace baju. They have a marvellous sense of colour. Rouge is artfully applied to an ivory skin, finger nails are tinted, straight hair is beautifully "permed", and lips curve redly. They swagger gracefully as they walk and wear heel-less shoes showing the coloured toe-nails. Many of the Chinese maidens would take Hollywood by storm.

On one occasion a dance was held in the Bukit Bintang Hall in aid of the China Relief Fund. The Loke family invited me to have dinner at their home and go on to the dance afterwards.

The story of the Loke family might well be the history of Malaya. The founder of the family fortunes was Loke Yew who, from a humble beginning some fifty years ago, amassed a fortune of eighty million dollars. He became a philanthropist and his name is widely commemorated on hospital and other buildings. An honorary degree of Doctor of Medicine was conferred on him by Hongkong University and when he died a few years ago a magnificent bronze statue and family tomb were erected a few miles out of Kuala Lumpur.

As I motored along the drive to keep the appointment I noticed that the front of the old Chinese mansion was adorned by scores of pot-plants. Inside the hall, glass cases held many treasures, models of junks, ancient chain mail and other things. I found that eight of us were dining at a circular table in the middle of a huge banqueting hall. The long, bare tables on either side could have accommodated several hundred people.

I was seated by the side of a daughter of Loke Yew, and she kept my bowl filled with many delectable things. She was in the summer of life. I watched the deft Chinese hands waiting on me. The fingers were long and slender. A magnificent solitaire diamond gleamed, and on one wrist reposed a diamond and platinum bracelet. She wore a tight-fitting black dress fastened at the neck with diamond buttons. Black hair was looped stiffly up in true Chinese fashion and an indefinable air of competence and assurance radiated from her. Aloof yet engagingly frank, her wit infected the party. She was severely sharp with the servants, not so much to censure as to pay a compliment to her guests. In every gesture she conveyed a subtle condescension that charmed. Brilliant eyes anticipated our every need. Her complexion was flawless.

I found that she spoke four Chinese dialects and three European languages. She had spent fifteen years in England, finishing her education in Paris.

I consumed bird's nest soup, the juice of boiled chicken, roast duck skin, pigeon, small delicacies in pork, chicken and liver, bamboo shoots, rice and whole fish.

"Yam seng" was said often, and meant draining one's glass to the last drop; but in some mysterious fashion my glass remained full. An ash-tray near by, consisting of a huge elephant's foot set in silver, seemed to be wiggling its toes at me. My state of mind hovered deliciously between fact and fancy.

Thus fortified, we went to the dance. Young Chinese girls, exquisitely dressed, sold sprays of orchid and dance tickets. All spoke perfect English, and the cultured voices might have been those of English girls. Fifteen thousand dollars were raised that night for the China Relief Fund.

Some months later, Alan Loke, the head of the house, died suddenly and I was given the rare privilege of attending the ceremonies of the forty-nine days' wake. Young Chinese nuns with shaven heads, from the Ayer Hitam monastery in Penang, performed elaborate rituals before the family altar. The spirit of the deceased was taken through all the stages of Chinese symbolism. Five hundred silken mourning banners hung on the walls and a papier mâché replica of the Chinese mansion was set out in the ballroom. The late head of the house figured there, living his usual life. On the morning of the forty-ninth day, the papier mâché was burned. In every deed and word could be seen the wonderful Chinese conception of the art of living.

CHAPTER X

JAPANESE SMOKESCREEN

"Mr Tsukigawa wishes to see you, sir," announced my interview clerk.

A smiling Japanese about five feet in height appeared in the doorway. He bobbed. I said "Good morning," and indicated a chair.

"I am the President of the Japanese Association in Kuala Lumpur," announced my visitor. "Our members are worried about income tax. They do not know how to keep their books by the English method."

He was about forty-five years of age, plumpish, with dark eyes rather close together in a fleshy face. He radiated cheerfulness. Obviously he wished to create an impression of goodwill. His hands nervously fingered some papers.

"I will show you how to make up your returns."

The president bobbed up, hissed politely and sat down, his face creased in a smile. "Thank you."

"How long have you been in Malaya?" I asked.

"Fifteen years, but business is bad now."

"Oh."

"The present state of affairs in China has affected my business."

I smiled. "So you call the Sino-Japanese hostilities a 'state of affairs'?"

He wriggled nervously.

"It is difficult for us to import goods from Japan. There is currency control and we have to get permits. I am a small goods merchant."

"Do you know that you will pay tax in 1941 on your 1940 profits?"

"But I am making a loss for 1941."

That was not without a certain humour. The Japanese were slashing into China on a steady advance south. The Chinese community in the Federated Malay States had boycotted the Japanese, who, while they had made profits in 1940, were doing no business in 1941. Money was being raised for the defence of Malaya and the Japanese had to contribute in common with everybody else.

"If Japan attacks China and your profits vanish, what can I do about it?"

Distress showed in his face. "I like Malaya. I prefer to live here."

"Taxes are imposed to provide for the defence of Malaya. Those who live here must share in the cost of security." My tone was one of serious banter. "You are living in a country which is at war. The tax will have to be paid."

Again he bobbed, hissed and sat down. Then he inquired, "May I bring in the secretary of my association to learn how to furnish accounts?" .

"By all means, and if you wish, I will give an address to any members of the Japanese community."

More bobbings and hissings. I tested him still further. "Photography is a hobby of mine," I said. "Have any of the Japanese photographers any Leica lenses or films?"

"Call at the Sun Studio," he smiled, "and I will tell my friend there that you are coming."

Japanese culture was then discussed. I told him of my desire to understand how it differed from that of the Chinese. He knew I was sincere. Our interview ended on a cordial note. He hissed his way out.

The next day Tsukigawa reappeared at a stated hour. With him was a man of about thirty, whose eyes met mine but seldom and gleamed with a sulky distrust. Obviously he

hated going through with this interview and an inquisitive government servant was anathema to him.

Tsukigawa was all smiles. He looked more like a fussy family man that a president. "My secretary cannot speak English but he can understand a little," he said. I exchanged a stare with the word-shy Japanese. Here was a lively intelligence with a fanatical twist, a militant one-track mind without imagination. Animosity smouldered within him. He held my gaze for a while, then resented defeat. Perhaps he read an understanding scepticism in my eyes. More certainly he knew that I recognized an alertness of mind at variance with the character of a humble secretary-shopkeeper. The president and I talked and the secretary weighed every word.

"Here are my accounts," said Tsukigawa.

Rapidly scanning the entries, I saw that he did not know how to make up profits. Recasting the figures, I arrived at his net income.

The president rose, bobbed and hissed. The secretary sat and glared, then spoke in Japanese to his companion, who asked, "You will not inspect our books?"

"Impossible to say," I replied.

"We are all making a loss this year."

"But how will you live if you continue to lose money? It may be better for you to go back to Japan." I thought the secretary was going to explode. Tsukigawa became more excited. "Times will change," he said, "and meantime I have plenty of money saved up."

I wondered where. He had no investments in property or shares. In fact, I was very curious as to the financial backing of the Japanese.

"How many members are in the Selangor Japanese Association?" I inquired.

"Nearly four hundred," replied Tsukigawa.

This was surprising. There must be more shops and hotels than I was aware of. The secretary gabbled again in

his incomprehensible language. Tsukigawa looked confused. His manner was anything but that of a spy as generally conceived. I surmised that the president was being warned against giving me a list of members, but my authority covered that. My friendly interest in them was not welcome.

"Bring in as many members of your association as you like," I invited.

They stood up. The president bobbed. He was politeness itself. He hissed softly. The secretary still glowered, uncertain. After they had gone I telephoned police headquarters.

"Have you any objection to my taking films to a Japanese photographer?"

"No."

"Any suggestion about not patronizing their shops?" I insisted.

"None whatever."

I called at the Sun Studio. A man of a militant type attended to me. I sensed his reluctance. Not once did his eyes meet mine. Patiently I explained what I wanted, but he had no cameras. He had a stock of Japanese-made albums. Magnificent pictures of Fujiyama were on the covers, also cunningly constructed shell work depicting scenes of Japanese rural life. They had beauty but the attendant did not care if I spent nothing. No matter how I talked I could not draw him. His intellect was much above that of the average white man. Japanese shop-keepers, I thought, were the worst salesmen in the world and probably the best educated. Was he a military officer, I wondered. But the art appealed to me and I spent ten dollars.

Two weeks later I had a visit from a Japanese who lived forty miles away in Seremban. His air was brisk, rather like that of an efficient company director. An air of authority weighted his words. He was spare, well dressed in a white linen suit. His eyes were close set in a bullet-shaped, close-cropped head.

"I have lived forty years in Malaya," he began. "My

father came here in 1890 and I was born here. Also my children."

"What do you do?"

"I am a shop-keeper. My father has just gone back to Japan, but I have no desire to go."

Such frankness was revealing. There appeared to be no reason for it. I took him up. "You are married to a Japanese?"

"Yes. She came from Japan. Our children go to the English school."

"So you like Malaya."

"It is my home. I will die here. But I do not like war." He waxed more confidential. "Japan is embroiled with China. It is senseless, wicked."

"You do not approve?"

"No."

His manner belied his appearance. Why should I suddenly receive confidences of such a nature? I had not invited them. I was certain that he wanted to test me. He learned nothing.

"Bring your accounts in if you wish."

"Thank you." He expelled his breath in a soft hiss.

But he never came back.

Tsukigawa called on me a number of times. One day I said, "I wish to understand more about the Japanese way of living."

"Thank you." A faint hiss followed the words.

"You come to me regarding taxes. I help you. But there are other problems of an international nature which I wish to understand. It is difficult for me to understand your point of view unless I know the basic factors."

Interest shone in his eyes. Also, speculation as to my motives. I continued, "The Asiatic conception of living is strange to me. It is fascinating to compare the East with the West. We give of our strength and hold back nothing. The latest findings of science are yours without the asking.

But tremendous problems are surging around us. Your leaders say you must expand. I am ignorant of the reasons. Can you enlighten me?"

Tsukigawa eyed me reflectively. Indecision struggled within him. "I will see what I can do," he conceded.

His interest was aroused. But I was not fated to learn his point of view. December was swiftly approaching.

A Japanese virgin, a so-called Swiss who said he was a secretary and who swore that he was a woman-hater, and an English youth who said he would never touch an Asiatic woman, are the persons of this tale. But the telling of the story is possible only because all these things were untrue.

Wakefield had been out a year. A sheltered existence with a widowed mother had equipped him poorly for the temptations of the tropics. His letters to England mirrored fresh clean thoughts and boyish optimism, but while a moderate income saved him from the excesses of club life, it threw him into a lonely and dangerous groove. Defective eyesight kept him from games. Had he played, a natural exuberance would have found an outlet. He knew that other young bachelors were taking Asiatic mistresses.

"Not for me," he declared. But the war held letters up for months and his mother's influence, already weakened by distance, became negligible. Wakefield was really hardly the type for the tropics. Then one night he accompanied Smith to an Asiatic dance hall. The dubious charms of the taxi-dancers smacked of vice and repelled him. His glance rested on a girl sitting at a table near by. She was beautiful. Slim and dark, she combined an elfin grace with a quaint old-worldliness.

"Who is she?" he asked Smith.

"Don't you know? She is a Japanese, and lives alone in a flat in Batu Road."

"By jove. I would like to dance with her."

"Not a chance, old boy. She is not a taxi-dancer; and she's undoubtedly a virgin, too."

Whether purity or laughing black eyes ensnared Wakefield, nobody will ever know, but he committed a breach of etiquette in walking over and asking for a dance.

Astonished Japanese eyes looked into blue British ones. Apparently the frank honesty of his gaze was approved. She accepted. Smith swore softly to himself. That was the beginning. Wakefield had fallen head over heels in love with her and she with him.

She would not let him take her home. They met at the Bukit Bintang dance hall.

The romance was burning fiercely when a Swiss arrived.

"Meet Sladen," somebody said. Well built, of medium height, he gave an impression of self-worship masked with modesty. His age was about twenty-five. Wavy brown hair threatened to fall into his eyes. His clasp was purposely bone grating.

"Where do you come from?" I asked in true Malayan style.

"Switzerland first, then Bombay," he said, smiling. We talked as climbers will. His manner suggested a secretive self-esteem.

Some days later he told me that he was a secretary. So I asked if they conducted examinations in Switzerland. He appeared confused.

"Not really," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"I do not know," he confessed. "I am just learning to be a secretary."

One night he gave me a reason for his leaving Switzerland. "I was engaged. We were about to be married. She had an affair with another man a week before the wedding. I left for Bombay. I loathe and hate all women."

"You do not find a woman's company necessary?"

"No."

"In Malaya they say that the Asiatic skin becomes whiter the longer you stay."

He shrugged distastefully. "Those yellow bitches," he said. "One tried to seduce me in Bombay."

Wakefield met the Japanese girl three nights a week. One Sunday he waited in vain. Sorely upset, he walked the mile to her flat. To his astonishment he saw a man leaving. The light from a street lamp showed that it was Sladen.

"What do you think?" Wakefield asked me, in dismay.

"A lot," I said briefly. "Say nothing to anybody." But discreet inquiries were disappointing. Influential citizens, I was informed, had vouched for him.

Sladen abandoned his ingenuous air, which invited unwanted questions. He felt that I was watching him. He took care never to be alone with me. Then he left the guest house and took up rooms at the club chambers.

Meantime, Wakefield remained infatuated. She swore she loved only him.

Once again she failed to keep an appointment, and with a heavy heart, Wakefield walked to her flat. Strangely, the window shutters were closed. Chinks of light showed and the murmur of voices could be heard.

Pushing the door open, he strode in. At first, the light blinded him, then he saw that Sladen was with her, sitting at a table strewn with papers.

Guilt—or was it fear?—held Sladen for a brief moment. Wakefield rushed at him shouting, "You dirty hound." The Swiss dodged and tripped him. Half-stunned, Wakefield saw the Swiss scoop the papers off the table, snatch a packet from the girl and disappear into the night. Wakefield ran to his car and drove to the club chambers. But Sladen did not turn up.

The next morning my telephone rang. "Sladen has disappeared," I was told.

She was questioned but said she knew nothing. Sladen, she stated, made love to her.

Then I heard that the Swiss had arrived in Hongkong. How he left the country, nobody knew. Strangest and perhaps shrewdest thing of all, he paid his debts from there.

There were those who said that Sladen was a Nazi spy. He was certainly no secretary. Wakefield was heartbroken, and she whose love of Japan was greater than her love of a man, vanished from the scene.

During November, Pannikar of the split infinitive came in and said, "A lady to see you."

His look of embarrassment caught my eye. "What is her name?"

"She cannot write her name in English."

"Show her in."

My eyes opened in astonishment when it was explained that she was the Japanese Missy of the Corner House. She looked uncomfortable.

"I am leaving Malaya," she said, "and I believe I have to get a clearance from the income tax officer."

"Why are you going?"

"The authorities have shut down my house. Some soldiers made a noise and the police came."

"What profits did you make last year?"

"I do not know."

This was awkward. I felt like a doctor asking questions on a case of incest.

"But surely you kept some form of accounts?"

"No. It was a cash business. I needed no books."

I looked at the Japanese. She met my gaze steadily. A faint smile wreathed her lips.

"How many girls did you keep?"

"Sometimes many. More since the soldiers came. Usually a dozen."

I commenced to perspire. "How much did the girls charge?"

"That varied too. Prices were less for soldiers. Perhaps five dollars."

Here was a pretty pass. The Japanese Missy had either to pay tax or be given a certificate showing that her income was too small to tax. It dawned on me that I might be making hard work of a simple problem. A multiplication of girls times dollars times days less holidays less expenses was quite all right in theory but——

"How much did you make last month?" I asked abruptly.

"After paying all expenses, I had $278 in cash."

"And the previous month?"

"I am not sure. Business was not so good. You see, sometimes you have five week-ends in a month and——"

"Quite," I interrupted hastily. "Did you ever make a profit of $400 per month?"

"Yes. At one time three of my girls had a wide reputation. One was the leading concubine of a Sultan, another had been the mistress of an Indian Rajah, and the third had been an actress at a famous place called Coney Island. Another of my girls was brought to Malaya from the Philippines by an American millionaire. My profits for that month reached $420."

"How long ago was that?"

"In 1939."

"If your profits are less than $400 a month, you pay no tax."

"My average is less than $300."

"Good." Or was it morally bad? I breathed freely once more.

As I wrote, I asked, "So your girls come from many lands?"

Certificate in hand, the Japanese said, "Yes, from Hongkong, Java, Burma, Bali, Bangkok—would you like——"

"The modesty of the Asiatic woman," I interjected firmly, "is beyond belief. Please leave me, or I shall get no work done."

"Thank you," she said. "I wish to mention that while I brought no books for this interview, I have with me evidence of what you call my 'turnover'. Is that correct?"

Suspicion took me to the window. Outside, standing on the grass, was a chattering, animated group of Missy's girls. They turned smiling faces in my direction. My horrorstruck eyes then encountered those of an eminent government official waiting to interview me. My knees sagged.

CHAPTER XI

PENANG

THE Singaporean knows practically nothing of the real Malaya. Even his climate is different because he has fierce rainstorms called "sumatras", unknown to those in the interior.

Kuala Lumpur is 250 miles north of Singapore and some 40 miles from the west coast. I speedily found that my life in the lovely capital, in spacious bungalows amid well-kept lawns and orchid-smothered gardens, taught me little of the conditions that prevailed in the jungle. Rubber planters and tin miners poured countless stories into my ears. A game warden told of a battle royal in which a boar killed a tiger.

To paraphrase the quotation in Appaduray's letter of application, I decided "that an ounce of observation was worth a ton of telling".

So I exploited every opportunity to see the Malaya of Marco Polo's time, which was difficult.

Seventy years ago Malaya was a vast jungle, as she had been for countless ages. True, man had been scratching for tin for some hundreds of years and a few towns existed at the mouths of rivers—*kuala* means "mouth"—but when rubber was introduced, a startling change took place.

From a town where in 1872 Capitan China paid cash down for the heads of his enemies, Kuala Lumpur became a garden city surrounded by many miles of rubber. It progressed in many ways; from malaria and dysentery

to dengue and influenza; from warm whisky and water to iced stengahs; from elephant and foot travel to trains and motor-cars; from rivers and muddy tracks to bitumen roads.

But with it all the Malay jungle was hardly touched, forty thousand square miles of it. And the eternal ocean, with its myriad life, beat as it always had on silver sands beneath nodding coco-nut palms, or surged in and out of muddy mangrove swamps.

First, I felt the lure of Penang. Everybody raved about its beauty. Many men had told me they could end their days on that island paradise. So one week-end I sped nearly two hundred miles north through an evergreen lane.

How I love the sea! When waiting for the ferry at the port of Butterworth, it gleamed friendlily—my first glimpse for over four months. Then after I had crossed, the E. and O. luxury hotel swallowed me. It was lunch-time and I had my first tiffin *rijsttafel* consisting of ingredients from eighteen dishes. First of all I covered my plate with rice and a procession of waiters appeared with chicken curry (plain), chicken curry (carma), fried and devilled prawns, coco-nut, cucumber, chutney, satee, brinjalls, tomatoes, prawn paste (Malacca cheese), prawn cropok (*kropok udang*), salt fish, salted eggs, turmeric pickles, mince balls, and bamboo. In Java, they have as many as forty dishes.

After a short siesta, I motored the fifty miles around the island, with Barrington, who acted as guide. Blossoms from the huge jacaranda-trees had splashed the road with patches of heliotrope. There was the angsena with its yellow flower and the scarlet blooms of the flame of the forest. Huge mansions stood among gardens of flowering orchids, cannas and clumps of bougainvillaea.

On we went. Lovely sea vistas opened up through the trees. Then we came to the snake temple. Here snakes writhed all around us, hanging on to pictures, chairs and tree branches. We watched those beady eyes, but the reptiles

seemed comatose with the heavy incense. An angry twenty-foot python tried to lash as we bent over a cage. I was glad to see the sunshine again.

The Ayer Hitam temple broke the skyline. For two hours we roamed through this huge structure. Over seven hundred steps were climbed and countless rooms explored. This temple is the only example of its kind outside Tibet and mid-China. Beautifully made alabaster and bronze Buddhas smiled enigmatically at us, hundreds of them. Others made of wood were twenty feet in height. One monstrous warrior had his foot on the figure of an opium addict which was so realistic—skin tight-drawn over emaciated features, fleshless skeleton, and deep-sunk, staring eyes—that it seemed alive.

Everywhere joss-sticks and incense. The heavy fragrance went to my head. My friend seemed disembodied in the swirling vapour. The raucous voice of our well-fed guide prefaced every sentence with a monotonous, sibilant, "Sir . . . Sir . . . Fifty years ago this Buddha of Love was brought from China. Sir . . . This goddess is alabaster and those flowers are offerings."

Gentle-faced monks watched us, their faces like parchment, yet smooth with youth, their eyes curiously intent, yet aloof, and at peace. Humility was in proper proportion here. Up and up we went. The heat scorched us. We had tea with one of the priests on the upper terrace. Then the new pagoda of eight stories. Steps winding. The top story was locked and I gazed through iron bars at golden ornaments.

The new pagoda was built five years ago, so our guide told us, by the King of Siam.

The temple gardens were beautiful. Hundreds of pot-plants. A circular pool gleamed. Here were the sacred tortoises—four hundred of them, and also larger land tortoises. We fed them with watercress. They crawled painfully over each other and spindly, leathery necks extended as

they gobbled the luscious greens. The eyes were predatory, birdlike. Some of these tortoises were thirty years old.

We were the only Europeans. There must have been more than a thousand Chinese. They moved all the time. I was disappointed in not being able to procure a history of the monastery. As we left, the word "sirrr" seemed to follow us, and beggars whined at our feet.

But the waterfall gardens took me back to New Zealand. The water sparkled coldly like diamonds in the moonlight. Tree-ferns abounded. We gazed at the cool mountain top, where we were due on the morrow.

Then a surprise—monkeys came down from the surrounding jungle and we bought bananas and fed them. Funny animals, just like humans.

That evening we looked in at the cabaret. We saw Asiatics, Europeans, soldiers and sailors. Dancing. Cornets blaring. Violins screeching. Lights now bright, now dim. Waiters speeding round with drinks, drinks, drinks.

Tired, we walked back to the hotel. Jinricksha pullers followed us hopefully, soliciting for prostitutes. We passed natives sleeping on sidewalks, under trees, anywhere, their dark bodies almost indistinguishable. All was still. But the unchanging air, warm, heavy, scented, told of the never-ceasing, spawning activity of the East.

"Why go to the top?" protested Barrington, who had stayed out late with friends.

"To see the view," I replied.

"Too far."

"Hangover?"

His jaundiced eyes flickered at me.

"Serves you right." I laughed, and set out alone.

In an hour, I was near the top of the 2700-foot mountain overlooking the famous Strait of Malacca.

A cooling mist caressed the peak just above, and high-piled masses of monsoon cloud towered across the heavens like the vaulted interior of a vast cathedral.

Just below was the jungle. It stretched out and down for two and a half thousand feet like a thick green carpet, and one could not tell where it merged with the ubiquitous rubber-trees. On three sides the sea could be seen, gleaming dully like unburnished silver.

Across a two-mile strip of water, the Malayan peninsula looked to be unbroken, impenetrable jungle. The colours, purplish and diffused, disappeared into the distant haze.

There were no harsh, hard lines, no glaring sky with fiery sun, no feverish speed. Those sampans and junks seemed anchored there. And yet they vanished. Others appeared. They were heading for Malacca, Singapore, up the Burmese coast, everywhere. I rubbed my eyes. No wake could be seen. This must be a magic isle.

But the eye, in this world of velvet shadows and soft half-tones, was drawn always to the city of Penang. Its buildings gleamed as if an enduring ray of light were lodged there from heaven. The city was situated on one of the promontories which pointed towards the mainland, and from this height was a beautiful sight. It was amazing how the buildings sparkled. This seemed to be a city conjured out of the *Arabian Nights*. There were mosques where the faithful attended for prayer (and this was the month of fasting, or Ramadan); Chinese temples and a monastery known through the East; a Snake Temple; a Chinese Catholic church of Our Lady of Sorrows; the Tamil church of Saint Francis Xavier; and of course the European Anglican, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic churches.

Hundreds of vessels crowded the harbour. Junks and sampans predominated, their lines an artist's dream.

The Malayan peninsula, so small on the average map, loomed large to the East. Four hundred miles to the south lay the British tip of Singapore. To the north the state of Kedah was etched sharply by sky-piercing Kedah Peak. Then Province Wellesley was just opposite, where houses could barely be seen in the soft luminous light. The state

of Perak, famous for tin and rubber, stretched to the south.

But fifty miles due east from where I sat was Thailand stretching to the north. And beyond Thailand was French (or Japanese?) Indo-China.

To the west of this island were steamers. The Malacca Strait was one of the arteries of the British Empire. It had been a trade route for countless centuries. Back in the mist of time, Indian traders found the secret of the south-west and north-east monsoons.

Likewise ships from the China coast. Malaya depended largely for its early history on writings found in India and China. I wondered if there were hidden somewhere a story of King Solomon and the vast gold workings which had been found in Malaya, and alas, never properly investigated. Then the ancient stone age culture. Whence came the peoples who left the huge ruins found in Burma, Thailand, Indo-China? There was also a tradition that Java, many centuries ago, was civilized by exiles from ancient Egypt. In Sumatra were found rudely sculptured images similar to the giants of Easter Island.

The sun's rays broke through the clouds. The sea became a sparkling treasure of diamonds. The land masses were purple velvet pads and the clouds protective balls of cotton wool. I am a pygmy in nature's treasure-house.

That evening, when waiting for the ferry, Barrington chuckled. "There was a good joke here last week."

"Yes?"

"A Chinese and his wife registered at an hotel as Mr Hitler and Mrs Mussolini. The entry was made in both English and Chinese. They were fined ten dollars for a false entry and the hotel keeper the same for non-verification of identity. Can you beat it?"

CHAPTER XII

CAVE TEMPLES, JUNGLE, AND AN ISLAND

IPOH sprawls in the middle of the world-famed Kinta Valley where giant tin dredges move around on a bubble of water.

The Chinese were more conspicuous here than in Kuala Lumpur. They owned many open-cast tin mines and were extracting tin ore in this valley when Sir Francis Drake sailed through the Strait of Malacca on his voyage round the world.

The Clarksons said, "You must visit the Chinese cave temples, and go to see the Sakais." Giant limestone teeth had been pressed up from the valley floor and the interior of the temples consisted of long subterranean passages formed by water erosion. The exterior effect was charming. Cunningly constructed buildings and steps led to yawning cavities. One limestone hill was like a hollow tooth and had an amphitheatre many paces across with walls five hundred feet high. It held a pond where I saw sacred tortoises and lilies. A distant droning came to my ears and I looked up to see Wearne's passenger plane flying towards Ipoh from Singapore. The silver wings were beautiful against a blue sky.

The chanting of monks and booming of gongs stayed in my ears as I turned off the road at Kramat Pulai to find the Sakais. Leaving the car under a tree I walked several miles past more limestone cliffs on which lived a curious goat antelope, as black as the devil himself, with a leering,

salacious eye. Bands of yellow and white butterflies rose before me, contrasting vividly with red laterite soil. As the heat struck me, I eyed the eight-foot leaf of the wild banana, but passed the inviting shade. My topee slipped on my sweating head.

My method of finding the Sakais was simple. They possessed elephants who made footprints as large as buckets and left droppings as big as loaves. I scurried along, feeling as big as the Malayan mouse-deer, which grows eight inches high. My sense of smallness grew when I passed between patches of gigantic bamboo which looked exactly like clumps of grass spraying over me. A swishing noise was heard and a gigantic bird-winged butterfly ten inches across swept me with a draught of air. Emerald green and black, its underwing was shot with crimson. A mate followed and I gasped like a very Lilliputian. They were of the famed *Ornithoptera brookeana* species. Then on a shrub I saw the green insect called the praying mantis, and near by on the bamboo lay a stick insect nine inches long.

The huts of the Sakais came into view. I halted, then moved slowly on. A dark form suddenly slipped out of the undergrowth. Smiling, I said "Bawah gajah!" (Bring elephant).

His hair was woolly, and to my surprise he wore a sarong. He moved and I followed.

The huts were built in the tops of trees and made of slit bamboo. Naked babies eyed me curiously. Two women appeared. They were comely, with slender waists. One was half naked and her breasts shapely. The eyes of these Sakais had a curious roving stare like that of a wild animal. No wonder, when tigers prowled and poisonous snakes abounded.

I was asked to rest in a hut while they brought the elephants. I noticed a blow pipe and poisonous darts. The barrel was polished like that of a shot-gun. Then I smiled

in delighted surprise. A violin lay beside the blow pipe. The incongruity of it was overwhelming. I found that a Malay from Gopeng came and played to them.

Through the hut entrance I saw two grown elephants and a baby swinging along. Sakais were sitting on a crude wooden framework on their backs. The baby took my eye—three feet high, as round as a tennis ball, with tusks about eight inches long. Later a Sakai wrestled with him. The baby squealed with delight, and pretended he was falling over. I laughed until I had to hold my sides. Then they bathed. Baby bounced along in water too deep for him. He appeared to be drowning. But the Sakais laughed, I laughed and the elephants laughed.

Leaving the elephants, I headed for a mountain river for a bathe. The directions I had received were simple. I merely followed a six foot thick pipeline which writhed like a gigantic snake through miles of jungle. It wound a thousand feet up and shortly my eyes glistened at the sight of clear spouting water. It was the Kampar River. How different from the torpid muddy streams of the plains where the water was discoloured by tin washings! Undressing, I tested the white frothing water above a deep pool, and dared the plunge. The fierce current did its best to hurl me downstream but I swam exultantly across. Then I lay on the spray-kissed rocks, water spurting past, and took in the scene. The sun was a glaring disk almost directly overhead. Giant trees soared two hundred feet up. Some had leaves two feet across and were shaped like those of a sycamore. Not far away was a wild rubber-tree, many roots giving it a straddly look. Green and black butterflies circled and looped where a tangle of vegetation spilled over the sparkling water. A great peace descended on me.

Moving over to a pile of decayed leaves and twigs I watched lines of ants. There were two varieties, both red. A strange beetle excited my interest. An inch long, it had a peculiar horn on the front of its head and was armour-

plated like a rhinoceros. Then, stepping back to the water, I was almost overtaken by disaster. My bare foot almost touched one of the most deadly snakes known. A banded krait about eighteen inches long slid wickedly under a stone, and I overbalanced into the river. Gasping, I swam back across the river. Better a ducking than death in a few seconds. The shadows now seemed sinister, and I dressed.

Before I left I stepped off the cleared track and penetrated a short distance into the jungle. Warily, I evaded barbed hooks and branches smothered with ants. Immediately I was in a strange world. Sunlight glimmered high above. Not a thing moved. Around me was a death-like stillness, but I felt a million eyes. A fierce struggle for existence was going on here all the time. Plant writhed around plant; branches stretched to intercept that ray of sunlight; giant trees were sucked by parasites; and in many places unseen orchids bloomed in mysterious loveliness.

Nature's devices to bring about pollination beggar the imagination. The humblest moth performs a predestined duty when it brushes the stamen of a jungle flower. Carrion flies pollinate a mass of putrid loveliness in the *Rafflesia arnoldi* orchid, of which one flower weighs fifteen pounds and is seventeen inches across. It has a smell like that of decaying flesh, and is the largest orchid known.

Then this waist-high vegetation might conceal the hamadryad or king cobra, which grows to fourteen feet, or perhaps a python with mottled coat and twice as long. It would not hesitate to enfold a tiger with its deadly coils. A black panther might leap from a tree, and you could be ten feet from an elephant and never know it. A flying-squirrel climbs trees and glides from the tops. Flying-foxes, which are really large fruit-eating bats, swoop on to plantations. Then there are the gorgeous birds of paradise and the resplendent Argus-pheasant which no one has ever seen alive in the jungle. Danger stills all life, yet quickens

the tempo. Monkeys screech from the tree-tops where they swing at incredible speed.

A monitor lizard suddenly appeared and glared at me. It was five feet in length and had forelegs nearly a foot long. Repulsion surged through me at the sight of its glittering, predatory eye. Then in a flash it was gone, swallowed by silence.

But you may spend months in the jungle and see few of these things. There are salt licks which are beloved by the elephants, the lordly seladang, and deer.

Then, in season, huge durian-trees attract all to an orgy of gluttony. Men and animals break the thick thorny crust of a fruit as large as a pineapple. The flesh smells like sour cream and onions, and tastes twice as bad. The Chinese say it is an aphrodisiac. I can imagine the elephant nuzzling the tree, I can see the leaping yellow of the tiger, the sinuous black shadow of the climbing panther, and hear the gleeful chatter of the monkey as it twists and twists.

Was the jungle impenetrable? The tangle of vines demanded a parang to slash one's way through. Pools of stagnant water and swamps would have to be skirted. With suitable footgear and equipment, plus sufficient determination, one could go anywhere.

But my wanderings over Malaya never uncovered another such wonderful gem as Pangkor Island.

A poet's pen, a love of peace, and a timeless holiday are necessary to do justice to the serene beauty of Pangkor, which is five miles in length and two in width. It lies half-way up the west coast of Malaya, between Malacca and Penang. The outboard motor of our sampan, as Grieg and I left Lumut on our forty-minute run, seemed to buzz like a magic movie raising an isle of paradise slowly from the sea.

In the tropics, light has a peculiar radiance. Objects on the skyline are sharply silhouetted and magnified, and may

appear to be leagues away; yet in reality they are quite close. To the left of the island, the horizon was etched by the merest thread, dividing the pale blue of the shimmering sea from a milky sky.

Out towards the Strait of Malacca, our eyes were drawn to lateen sails which seemed suspended above the skyline. The boats themselves were out of sight. More sails appeared. After a while a junk, reeking with age, huge rust-coloured sails wide set, floated past, the high poop flaunting. Huge eyes, with plenty of white, stared unwinkingly from the prow, for Chinese ships must have eyes to see. Doubtless it was loaded with merchandise from Singapore.

Little by little, the blurred mass of the island changed into graceful coco-nut palms and silver sand caressed by a murmuring surf. The sound of purling water died away as we ran on to the beach.

An ancient car took us over to Emerald Bay where a rest-house nestled amid shrubs clipped like Christmas puddings. Bougainvillaea flared with colour and the scent of frangipane hung in the air. Huge trees shaded the very sea and we lay on long chairs and sipped cool drinks.

Then the ecstasy of a bathe. The sun caressed our bodies. I hired a canoe and paddled over blue and purple coral. A large turtle rose near by, reared its bird-like head and disappeared with a splash of its flippers.

A leper island lay just off the bay. It was deserted now, and no lepers had been here for many years. I landed on smooth sand and peered into the leafy depths. Silence enveloped me. Then as I waited a weird crackling broke the quiet. Innumerable hermit crabs were stealthily crawling on their loathsome way. I rested in the shade of a wild rubber-tree. A firm fleshy leaf yielded milky sap. Then I stepped into my canoe and for two hours paddled in and out of little bays where many-coloured fish swam by.

The golden yellow sand, clear green water and whispering

palms over shaded rest-house, were a dream of delight that will linger for ever in my memory.

Chanting Malay fishermen were pulling in a net as we motored from Emerald Bay. Before leaving the island we visited the fishing village and peered at ancient junks grounded to provide homes for innumerable families. Then a stroll brought us to a white man's graveyard in an old pirate lair. Wooden crosses bore mute testimony to the prevalence of dysentery and malaria: "To the memory of Seaman Brown, H.M.S. *Orion*, died of dysentery, February 1874. 33 years. R.I.P."

A treaty was signed here in January 1874. The British navy, mistress of the seas, was here. There was a China Squadron in those days and it was "lent" to give weight to this occasion. And yet, tossing weakly in the sick bay, was Seaman Brown. He was dying thousands of miles from those who loved him. The dreams and ideals of a mighty empire, and a sick sailor who was doomed to be buried in strange soil. Then the firing party, dressed in cumbersome clothes, faces yellow with fever, unsteady hands.

We glided away, leaving the isle to its dreams.

On the way back to Kuala Lumpur I saw a tiny portion of modern Malaya. Dawson showed me over his rubber estate. He had developed 2300 acres over some twenty-one years. Trees were tapped on alternate days, and the period of flow was three hours. Five hundred Tamil coolies, including women, lived here. More than sixty children were taught by accredited teachers. The employees were happy. They had everything they wanted. Yet the child-like characteristics of the Indians sometimes took a tragic turn.

"Let me tell you the story of Ramasamy, the husband of Muriamah," said my host. "Ramasamy had a disagreement with his wife about his day off. So he hit her on the head

with his *chungkill* (hoe) and climbed a tree and hanged himself.

"Then one Ponnusamy went into a local shop and asked for change. There was a quarrel for the smallest of reasons and Ponnusamy stabbed the shop-keeper.

"Their quick passions can be raised by caste differences. Marie and his brother Ammassie were playing cards. Viaparie, who was passing by, spat at them. He was chased and stabbed, for which Marie is going to hang. But, generally speaking, they are happy."

My host was a registrar of Hindu marriages. He ran a savings bank for the Indians who had saved $10,000. His duties commenced at dawn, and he had a break of two hours for tiffin and siesta.

The white planter must be an efficient executive, speaking Tamil and Malay. The secret of his efficiency is control of staff. The estate has hundreds of head of cattle, sheep, goats, acres of vegetbles, and is self-supporting.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MALAYAN

THOSE who live in a temperate land suffer cold rain and and winds that slant from the poles. Trees are scarred by the chilly blast, and grassy slopes ripple like a wind-blown sea. Thick, warm clothes and heavy shoes are necessities. Jack Frost calls regularly with his whited visiting card and the landscape takes on a barren desolate look. You huddle round a glowing fire in a small tightly-closed cell called a room, drinking whisky in neat little potions much more deadly than the Malayan stengahs. The sun's rays are always at an angle, and may be cool and fragrant like a maiden's kiss, or coldly chaste in the unfeeling winter time. You love the home of your fathers; your roots are in the soil. Your strength lies in moderation. Extremes excite your suspicion, but heady romance is alluring, and your imagination is always vulnerable.

You think ahead, for to-morrow is always subtly different; but the Malayan dreamed in the present, for to-morrow never came.

Europeans in Malaya numbered 30,000. Generally speaking, these comprised 21,000 English, 4800 Scottish, 1500 Irish, 1000 Australians, 330 New Zealanders, and 100 Canadians. There were sprinklings of many other nationalities.

On the average, the white man worked three years in Malaya, then left on the four to five months' long leave necessary to preserve health. Thus, to maintain an effective

population of 30,000, you require 35,000 with 5000 rotating on long leave. The Malayan lived for his first oversea leave.

Many had been educated at well-known public schools and universities, but I never heard one say so. Others ranged down the social scale. Not a few came from the cosmopolitan cities of the world.

The social differences among the Europeans tended to remain as wide as those of the many classes they sprang from. People on long leave often returned to find strangers in place of former acquaintances. The country cast a spell on the spirit and fought the body. There was never any truce. Thus everybody lived for the hour, whether of work or play.

Socially and in business the colour line was very clearly defined. Even near-whites were ostracized. Asiatics could not join the white man's clubs, but were allowed to compete freely with the European in most games.

The European lived a life entirely apart from the wealthy Asiatics and mixed only in his own class. Snobbery pervaded the European community.

Prestige demanded that the European should act as a lord. A multitude of servants attended his every want. A domestic staff might consist of one or two houseboys, a tukang ayer (water carrier), a cook, a gardener, a syce (chauffeur) and perhaps an amah. Then there was the dhobi (washerman). These servants would cost about $150 a month, or £210 a year.

European salaries were high. They ranged from a minimum of $350 to, say, $1500 per month. This means £490 to £2100 sterling per annum. A contract paid steamer passages and salary during long leave. The European acted as a skilled administrator. He organized admirably, and was very well served by an efficient Asiatic staff.

The standard of living was possibly the highest in the world, and the same for all Europeans. The minimum salary on which a bachelor could expect to live with any

degree of comfort was \$350 per month (£490 per annum) and for a married couple without children, \$600 per month (£840 per annum).

The rubber planters, so-called, were really highly skilled managers of estates. They lived an isolated life in the heart of the plantations, but visited the towns periodically.

European employees on tin mines ranged from junior supervisors to qualified engineers. Their life was more communal than that of the planters, since a dozen houses or so would be grouped in a compound.

Tin miners had nothing in common with rubber planters; government officers had little in common with any one outside their ranks. The towns never thought about the country. Nobody thought about anybody but himself. Entrepôt Singapore was stand-offish with the wealthy F.M.S.

The Malayan often bluffed. If you called his bluff, he respected you; otherwise he treated you with contempt. He was sceptical, quick yet insensitive, and would often have you believe that he was clever. It was purely a defensive pose. I stress that life was quick and if you lacked speed and had all the brains in the world, you might be passed over. Criticism rode rampant; but while thinking was quick, it was often too shallow. It was obvious that the temperament and cleverness of the Asiatic unconsciously affected the viewpoint and attitude of the white man.

Much depended on the age at which you went to Malaya. To a young man in his twenties, Malaya would be a golden, intoxicating dream; but arriving ten years later you would be inclined to criticize the bored *habitué* and his mode of life. The period in a man's life from twenty-five to thirty-five is a very important one, and those ten years of strain and pleasure in Malaya too often produced an outlook that was at once selfish and arrogant—especially since, at thirty-five, he would now be receiving \$650 a month (£910 sterling per annum).

The Malayan made many sacrifices. He waged an unceasing mental, moral and physical fight. He became a very shrewd judge of character; he was developed in a way that a conservative stay-at-home could criticize but not understand. "If life may be short, let it be merry," was often his motto. He would always take a chance and asked for no quarter. He had boundless courage, and a sense of humour that was astoundingly well developed.

The Malayan had many influences to fight. A vast green carpet covered him. A fierce sun sucked the nearby ocean out of its very bed to drench the land with sticky heat. No winds plucked at the trees, or cooled the skin, which grew sallow. Tropical fevers lay in wait. Asiatics living happy, aloof lives surrounded him. Most important of all, he had no roots in this soil.

Not only did Malayans come from all walks of life, but their attitude to the country differed widely at varying ages.

The much-talked-of fast life of the European in Malaya was purely defensive. It might be a healthy "letting-go", or proof that the country had "got you". And when you plunged into excesses, you faded quickly from the scene. He who gave Malaya its whisky-swilling reputation was having a last pathetic fling at outraged nature. Loneliness tore at a man's soul. He chose to be starved amidst plenty. Wherever he went, a drink was thrust into his hand. Drinking was not a habit, it was a mania—a stimulant to induce brightness, a weapon to fight neurasthenia.

The standard of conversation was appalling. To the visitor, social life in Malaya was a blend of whisky, snobbery, sophistication, ennui and downright rudeness. To the Malayan, relaxation afforded him the pleasure of realizing what he had, and of taking more than he realized.

But the casual visitor was as incapable of understanding the real Malayan as the seasoned resident was of explaining himself.

The Malayan was lavish with his hospitality—and the world criticized him. A genuine pleasure in seeing new faces was misconstrued as an excuse for a "party", and stengahs cannot be said to have impaired the efficiency of the European. And snobbery so-called was often merely a defence against boredom and the exhaustion brought about by high living.

The majority of Malayans led sensible, well-balanced lives. They recognized that many things criticized in Malaya were common to the world at large. However, the Malayan's indifference to criticism suggested that money compensated for everything, even a bad reputation, whether it was deserved or not.

CHAPTER XIV

JAPANESE TREACHERY

A COMMITTEE was formed by the F.M.S. Government to examine anomalies in the 1941 income tax enactment and to formulate the basis of tax for 1942. Leading members of the government, unofficials on the Legislative Council, representatives of vested interests, a Malay (prince), a Chinese (Oxonian) and an Indian (lawyer) served on the committee. I was appointed secretary in addition to my ordinary duties.

A similar committee was set up in Singapore for the colony of the Straits Settlements.

Our order of reference covered everything and ranged from the laws of England to the statutes of New Zealand, from Ceylon to Hongkong. We noted that the income of husband and wife was aggregated at home and that company dividends were taxed twice in Australia. Hongkong made allowances for innumerable children on a decreasing scale, and allowed for illegitimate children.

Principle and theory grappled with fact and practice. A working sub-committee was formed, then a sub-sub-committee, and later, to our amusement, a sub-sub-sub-committee. My files grew to magnificent tomes of over three hundred pages.

The chairman was the Honourable Mr H. R. Joynt, the financial secretary of the F.M.S. He was the soul of tact and allowed everybody full say.

My staff was wary of my capacity for secretarial work.

After a meeting lasting all morning, I would dictate the whole afternoon using as many as three stenographers. Copies would be rushed to members and at the next meeting, two days later, I would listen attentively for possible criticism of my written interpretation of intensive discussions.

If the stenographers were worked too hard they slowed down and could not be induced to immolate themselves in the fire of my enthusiasm. Pannikar found split infinitives in minutes after they were confirmed, and I fear that he formed dark opinions on the impending dissolution of the British Empire. But my staff did well and it gratified my vanity to listen to wonderment on the speed of a government servant.

Joint meetings were held with the colony. On one occasion at Singapore, our voices in the historic council room in the Colonial Secretary's office were drowned by a lone fighter plane snoring just above the roof-tops. Alas, the thunderous noise was heard by none other than ourselves.

The Singapore meeting was held in late November. Troops of all kinds seemed to fill the streets and the harbour swarmed with shipping. Gun practice had been advertised. Slow, heavy booms shook the island. I stared everywhere and wondered. To me, Singapore never stayed the same. It seemed to be always changing, as if busy with dreams of the future, its magnificent buildings but half-built. Perhaps the quiet serenity of Kuala Lumpur was such a contrast. But cities, like men, have an individuality. In Singapore, newness shone with startling whiteness beside ancient squalor. The severely classical lines of ferro-concrete buildings spoke of European dominance among the sprawling roofs and lime-washed walls of Asia.

Our deliberations ended, most of the F.M.S. committee went to the swimming club. I took a taxi to the famed botanical gardens where I walked for an hour. Towering

palms, trees and bamboos, of every description set off flowering shrubs, tulips and orchids. I was alone amid this silent, exotic splendour and yet I felt life surging around me. But as the sun disappeared behind the rim of a spinning world, I realized that my tiredness was greater than an exhausting meeting warranted. My temperature was dangerously high. Surely fever did not have me in its grip. I dragged my leaden limbs to a telephone box and, as I waited for a taxi, sweat poured out of me.

The journey back to Kuala Lumpur was a nightmare tempered by the blessed coolness of the air-conditioned sleeper. There followed a blurred two days at the office when I struggled through a haze of heat and work. On the third morning my body refused to rise and I was taken to Bungsar Hospital. What a fool a man feels when he is helpless! A blood-count was taken and a general overhaul made. Doctor Campbell said, "No malaria. You have had a severe attack of influenza and had better take a few days' leave."

I suppose it was my own fault. A case of too much work and an inability to say no. Others in the department had gone under and my attitude had been a smug "This cannot happen to me"; so I flouted nature and paid the penalty.

Four days in hospital left me as weak as a kitten. I said good-bye to cheery Sister Adam, who was to be married to a soldier in early December, also to two fellow patients, one of whom was an officer in a famous Scottish regiment. He had a gaping hole in his calf from an infection. The other was Thomson, a rubber planter on an estate sixty miles away on the road to Pahang. "Come and stay with us after the Christmas holidays," he said.

My leave arranged, I set out for my destination, five thousand feet above the plains.

On 20 November, I stepped off the train at Tapah into a taxi which sped upwards and ever upwards on the way to Cameron Highlands hill station. We passed through

village after village. A sign caught my eye, "Best Malacca canes for sale." Then the vile smell of durian overcame me. I purchased several dozen mangosteens, a brown-covered, juicy fruit with delicately veined flesh of an exquisite flavour. On each side of the road clumps of gigantic canes sprayed amidst wild banana and a wonderful profusion of shrubs and creepers, with trees two hundred feet in height.

From near sea level at Tapah, we rose to two thousand feet. Vast gorges smothered in jungle stretched away into dim blue. Clear tinkling streams bubbled from the forest wall, to disappear into road culverts, and I felt the in-rushing air gradually change from clinging stickiness to a cool dry caress. My skin tingled.

Orchids could be seen festooned at the tops of tall trees. Great clusters of the orange flowers of a climbing bauhinia caused me to stop my speeding syce, but it would have taken hours to gather a specimen.

An eight-foot snake was undulating over the road. With a chuckle, the driver braked the car over and killed it. I shuddered as I watched its patchwork of brilliant colour writhe and knot in last impotent convulsions. Dozens of bright blue butterflies clinging to the red soil of cuttings flashed when alarmed by the car.

A height of three thousand feet was reached; then I saw a sign which told me that I had left the state of Perak, and was now in that of Pahang. Here was nothing but jungle, turbulent rivers, Sakais and the quiet secrecy of animal, bird and plant life. And, of course, Malaya's finest hill station. The state of Pahang has 130 miles of its eastern border on the China Sea, but the Cameron Highlands hill station was situated in the extreme north-west corner 120 miles from the east coast, some 50 miles from the west coast, and about 350 north of Singapore.

The village of Ringlet appeared and presented a view of a dozen filthy Chinese shops. We sped by to see tea

plantations set on a sunny slope. Up and up we wound until I shivered in the mountain air. The 4000 feet sign was left behind, then magnificent houses were passed. These belonged mainly to large companies or rich Chinese and commanded wonderful vistas of mountain valleys. Topping a rise, the car emerged from its 35-mile long climb, at 4750 feet and I stepped out at the entrance to the Cameron Highlands Hotel.

Here was a bowl of clear, cold air, bright sunlight or cool misty rain, mountain peaks and miles of jungle walks. A tinkling rill gleamed and sparkled as it tumbled over a granite bed through the golf links, and tree-ferns spread deep green fronds over mossy turf. Best of all, there were roses, carnations and violets.

That night I stretched luxuriously in a long hot bath. How good it was to see the steam rising and experience that warm yet relaxed feeling denied to me on the plains. I bathed three times a day.

Fellow golfers were soon found. Thomas, from Singapore, was in his fifties, and wise and tolerant after travel in many lands. I liked to listen to his whimsical philosophy, and watch his mannerisms with his pipe. Deep-set eyes somehow matched a mellow voice and a strongly lined, spare face had a mouth curved with good humour.

Simmons also came from the City of the Lion. Just under thirty, he was tall, good-looking, a shrewd observer of life, sophisticated, and with a keen sense of humour. His personality had unsuspected depths.

Some thirty military officers belonging to various regiments were staying at the four hotels, and enjoying a few days' leave. Captain Halsted, of the Royal Artillery, was a golfer. He had the fascinating personality of a cultured Englishman not bound by convention.

But for three days golf was beyond my strength, so I walked, ate enormous meals and slept. Colonel and Mrs Cornelius talked to me of the beauty of Hongkong

and the China coast, and the Proctors, from Bagan Serai near Penang, enthused over the witchery of Malaya. Mrs Proctor was charmingly debonair, with an exquisite sense of humour. She said to me: "I am much older than you. Let me give you some advice. You should be married to a beautiful and interesting woman; then you would love and understand Malaya as we do."

On the fourth day Simmons and I went for a walk. We agreed that it should be nothing strenuous, and entered the jungle along a well-defined path. It was dark and almost gloomy in the leafy depths. Creepers and parasitic growths of all kinds looped from the trees and now and again we heard the cry of strange birds. By our feet, mosses covered with tiny white flowers bulged like pincushions. We plodded through a mess of decaying vegetation. Other flowers peeped at us from hanging vines. I saw what appeared to be wild honeysuckle; then a magnificent carpet of fine crimson petals looking like small red pencils was ruined by our footsteps. Several handsome rhododendrons gleamed with white and pink waxen flowers. I was attracted by many peculiarly shaped leaves and large fleshy excrescences from which hung lines of pale pink flowers. Several wild fruits defied our attempts to break them open.

Every half-hour we discussed our capacity for going on. We agreed that we were not ambitious, that the path was muddy, that the clinging vines were barbed both ways, but we kept on walking. Higher and higher we climbed. Then, rather than retrace our steps, we decided to take the first fork back to the road and civilization.

Sweat poured out of us. We were two pygmies in a vast amphitheatre. The sunlight could be seen sparkling on far-away leaves. The track became more difficult. We lost all sense of direction. Wooden ladders had to be climbed. Then we journeyed up and down as if over a giant switchback. My heart raced, thudded four times to every step. Unexpectedly, we came to an open space and found to

our astonishment that we were on the very top of Gunong Batu Brinchang, the highest mountain overlooking the Cameron Highlands. This was too much. We gaped, then laughed in gratified glee.

The view was superb. The distant mountains were soft purple and the bush in the valleys an exquisite shade of milky lavender. We sat and dreamed, little knowing that the Japanese were at that moment massing in the jungle near by. Two miles away the golf links and the surrounding bungalows were spread like a smooth green handkerchief embroidered with white squares, among the endless trees. White dots denoted golfers. The wonderful possibilities of this high, far-reaching plateau could be seen at a glance.

A few yards away, a smother of pink and white flowers caught my eye. They were pitcher plants, living on insects. Each container was up to nine inches in length and held as much as a quarter of a pint of acid secretion in which insects were partially decomposed. The rain-lid on the pitcher was extraordinary.

But time was getting on. Reluctantly, we retraced our steps and later, over a pewter of beer, boasted of our conquest of the 6666-foot mountain.

Just before dinner we listened to the radio news. An electric shock ran through me when I heard: "Manila reports state that a strong formation of the Japanese fleet, including sixteen heavy cruisers and aircraft carriers, is concentrated in the neighbourhood of the southern Japanese mandated islands in the Pacific."

"War cannot happen here," was the general verdict about me. Had not the Japanese neglected their great opportunity in June 1940, after the collapse of France?

Later, I tuned in to Manila and listened to a report that President Roosevelt had broken off his holiday at Warm Springs in view of the Far Eastern situation. Then the shoutings in Japan were broadcast. In Tokyo, General Tojo, in a message to mass meetings held in celebration

of the first anniversary of the treaty with the Nanking Government, declared "that European and American powers were trying to exploit the 1,000,000,000 people of East Asia to satisfy their greed"; that Japan would "proceed over the corpses of our comrades in the construction of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere"; and that "we must purge East Asia . . . of Great Britain and the United States, who are pitting the East Asiatic peoples against each other, in order to grasp the hegemony of East Asia for themselves". A resolution was adopted at the meeting declaring that "unless Britain and the United States, whose acts are an offence and an injustice to God and humanity, understand Japan's ideal and cease from hampering her mission, we are resolved to crush them".

"But," said someone next to me, "the Japanese envoys are in Washington, and there is no suggestion of war."

Early the next morning, I saw the Indian jaga (night watchman) piling suitcases into cars. All the officers had been recalled. I watched the departing cars and pondered.

"Just another scare," we thought. Troop movements and the training of volunteer forces had been going on for twelve months now.

The next day was the last of my leave. I sped down to the stifling heat of the plains.

On 2 December I heard that a state of emergency had been declared in Malaya and that the *Prince of Wales* had arrived at Singapore.

Work again claimed me. My secretarial duties had to be rounded off prior to the 1942 draft bill becoming law. On 4 December the morning newspapers stated: "Chinese Army H.Q. in Chungking announces that forty Japanese warships including aircraft carriers have been sighted in Cam Ranh Bay, Indo-China, and that the Japanese are hastily constructing air bases in Western Indo-China near the Gulf of Siam."

"Probably a bluff," we hoped, but we were uneasy.

Suspense enveloped us. We went about our duties without admitting our fears. I recalled all that I had heard; that the Japanese ships were full of dud shells; that their guns had never been fired; that Japan was hopelessly embroiled in China; that the American fleet was waiting in Pearl Harbour.

The local defence forces were mobilized. Nobody I spoke to knew anything. An announcement from Japan said that the Washington negotiations would be continued and that "both sides are continuing to negotiate with security in order to find a common formula".

On Sunday, 7 December, I spent a quiet morning at the baths. Despite my holiday, I was still weak. Never had I had such a severe attack of influenza, or taken so long to recover. In the evening, I went to the early cinema show at six-thirty. Mickey Rooney was acting in "Andy Hardy's Private Secretary". I was sitting among several hundred Australian and British soldiers and the hilarity of the picture was rising to its height when a message was flashed on the screen: "All units report to barracks at once." Those in uniform rose almost as one man, and departed.

That day Japan had attacked in the Pacific and her declaration of war followed later.

In America, the next day, President Roosevelt, amidst enthusiastic scenes, said in an address at a joint session of Congress at 12.30 p.m. local time:

Yesterday, December the 7th, 1941, a date that will live in infamy, the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by Japan. . . . One hour after Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing . . . the Japanese Ambassador delivered a formal reply to a recent American message and while this reply stated that it seemed useless to continue the existing diplomatic negotiations, it contained no threat or hint of war or of armed attack. . . . The Japanese Government also launched an attack against Malaya. Last night Japanese forces attacked Hongkong; last night Japanese forces attacked Guam; last night Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands; last night the Japanese attacked Wake Island; and this

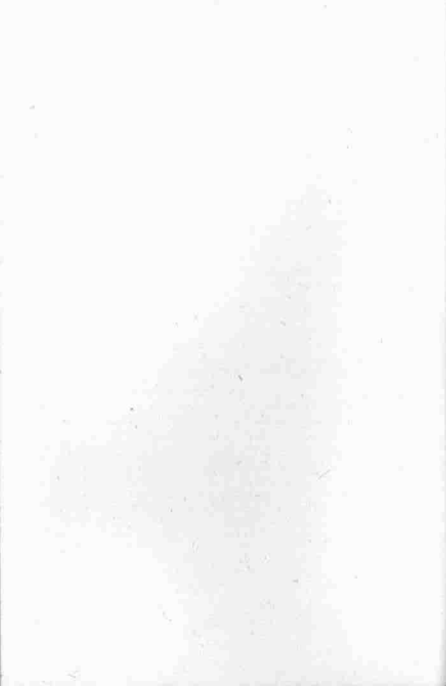
morning the Japanese attacked Midway Island. Japan has undertaken a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area.

A state of war was declared between the Imperial Japanese Government and the United States of America.

In London, in the House of Commons, Mr Churchill made the following statement at 3.30 p.m.:

> Should the United States be pledged in war with Japan, the British declaration would follow within the hour. . . . Every circumstance of calculated and characteristic Japanese treachery was employed against the United States.

War was declared by the United Kingdom.



PART II

THE TRAGEDY

CHAPTER XV

WAR

(8-15 December 1941)

JUST before dawn the telephone rang. I parted the mosquito netting, rolled out of the bed, and slipped on a dressing-gown.

"Hullo!" I said. "Yes. Speaking. What? Singapore bombed? Don't be funny . . ." In growing consternation, I listened to a spate of words. Jones was speaking from Singapore. Sincerity and excitement were evident in his voice.

"Happened at ten to four this morning," he said. "I walked outside and the searchlights lit up the bombers as they flew away. Our street lights were still burning."

So the Japanese had come at last.

Call it daring, call it cheek, call it anything you like, the Japanese raid on Singapore in the early morning hours of Monday, 8 December, smacked Malaya with a feeling of stunned surprise. The lights of Singapore blazed that night for the last time in 1941, and winked slowly out as the bombers sped away. Guthrie's building in Raffles Square was hit and the jaga who reeled from the ruins, shaken beyond belief, was symbolical of Malaya when the news was out.

Malaya had so long believed that the Japanese would not dare to twist the British lion's tail. A quiver of excitement, mingled with a sigh of relief, rippled down the peninsula. Tens of thousands of troops stationed at strategic points were at last able to carry out long-completed plans.

Quickly swallowing breakfast, I motored down town at eight. An A.R.P. official caught my eye. "Without a declaration of war," he declared bitterly. "And the Japs are invading Thailand just above our borders. Forty transports full of troops."

Fierce fighting quickly developed. The first British troops in action were the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

An excited hum of voices at the office told me that the Asiatics, as usual, were up to date with the news. Rozario, my chief clerk, came into my room, eyes gleaming with excitement. "Penang was bombed at seven this morning and the airfield machine-gunned," he said.

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than our alert sounded. Pandemonium broke loose. Dozens of chairs scraped harshly out in the main office and I walked quickly out to make sure there was no panic. "Take it quietly," I ordered. Some were laughing nervously, others were frightened. Half of them ran out of the side doors and the rest poured out to walk a hundred yards to the slit trenches away from the building.

The anticipation of that first raid was worse than the realization of all the following ones. We cowered out in the blazing sun, hearts thumping madly, and peered at the cloud-strewn sky. Nothing happened and, with the all-clear, one hundred and forty seven corpses marched back to live another day.

In those early hours some British nationals were caught in Thailand. Tin dredges and sluicing plants were lost intact. Many near escapes were made through the jungle, and one was told later of those left behind. Among them were several women, one an expectant mother.

At Kota Bharu, Indian troops distinguished themselves fighting on the north-eastern shore near the aerodrome. A bank manager rushed out of the back of his house with his sleeping suit and cash as the Japanese entered at the front.

Japan invaded Thailand from the sea at six points, also

across the Indo-Chinese border. The Thai forces resisted for exactly five and a quarter hours and the Japanese entered Bangkok in the evening.

In the office on that first day of war, I worked mechanically. The staff quietened as the day progressed, but I suspected that ears were straining for the alert. One of my Indian clerks came in to me. "Sir," he said, "I have the stomach-ache, and I wish to go home."

His look of pitiful entreaty was pathetic. "Nonsense," I replied.

I made a tour of the huge building, verifying that all A.R.P. equipment was in its proper place.

During the afternoon, an anxious European called on me. "I have just been notified of my transfer from Kuala Lumpur to Kota Bharu, which is outside the F.M.S. income tax area," he said, "and I am worried."

"Why?" I asked.

"About claiming a refund of tax paid."

"Have you heard the war news?"

"Yes. But that will be all over in a day or so. Our troops are mopping up now."

Well, that was his opinion.

"Come back and see me next week," I requested.

Leaving the office at five, I motored through the centre of Kuala Lumpur. The town was at work as usual, all shops were open, and I found that credit was not curtailed in any way, but the topic among all the Indian and Chinese shop-keepers was incessantly the same. The intuitive Asiatic will worry over a problem until he knows the answer.

The afternoon newspapers had been sold out, so, driving carefully through the swarming traffic, I made my way to the Selangor golf club to find out the latest news.

The tables were almost deserted. Coolies were erecting poles on the spacious fairways. I sat with two officers and a civilian. Optimism was the keynote and impatience was

expressed at the fact that little news had been given out regarding our troops.

"Their planes are antiquated junks," said Morrison, "and our Buffaloes will run rings round them."

"They have defective vision and cannot see straight," laughed Brown. "I wish I were up on the border."

"They may drop parachutists here," reflected Graham, "and give the re-treads* something to do." He turned to Thomson. "What do you think?"

"What are we told?" he replied. "That Singapore is impregnable, that the country is full of troops and that Great Britain controls the seas. I hope we launch a joint attack on Japanese-controlled Indo-China and Thailand. Our troops from Malaya and Burma would meet in Bangkok, then help the Chinese."

Thoughts of our collective might dazzled us. What a nerve the Japanese had! The British and Australian troops were spoiling for a fight. Our planes would sweep the Japanese out of the sky. We were thrilled by the arrival of mighty battleships to form the spearhead of our Far East battle fleet. The enemy ships would be blasted to the bottom of the sea, and the invaders hurled from our shores.

But it was the Japanese who marched into Bangkok and, while we belatedly realized that the Thais were pro-Japanese, the ill-fated *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were leaving the naval base at Singapore for the last time.

Three Japanese planes flew high through a moonlit sky, over the faintly gleaming waters of the China Sea. They were not on idle reconnaissance so far from their base, for darkly outlined far beneath were the silhouettes of two huge battleships.

But the noise of the aeroplane engines was picked up by the sensitive apparatus in the ships and the Admiral ordered the return to Singapore. During the retirement, news came through that a further landing was being

* Local Defence Corps.

effected in Malaya by the Japanese, and the ships turned north again.

Dawn came. Drizzling rain from the north-east monsoon reduced visibility to practically nothing. No enemy ships were discovered and again the battleships turned. At 11.15 a.m. a rift appeared in the misty whiteness overhead, revealing a lone Japanese plane silhouetted against the patch of blue sky. The *Prince of Wales* fired.

Then clouds melted away, to disclose sixty two-engined bombers circled at seventeen thousand feet. It was now 11.30 a.m. The first bomb that screamed down hit the *Repulse* squarely on the catapult deck. Fierce flames leaped and spread. The loud-speakers in the *Repulse* blared quick warning of low-flying torpedo-carrying planes. Twenty-seven of those machines separated and pressed an attack from all directions with great skill and determination. Contrary to general belief, none of the planes attempted to dive into its objective. Several were brought down in flames.

The *Prince of Wales* was hit by a torpedo and the steering-gear smashed. Three more torpedoes found their mark. She listed heavily to port, and started to go down by the stern.

Meanwhile the *Repulse* had evaded nineteen torpedoes when she was hit astern on the port side. A fountain of water shot up a hundred feet. Two more torpedoes found their mark and she listed badly to port.

At least seven planes were brought down. The guns were blazing furiously, but it was a last defiant gesture. The sea became smothered with oil. Gradually each vessel heeled over. The crew in the *Repulse* actually walked on her upturned starboard side; her bow rose high in the air, remained stationary for a while, then slid under the surface of the China Sea. Both ships were sunk within an hour of being attacked.

Admiral Sir Tom Phillips was last observed sliding from the bridge of the *Prince of Wales*. Captain John C. Leach

was among those missing. Captain W. G. Tennant, commanding H.M.S. *Repulse*, was saved. He sustained a head wound while diving into the sea. Escorting destroyers saved 130 officers and 2200 ratings and took them to Singapore. The *Prince of Wales* had a displacement of 35,000 tons, ten fourteen-inch guns and a complement of 1500 men, while the *Repulse*, of 32,000 tons, mounted six fifteen-inch guns and carried a crew of 1200 men. The Japanese were said to have circled over the British destroyers which came racing up, and waved as they picked up survivors.

I gazed stupidly at my radio as the news came through. Several others listening walked away without a word. It was incredible. I visualized those sixty bombers circling at seventeen thousand feet, those torpedo-carrying planes, those two splendid ships alone without fighter escort. To think that such a tragedy could happen just out of sight over our mountain ranges and that we could be so serenely unaware of it! Why should the weather break just when it did? From that date on, it seemed as if we had lost the capacity to think, whereas the Japanese were invested with a ferocity and fanaticism beyond belief. Little did we realize that the command of the sea had now passed to the Japanese, and that the dissolution of Malaya had begun within seventy-two hours of the first treacherous attack.

A.R.P. duties kept my hands full. One hundred clerks rotated on continuous duty. A kit of first-aid equipment was bought and I was fated to carry the tin of bandages and medicine many miles to and from our trenches.

Our office building, one of the largest in Kuala Lumpur, was built on a high rise in the middle of spacious lawns extending nearly a mile. Going to the trenches meant dropping down several terraces, and we had to watch our step, while our white clothes were visible for miles around against the green grass.

I approached the Collector-General, when he appeared

from his duties with the L.D.C. "I want to join the fighting services," I informed him.

"Impossible," I was told. "You are required in your present position."

Being a recent arrival in Malaya and engaged in an essential war revenue department, I had been compulsorily exempted from service with the Volunteer Regiment (now mobilized), which embraced the entire manpower of the country up to the age of forty-one. I was also held from joining the Local Defence Corps formed by older men, or the re-treads as they were called.

The courage and steadfastness of the Volunteer Regiment and the Local Defence Corps were beyond praise. But the value of the European specialist in Malaya was more than one manpower. The European was an expert in languages and he knew the country intimately. The economic life of five million Asiatics was controlled by him. What was the real value of Malaya to the war effort? Tin and rubber. Planters had to leave rubber estates to run themselves, and wives were left to wonder where the Japanese were. Banks are an artery in ordinary life but how could they work, with a quickened heart-beat, in time of war? Tin dredges with delicate expensive machinery were left to the mercy of inexperienced Asiatics. All these Europeans could have remained in their own localities and acted as liaison officers to the troops in addition to preserving Asiatic morale. Malaya was an intricate, high-geared machine and we removed the nerve centres and used valuable formulae to dig trenches and peel potatoes.

The factors of confused retreat, streams of refugees among whom one had many friends, destruction, looting and demolition, put me through a cycle that commenced with anxious care of records and property and, in the last hopeless days, finished with a wary disregard of bombs and everything but life itself.

On the 11th, an enemy landing was effected at Kuantan,

which was two hundred miles down the east coast and almost directly across from Kuala Lumpur. This was a direct threat to the F.M.S., but the rest of the world was forgotten in the tragedy of Penang.

On 9 December a formation of silver-blue bombers had circled above beautiful Penang. At first, confusion was rife, but as nothing happened the people thronged into the open to watch. These were thought to be British planes. The bombers came over again on the following day. This time there were more sightseers. Still nothing happened. On the third day twenty-six planes appeared. Thousands watched. Then down came the bombs, mainly on the Chinese quarter and shopping centre. On succeeding days the Japanese machine-gunned the streets. Corpses lay everywhere. One Chinese who had stood immobile as the planes swooped, was riddled from head to foot with bullets. Two Chinese children clung to their dead mother and were then killed. Several European women were running to a fence near the racecourse when the low-flying planes machine-gunned them. They were unhurt.

Asiatic looters started a dreadful orgy.

An acquaintance of mine, a military policeman, later said to me: "We had our work cut out. In one shop a dozen Indians were looting. I ordered them to stop, then shot some. The others just carried on."

A dying Indian had a watch torn from his wrist, but the thief did not get away with it. Mysterious fires broke out. Fifth columnists were guilty of organized looting.

The bombers then attacked shipping in the harbour. The ferries operating between Penang island and Butterworth on the mainland were ordered to be sunk. One was approached by a naval craft. A single Chinese on board was ordered to jump. His nerve failed him. The naval vessel drew off and sank the ferry by shell fire.

But the shipping at Penang was hardly touched. Scores of small craft were ultimately left intact and the Japanese

used them to effect a landing later at Kuala Selangor down the coast.

The European population, normally 2000 out of 237,000—but now consisting mainly of 600 women and children—evacuated Penang.

All through Saturday night, ferries manned by sailors from the *Prince of Wales* plied to and fro, taking women and children away. One woman had just given birth to a child, but refused to allow any one else to hold it.

It was three days before our planes were seen. Goodwin, of the Volunteer air force, flew one of the two Tiger Moths. His armament consisted of a revolver. The Japanese in their victorious advance down the mainland, soon passed Penang which had been left for them to invest. We could not spare the men to garrison the island.

The chief medical officer, Dr Evans, and another unnamed doctor remained behind, also two heroic Eurasian nurses, to care for the injured.

Penang just died. A Free Frenchman told me: "Bodies lay everywhere. There were over three thousand casualties. I helped to burn the corpses lying in the streets. The town was not greatly damaged, but there was nobody to operate the essential services. I went to Singapore. A rubber planter escaped from Kedah and stayed at the E. and O. Hotel, Penang, for three days after the European evacuation. A few Chinese boys attended to his wants. He then left in a sampan just before the Japanese arrived."

Saravanamuthu, an Indian who was editor of a vernacular newspaper, was appointed Governor of Penang by the Japanese. Shades of the Malayan Civil Service!

A bank officer told me that notes of large denominations had been burned by the European banks but one was told of $10,000,000 (Straits) left behind in small denominations. The Asiatic banks were also doubtless full of wealth worth millions of dollars. Ingots of tin lay stacked on the wharves.

I was down at the railway station when the evacuees

came through. The station hotel was full of stretchers and mattresses. I remember an aged nun lying on a stretcher on the railway platform. She looked as if she were of Portuguese blood. Her deep-set sombre eyes held mine with unfathomable resignation. Incredibly old and gaunt, her face had a purity which seemed not to belong to this world. Near her stood a European girl of about six. She was dazed with tiredness and her swollen, puzzled eyes made me feel nameless things.

Then I saw a basket cot in which a European child slept blissfully. Her name, I was informed, was Patricia Grant Watson and she was twenty-eight days old.

The tin smelting plant was blown up but the amenities of Penang itself were left intact. The Japanese merely threw a switch at the radio station and broadcasted repeatedly in English, "Hello, Singapore, how do you like our bombings?"

At Kota Bharu, the aerodrome was lost. Singapore reported a brilliant rearguard action by Lieutenant Close who, with twelve Indian soldiers, held the Japanese at bay for many hours while the main forces effected a withdrawal.

On the 12th Dutch submarines sank four Japanese transports off Patani. It was estimated that four thousand Japanese were drowned.

Price control was brought into Singapore on account of profiteering. The Federated Malay States Government followed suit.

Each day of that first week seemed a month. It was strange how the detail of my work and defence duties kept me from thinking too much. In chance meetings with acquaintances, the anxious question was, "Any news from the front?"

"Confused fighting. Enemy using tanks. Strong plane support. We are falling back."

We wondered blankly when our lines were going to be formed, but the happenings of the week were so momentous

that our minds were wholly incapable of grasping their import.

We perused maps anxiously. The rivers and mountain ranges ran down the peninsula and there seemed to be no natural bulwarks from coast to coast. Long valleys by-passed even Kuala Lumpur, which was mid-way between Thailand and Singapore. Surely a line would be held near Penang? But we did not then fully realize the effect of the increasing Japanese air ascendancy.

If you look at a good map, you will see that the Malayan-Thai border doubles and twists in crazy sweeps and angles. The state of Perlis is almost isolated high up on the west coast of the peninsula, like the state of Kedah. They are fronted on the west by Thailand. It was extraordinarily difficult to place our forces correctly, for the adjoining states of Perak and Kelantan were almost simultaneously attacked. The west coast, be it noted, is the developed side of the peninsula, while the east is largely jungle.

Aerodromes were being peeled off us as easily as skinning bananas. But the blind Japanese rush, it was said, would soon expend itself. The advantage of surprise would soon be lost. We would then invade Thailand, join up with Burma, protect Indo-China, help the Chinese, and cause Tokyo to coil up with dismay and hara-kiri.

Throughout the whole of the Malayan campaign, I was doomed to be an exceedingly busy and helpless spectator. I found that, as a civilian caught up in the maelstrom of war, life was no sinecure. I was to be bombed and machine-gunned as impartially as the troops were. In fact, in common with all other civilian evacuees, I underwent a peculiar psychological experience which I will endeavour to explain. A soldier under orders does not undergo one-tenth of the uncertainty of the harassed civilian. The soldier views looting and the smashing-up of an economic framework with detached interest. It is even good fun. He is marching through. He has his own food supply system,

and has no affection for a country he does not understand. Not so with the resident. I was under government orders, orders designed for peace-time. My departmental head was mobilized in the Local Defence Corps, and I was held by a paralysed department. Five Europeans were charged with the control and safety of 147 Asiatic clerks. At any moment one's personal servants might disappear, and food and water become unprocurable. The problem of petrol supply was tied up with that of the safety not only of valuable official records, but of life itself. I was to know nothing but what my own intelligence and actions told me. Thousands of rumours reached my ears and the crushing mass of detail added up to a damning story at once tragic and stupefying.

CHAPTER XVI

WHERE WERE OUR LINES?

(16-25 December 1941)

A DENSE green carpet covers Malaya. Over three million acres of jungle had certainly been cleared, but had been promptly replaced with a carpet of a different weave—rubber. The Japanese liked the trees. They hid behind them or even ambushed our troops from the branches. Malaya seemed doomed to be strangled by her own wealth. Individually our men were undaunted and unafraid, but who had heard of tree warfare?

Some facts came to light regarding the Japanese soldiers. Many carried a sub-machine-gun firing .22-calibre bullets point-blank up to forty yards. That is a long way in jungle or rubber. Others carried .30-calibre revolvers. Communications? Practically none. Individuals or small parties "felt" for us to outflank. There are 3,300,000 acres of rubber in Malaya and at 100 trees to the acre, there would be ample cover for the whole Japanese nation.

An Australian dispatch rider said to me: "They carry their own camouflage; sun glasses; chlorine to purify water; quinine; a roll of bandages; hard tack; even boiled lollies. And do you know," he continued, "they carry concentrated food pills. We are fighting blooming scientists!"

The Japanese were eager, foolhardy. They came on and on. The prospect of death did not daunt them. They just didn't care. They dressed in Malay sarongs, tunics of dead soldiers, and wore Indian turbans; disguised themselves as

tappers, picked up bicycles and rode blithely along jungle roads to the highways; lived on the country. Their food was rice: five million Asiatics had to live and so a couple of hundred thousand Japanese weren't even poor relations. Someone told me that stocks of 23,000 tons of rice were left near Ipoh. A ration of rice for an adult labourer is one *kati*, or one and one-third pounds; thus 23,000 tons will feed 100,000 men for a year. But we could not destroy the food of the Asiatics.

The Gurkhas wielded a fearsome weapon called a *kukri*. Some were said to slice an ear off a kill. One was caught, scalped, and pegged down in the sun for the ants. Luckily he was rescued and lived. Disarmed soldiers would walk back to their forces.

Our communications were cut. Fifth columnists. Orders never came through. Troops were isolated. They found themselves back to back with the enemy, then had to fight their way out. Thirst, heat, exhaustion attacked our men. A lot of movement took place at night.

Some Germans were caught masquerading as Swiss business men and shot.

Singapore admitted that the enemy had superior mechanized forces, including one-man tanks, and had control of the air.

On 17 December a bedraggled exhausted party of Europeans emerged from the jungle at Kuala Lipis. Under the leadership of Mr Jerram, twelve men and four women had traversed the jungle by foot, all the way from Kuala Trengganu, a distance of one hundred miles over mountain ranges and through rivers. They had travelled for nine days and nights. There were many such journeys, but I know of none other so long.

Numerous alerts upset us. One moment we would be working quietly in the tropical heat, fans whirring lazily, and the building would seem deserted. Then the alarm

would shriek. Rushing feet pounded along corridors, down stairs, and excited clerks would burst out into the open. If nothing could be seen or heard, they sauntered, even gossiped. A latent nonchalance would be acquired from nowhere. It was difficult to make them realize the importance of taking cover, but our few days of seeming mock war were soon ended.

One night an anti-aircraft battery was installed near by. We had no warning of this. Next morning, ear-splitting detonations sounded like bombs dropping just outside the building. There had been no alert. I sped out into the hall. Clerks were running into each other. One ran round his desk twice, face crazed with fear. Some were shouting. Then they rushed forth like a flock of frightened sheep. I followed, helpless to stop them. The A.A. shells were whistling up just over our heads. A few clerks fell flat on the gravelled drive and I kicked them up again. A breathless crowd scurried into the trenches.

It amazed me to observe how quickly fear had swept through the staff. That night I lectured to my unit on staying cool, on getting under cover as quickly as possible, and on keeping down whatever happened. Just a nice friendly chat.

Then the contractor who was building "cake-walks" in the roof to provide access in case of incendiaries, stepped through the ceiling and killed himself. Unfortunately, some of the clerks saw a pool of blood, so that afternoon I made all A.R.P. watchers follow me up iron ladders and along some 250 yards of cake-walks.

A military camp mushroomed up overnight, right next to the office building. The next day no fewer than four clerks came in at different times and said: "Sir, I do not like that camp. I do not like the anti-aircraft fire. I do not like being so close to the aerodrome. We are between the lot. Do you think we will be bombed?" Whereupon I laughed at their fears and frowned at my own.

To improve morale I put two spotters out. Not on the roof if you please, but sitting comfortably on chairs underneath a shady tree. As soon as the alert sounded, they blew whistles and could be relied upon to give warning of imminent danger. However, we were sold a pup as big as an elephant. A sergeant in the camp was putting additional A.A. into position and he blew a whistle to stop a lorry. He stopped the lorry all right, but started us, for 147 clerks swept over to the trenches on the run. My telephone buzzed angrily afterwards as the four European collectors demanded to know the whys and wherefores.

Then there was the visit from an irate taxpayer. A European burst into my office, glared at me with hot eyes and shouted: "Much as I hate the Japs, I hate income tax collectors more. I live in Trengganu, which is not taxed. I send my salary to Kuala Lumpur and you tax me. I am glad the Japs invaded Trengganu, otherwise I could not come and complain. I paid the tax a week too soon. What is worse, I paid for protection and what do I get?"

Poor fellow. His bark was worse than his bite; I found that he had donated $1000 to the war fund.

The Japanese bombers were concentrating on military objectives round about. Ack-ack did not seem to bother them. Then three visited the aerodrome close to us. From out of nowhere, a similar number of our planes appeared and a battle royal started.

The planes were screaming around in circles less than a mile away. Ack-ack seemed to be sucking in all the air near by. The door of our air-raid shelter kept opening and shutting. I was all eyes and ears. Warily I crept behind a tree. The noise of bursting bombs, the stutter of machine-guns, and the crack of anti-aircraft shells held me spell-bound, when I suddenly let out a howl as if a bullet had hit me. Several Europeans near by dropped flat and morale generally was very badly upset. Ferocious ants had got up my pants and I tore up to the office shedding clothes as

I went. To my embarrassment, the two European women on the staff were most solicitous until some days later, when they went to Singapore. Nevertheless, the ants had the longest say.

Our A.A. shot down two Japanese planes during that dog-fight.

Quite by chance I heard that the Observer Corps required controllers for night work, so I approached Borrie, the pilot-officer organizer. Government protested at first, then I managed to join "subject always to the control of government". This had to be signed by the Collector-General. I was glued to a network of telephones for twenty hours a week.

My Observer Corps duties were interesting. A large room at headquarters contained a huge horizontal map of Malaya marked off in squares. Telephone plugging points and warning lights were provided around the map table. Asiatic plotters chalked up reports of plane movements as sent in by our hundred observation posts. It became a joke each time one came on duty to inquire, "How many more posts are in enemy territory?" A mystery with a tragic twist cropped up one night. Grik, at the head of the Perak River, had been in the hands of the Japanese for at least three days when a message (wireless phone) came through, giving not only the name but the post code number. "Three bombers have just passed in direction of——" The message was not completed. No contact could be made, the voice was unmistakably English and ten minutes later, the town of Ipoh near by reported having been bombed. I visualized a last desperate effort to report.

I was exasperated but entertained over the following: K23 phoned to report, "One plane, not heard, but showing green observation light, circling." I reported to R.A.F. fighter command, Singapore, who were curious. Information was verified, then I checked up on adjacent posts who had nothing to report. Phoned K23 again. Plane still circling.

Then the observer phoned again, "Green light still seen—" He broke off and added, "Good God, it's a firefly." Yes, they are big and luminous, especially after the fifth stengah.

The Japs were gaining territory at the rate of a steady ten to twelve miles a day. "Position unchanged" had us worried, all right. Also, numerous reports came in regarding fifth columnists. Smith-Jones was relieving me on observation duty after a six-hour stretch and drew me aside.

"I'm not very happy," he whispered.

"Tid'apa," I consoled.

"Where are the axes to smash up the plotting table and the kerosene to fire it with?"

"What, orders?"

"No, I can't find them and I suspect fifth columnists," he said.

"Put it in your report," I suggested.

He started off with, "I am inclined to believe in the possibility that there is some truth in the assertion that there is probably fifth columnist activity in Malaya and I have the honour to inquire . . ."

Hell!

But at a later date the plotting table was duly dealt with by the Observer Corps in the usual fashion.

There was a happy comradeship among the personnel of the Observer Corps. The work was interesting but it clashed at times with my A.R.P. duties, since I had to report to the office (two miles) during alerts. A false alarm swept Kuala Lumpur out of its bed one night and I didn't bother to go to the office. Result, a wigging. "A false alarm is no reason."

Observer Corps headquarters were situated in the mansion of the Chinese millionaires' club.

One morning I was on observer duty from midnight until six o'clock. The huge map gleamed whitely under brilliant spot-lighting and the Asiatic plotters nodded as they sat by the plugging points. Despite four fans, which

spun unceasingly, the air was hot and stale. Perspiration trickled down my face. My clothing was the minimum—shorts, open-neck shirt, tennis socks and light shoes. A torch and tin helmet were kept handy. The battery of telephones was quiet. There were no hostile aircraft over Malaya and I had several hours to myself.

Trying to plan as constructively as possible, I drafted a letter of application to R.A.F. headquarters, Singapore, setting out qualifications and necessary details and asking for any duties considered suitable. I also wrote several letters to officer friends in Singapore and one to Dr Craven of the Alexandria Military Hospital. "Please pass this letter on to any military organization that may require my services." I stressed urgency and requested advice. My trouble was all for naught. In the one reply received, a colonel medico told me that it was best to apply in person—in fact it was the only way—and that influence was required.

During the same night on duty, I completed other arrangements. I wrote a letter to the Chartered Bank transferring certain moneys to Singapore and Sydney. Unfortunately, I sent too much to Singapore, but I was not to know this. One never knew what might happen. Later, when off duty, I packed all my clothes and railed them to Singapore. Thus I was left with khaki changes only, one small bag of necessities and an empty car.

A Sydney cable gave news of a bitter article on the "unimaginative, tradition-soaked pundits of Malaya".

Mr Duff Cooper was appointed Minister in the Far East, at Singapore. Sir Henry Pownall, who had been travelling to the Far East for some weeks, arrived to take over from Air Chief Marshal Brooke-Popham. Regarding these appointments and subsequent happenings I quote from editorials published in the *Straits Times*, the leading European newspaper in Malaya. In an editorial dated 29 January, a reference was made to Mr Winston Churchill's

speech about the suggestion that Mr Duff Cooper should be thrown to the wolves. The editorial says:

> May we state once more, from some knowledge of what he (Mr Duff Cooper) accomplished in a few weeks in Singapore, that any such jettisoning of Duff Cooper would be a wicked injustice. The great majority of people in this country will never cease to be grateful to him for the work which he did while he was among them. His departure was a bitter loss.

Regarding Air Chief Marshal Brooke-Popham, an editorial said, "Malaya owes a great deal to Sir Robert Brooke-Popham."

The 20th of December arrived. Fighting had been going on for twelve days. The Japanese now controlled the railway terminal on the east coast north of Mersing. The states of Perlis and Kedah and the settlement of Penang were in Japanese hands. Butterworth was nearly gone. Inland at Grik, heavy fighting was in progress and the head waters of the Perak River were under Japanese control. There was no news from the state of Kelantan, from which a railway line bisected the peninsula down to Kuala Lipis near Kuala Lumpur. It was officially stated that the Japanese were within 350 miles of Singapore.

In Singapore, "security registration" was introduced for everybody, the populace was asked to assist in the construction of trenches against air raids, war zone courts were set up to try cases of looting and treachery, Singapore was declared a war zone, and the public warned against possible parachute landings.

There was still no satisfying news from the front. Nebulous rumours spoke of lines being formed, but there was no confirmation. We lost forty-five miles of the east coast in one day, and were told that the enemy were preparing a drive towards Ipoh. Our few fighter pilots were putting up a brave but hopeless fight against superior numbers.

In Kuala Lumpur, plane landings and parachutists were

ever a bogy and were given a par rating on the links. Every night, huge lorries were stationed at strategic points.

Shortly before Christmas, a hair-raising experience was my portion. At the house where I lived, my room was on the ground floor. Tumbling into bed dead tired one night, I was just going off to sleep when I heard a peculiar swish outside, followed by a heavy thump. It was insufficient to rouse me fully and I went off to sleep. Some time later I became suddenly wide awake. My every sense was on the alert. The air in the room was still and close. Reaching for my torch, I found that the battery was finished. Impatiently, I decided that my imagination was at fault when I heard a noise outside my door, which had a chair jammed under the door handle. Somebody was trying to push in. In growing consternation, I saw a pencil of light from a torch as the door slowly gave way. "Who is there," I called, but an ominous silence followed. There was no time to do anything. Escape from the room was impossible. I backed up against the head of my bed as the light from the torch gleamed through the mosquito netting and blinded me. For several agonized seconds I waited for the staccato beat of a tommy-gun. The hairs on my neck stiffened and my heart pounded like a trip hammer. At the same time I loathed myself for being frozen into immobility, for my bare feet gave me a bitter feeling of helplessness and I did not want to be shot ignominiously under a bed.

The light held me like a fly pinned to a wall, then a sibilant whisper reached my ears:

"Who is there?" it asked.

"My God—who is it?" It took me two breaths to say that.

"Ssh! Did you hear anything outside?"

Relief flooded my very soul. It was Cornfield, who slept on the floor above. "You damned idiot," I hissed, "why didn't you speak before. You frightened the life out of me."

His eyes gleamed in the subdued light. "Not so loud. I am sure I heard a parachutist drop outside."

With a stupendous effort, I controlled myself and rolled out of bed. My windows were shuttered against possible looters as one never knew what was going to happen. Cornfield swore he had heard movements among some bushes. I was tired, fed up. "Give me your torch," I demanded.

"And get shot?" He refused.

We climbed upstairs and tried to solve the mystery but the night was pitch dark. Impatiently, I took the torch but the ray disclosed black leafy depths. A Japanese could be a mile away by now. Next morning, we found that a rotten tree had toppled over. Cornfield never realized how big a fright he had given me.

Ipoh, in the heart of the Kinta tin valley, was now getting blitzed daily, and the Japs enjoyed hedge hopping, or (should I say?) bamboo bouncing, durian dancing, or casuarina clipping, in exotic Malaya.

An ambulance driver said to me: "When the first Japanese bombers came over Ipoh after ten days of war, there were two flights, one of seven and another of five. Bombs were dropped, then they machine-gunned the streets. Various Japanese women had not been interned and I saw them cowering in slit trenches while others in a brothel were wounded."

The European women of Perak (and throughout the whole of Malaya) performed valuable service in canteens and auxiliary services, and deserve the highest praise.

Then down on Kuala Lumpur descended the European women of Ipoh. They talked, they raved, they swore. They damned the Japanese from Tokyo to Nippon's representative in America, from Manchuria to Malaya.

It appeared that an order had been issued by the government evacuating all women, but this was later denied.

Many of the women actually went back so as to await the official order.

Why all women were not *compulsorily* sent away from Malaya as soon as hostilities started passes my understanding. Their courage was magnificent and unquestioned. They did not care for themselves, but others had to. Yes, the European women were splendid in Malaya. Splendid, obstinate and wilful. Some had made a last-minute dash from far away estates. Five cars and luggage started in one convoy from a remote region in Perak, but only one car arrived full of women and no luggage. And hardly had a mem disappeared when the Asiatics looted the house. Most women lost their dearest possessions. In Malaya, a home was doubly precious. I wish you could have seen some of them. Those homes were loved with an intensity known only by the exiled.

One arrival from Ipoh, an American girl (Mrs James) in khaki slacks, showed me a revolver. "I have $2000 in cash and the Japs will never take me alive," she declared. She had been driving an ambulance in Ipoh and described how the Japanese crossed the broad reaches of the Perak River. "They came down on rafts. Our men fired until their rifles were red hot. Still they came. When a Jap was shot, two took his place. Our men became exhausted. . . ."

Arriving home from tiffin one day, I found a woman sitting on the stars by the telephone. "Can I do anything for you?" I asked.

"I have just arrived from Ipoh," she said. "I cannot get a taxi and a friend of mine and her two children are stranded at the Majestic Hotel."

So I motored down to the hotel and met Mrs Brown who had an old-world courtesy that would stamp her as a gentlewoman in any country. Her children were girls in the glory of budding womanhood. And that was how I met Stephanie. She was a perfect honey blonde. I rushed them to Montrose

House, missed my tiffin and went back to the office in a slight daze.

That evening after dinner, I asked a question. "Were you staying at the Adelphi Hotel in Singapore late in 1940?"

Stephanie raised her eyebrows in surprise. "Are you sure it was me?"

"So you admit being there."

"Of course I do."

The house became full of women. One was an Indian with a European name and a Chinese daughter. Another one was worrying about some race-horses which she had turned loose up Taiping hill, and a sick dog which she mothered all day. Stephanie was sad over some pedigree Alsatian pups she had to leave behind. All had husbands or brothers in the Volunteers.

Mails were disrupted. Wives couldn't trace Volunteer husbands and husbands did not know where their wives were. Some women had no money, others few clothes.

Apart from office and Observer Corps duties, most of my time seemed spent in an old drain under a stone bridge, for the Japanese bombers were over every day—particularly at tiffin time. The whining wail of the siren would rend the air, and everybody would scuttle out of the house. The stone bridge was quite a rendezvous. There might be ten persons all told. Several Indians used to jabber in Hindustani and from their expressions I would surmise that they were talking world politics. An old Chinese, also, was most interesting. His face was gaunt and the skin taut. The eyes were expressionless and I wish I could have heard his thoughts on the war. He would sit on his haunches, hands clasped as if in prayer, absolutely immobile. He was expensively dressed. When the engines of the bombers could clearly be heard, he seemed oblivious to the sound. Possibly he was deaf and bored. Whence he came, I never knew. But the wisest of those who sheltered, I am sure, was a giant frog. His skin was bloated and he preferred

to stay in a coma. He refused to be "bomb conscious", for the slow steady pulse in his throat never quickened. His eyes never opened. His views on our intrusion of his privacy would have been expressed by a caustic croak.

Exhaustion slowed all troop movements on the fighting front and we wondered what was taking place. The Japanese were half-way to Kuala Lumpur already, and the fate of Ipoh was hanging in the balance.

It was pitiful to observe the women evacuees from Ipoh. They were homeless and restless. Many helped at the Services Canteen but obviously they lacked stamina for washing plates and preparing food. Most of them packed up and went to Singapore.

Incessant alerts disrupted all work at the office, but the Japanese had not, as yet, blitzed Kuala Lumpur. We knew it was coming, but meantime we cautiously watched Japanese bombers flying leisurely about, ignoring A.A. fire as if it were made up of balls of cotton wool. Excited persons often thought that the A.A. shell bursts were parachutists coming down.

Reconnaissance planes came over about 8.30 a.m. In the main, however, the Japanese bombers left Saigon about 6.30 and arrived over Kuala Lumpur at about 10.30, so the office hours were amended to commence at seven, and finish at eleven. This meant no breakfast for me, since the Chinese cook slept out and did not arrive until after daybreak.

Minor troubles cropped up. The cook-shop on which half the staff relied for midday meals shut down. This also affected the personnel on 24-hour watch duty. Some of the staff grew positively cadaverous. Eating shops in town also closed, against government orders, and aggravated the position.

I went shopping. Kuala Lumpur viewed Christmas and New Year with apathy. All shop windows were barricaded against blast and looting. Shopping, however, was fairly

brisk and the astute Asiatics had at last caught up on the position and were selling for cash only. I bought some things at Gian Singh's. The bearded Indian in picturesque turban, sitting behind his desk in the shop appeared as urbane as ever. "Why not drop your prices and clear your stocks?" I asked. He smiled in a sickly fashion and mumbled something. He was not a happy man. The tragedy of Penang was like the sword of Damocles. But the prices were far too high and had advanced about 25 per cent. *Tid 'apa* (why worry). My shirts were looted anyway and I left the rest at the finish.

The few Japanese shops were now shuttered and sealed. As I passed, I wondered how many Japanese officers of high rank had passed through those doors. The hairdresser who used to thump my neck was now doubtless thumping a field service table in enemy-occupied territory fifty miles away. There was a man who used to hiss politely round my head. His control over a razor was amazing. It is difficult to understand how a potential governor of a state could demean himself by cutting the hair of a hated Britisher.

I walked into Robinson's departmental stores in Java Street. "Any khaki shirts?" No, the Chinese cutter had vanished. "Probably sick," I was told. I eyed the Chinese who was being politely negative, and for the thousandth time wondered what the Asiatic thought of the white man. There were some made-up shirts on the counter. They were orders awaiting delivery. "Will you sell me these?" The answer was no, and they are doubtless gracing an Asiatic back now.

I needed an alarm-clock for my observer duties. I had no cash but to my relief the sale was booked. A Baby Ben at six dollars fifty, and I owe the amount to this day.

Out in the street I saw some Indian coolies levering a log from a lorry. It hit the asphalt road with a loud thump. An Asiatic next to me leaped about three feet into the air

and dived into a building near by. Others scurried everywhere. Amongst the Asiatics in Kuala Lumpur, nervousness was the keynote, and they did not appreciate my laughter. The noise of whining gears was sufficient to scatter people.

It is interesting to reflect that the Asiatics were told nothing. They never knew if and when the Europeans were vacating any area. It was impossible for them to move *en bloc*. The bulk of them knew that they just had to wait and take it. Nevertheless, I watched many interesting processions wending their way south. They ranged from Chinese coolies with bamboo sticks to balance heavy weights, to Asiatics with bicycles and cars. The miscellany of articles carried was amazing. Live poultry would be trussed to baskets along with thermos flasks and firewood. Pots and pans were hung everywhere, and anxious haste was apparent in every face. Heavily laden Chinese coolie women, with their sagacious faces, walked on bare feet, carried babies and incredible burdens, while long black pigtails swung rhythmically down black trousers.

South, ever south.

"On Christmas Day and Boxing Day government offices will remain open as usual."

I gazed at the notice and wondered. So I manned my desk, knowing that the Asiatic clerks were nervous and could not work. They would have much appreciated a break away from official authority. I remember that instructions were issued to send assessments of tax due, or reminders, to addresses in enemy occupied territory. Can you believe it? It was a strange Christmas. And still there was no reassuring news from the front.

Propaganda pamphlets were dropped over Singapore, containing crude appeals to the Asiatic population to "burn all the white devils".

CHAPTER XVII

BOMBS ON KUALA LUMPUR

(*26-31 December 1941*)

OVER Christmas I took a friend to dine at the Majestic Hotel. Just as usual. You must eat even when there is a war on. White mess-jacket felt strange—probably my last opportunity to wear it. I viewed my black trousers with satisfaction but the cummerbund had to be tight and made me perspire. Rain smothered the roads as I drove at a walking pace to a bachelor house, had the inevitable stengah and listened to some heavenly records played on a radiogram. At news time we listened to the communiqué from Singapore.

"The position remains confused. . . . Enemy infiltration . . . lines being re-formed . . . small craft being utilized by Japanese to progress down the west coast of the peninsula."

"Turn the bloody thing off," I said.

Faulkner laughed. "Suits me."

"How can we talk of 'lines' in the jungle—where are our 'strong points'? And as for those boats we obligingly left for the Japs at Penang——"

I was but expressing the views of everybody. Day and night we felt the crushing weight of ever-continuing retreat. Murder crept in the silent jungle, lay in wait in the paddy-fields, hurtled from the air. Fear swept the Asiatics into gibbering frenzy. Lovely, peaceful towns were being engulfed in the lust of war.

As we set forth on our one night of freedom, I wondered what would be the result if the war receded from our shores and left us, badly shaken, but free, to reconstruct life in the Federated Malay States. Would there be a sober realization of the hell we had narrowly escaped or would we give ourselves over to an orgy of delight and self-satisfaction? War, while devastating and murderous, nevertheless scarifies souls with searing flame. The rot which was growing into us needed burning out. Would the play-acting spirit of bravado in Malaya have been tempered into steel, or merely shocked into silence?

Spangled with rain, our car drew up at the hotel entrance. The Sikh attendant saluted and we dallied at the art shop. There were carved teak Balinese heads in which the mysterious spirit of Asia expressed docility and decorousness. Avid for business, the Malay salesman started forward, recognized us and paused. These tuans knew that his goods were too dear. Ever hopeful, he fingered a bone sheath containing a kris. "Best ivory," he chanted, but we laughed. "Old, very old," he persisted, drawing a rusty blade from the short, heavy scabbard. But while his shelves were filled with Kelantan silverware, sarongs, teak elephants, wooden masks and the like, I was unable to buy for my sister the beads she wanted.

The air-conditioned dining-room felt cold, though the only difference from the air outside was dryness. Cigarette smoke hung heavily. Boys spun noiselessly around with trays of drinks. We sat in rattan chairs around a small table.

Animated groups clustered around similar tables, hands hovering over drinks. Tongues loosened, eyes shone and the flush of loquacity gleamed on heated cheeks.

Several English army officers joined us. I had met them casually several times. In private life one was an investigating accountant, the other a teacher. Both were used to a good standard of living. Neither liked Malaya. To my

regret I never had an opportunity of speaking to them away from a crowd. The topic of Malaya, to me, was an inexhaustible subject. My sympathies were always with the newcomer, whether soldier or resident, and the studied sophistication of a few Malayans, whether it was due to snobbery or shallowness, appalled me. European seems to eat European out East. Of course, I also met and liked many sterling people in Malaya, and these were very much in the majority.

In Malaya, there was no past or future. The present was pursued indefatigably. Actually, this was a defence against lassitude, depression and morbid thinking. Those who lived there had courage, hardness, stacks of it, and they expected the same of the newcomer. The Malayan was merciless. Many had gone there to live and had crept away. Sensitivity was savagely slaughtered. The Malayan learned to expect no mercy and he had none to give away.

What right had I to sit in my corner and watch these people? We were held inevitably in a groove, the battle was raging, and we were told nothing. The two hundred diners here would be scattered everywhere to-morrow. Many would go to their deaths with a jest and a contempt for this land. The blanket of war was all around us. An hour's run in a car could take one to the Japanese lines, and their warships surrounded our coasts.

The Chinese boy serving us was as inscrutable as ever. In his spare time he read his Chinese papers, listened to his radio, gossiped, and knew as much as we did. He could leave his work to-morrow if he liked; then how would the tuan fare? At the moment, life, whether one viewed it in detail or *in toto*, seemed utterly unreal.

This brief contact with one's fellowmen was unsatisfying but somehow necessary. We arrived at the hotel at seven-thirty, dined at nine-thirty and rose from the table at eleven. The night cost me about fifteen dollars. I felt that I had gained nothing, given nothing of myself; I had

merely joined in the defensive social round against boredom—except that I was never bored in Malaya.

At the office pathetic efforts were made by the Asiatic staff to appear busy. Most of our work depended on mails, but these had largely dried up. Efficiency shown during the year had been very high but paralysis was setting in.

The eagerly awaited day when our lines would be stabilized was surely not far away. The swift advance of the Japanese could not go on. Everybody waited for the day that never came. I kept close contact with my own staff so as to ensure that they would not panic and I began to realize how desperately anxious they were. The Asiatic is a thinking, feeling being with the same hopes and fears and emotions as his master.

Just at this time I was conducting an investigation to find out how many Asiatics throughout the Federated Malay States had escaped paying taxation, and my work was being nicely rounded off for the year. My chief clerk Rozario was a pensioner Indian who had had some twenty years in the post office. He looked tough. He had a face like an Italian gunman and whenever I called him into my room his air of bustling efficiency made me grimly suspicious, but he was a likeable character. His evil-looking smile really sprang from a keen sense of humour. I made a point of speaking to him or any of my clerks when I saw them in the town, whereat they were pleased. But I was nearly the death of Rozario.

"Go to town and deliver these documents," I ordered on Boxing Day. He galloped out of my room with habitual speed, and when out of sight slowed to his usual wise-happy bustle.

Not long after he had left for town, the alert went and out we raced to our shelters. I was getting fed-up with the long journey to the trenches and in fact I had never been keen on their location. The building would have stood up

to a direct hit, I think. But the Asiatic staff needed coddling, so I stood in, and moved with the rest.

Twelve Japanese bombers came over and headed past us for the centre of the town. They were flying low and as usual there were none of our planes about. Down came sticks of bombs on the government buildings, the padang, the Spotted Dog, where some European women were having tea, and the Chartered Bank. One European was killed and there were a number of casualties. Two were tea sellers, another was a Malay peon. The beautiful Mohammedan mosque was also hit, three devotees being killed at prayer. The clock which had so lustily chimed the new year in, was blasted and stopped at eight minutes to eleven. The post office Savings Bank building was a sorry sight. Bombs had pierced the roof. Blast had blown the shutters off and the place was no more than a shell. The numerous bomb craters in the soft earth of the padang were about six feet deep. There were many narrow escapes. One European dived into a trench so hurriedly that he left his foot sticking out. A bomb splinter sliced his heel off as neatly as would a razor. Another had to have his leg amputated.

Rozario appeared in due course with a beautiful smile. Never had his eyes rolled so much and he forgot to put on his air of terrific busy-ness.

"Sir, I nearly got killed."

"Lucky for you."

"Yes, sir. I ran for a shelter near the mosque. A bomb landed just outside. Splinters dug into the concrete wall and gave us a big fright."

"Congratulations on your escape."

"Thank you."

His smile, as he went out, threatened to engulf his ears. Excited whispering filled the outer office.

The next day, in eloquent silence, thousands of people inspected the damage and thereafter streets leading out of

town were packed for days. No panic. Just a deadly serious disinterestedness.

One of my Malay clerks approached me. He was small, intelligent and dressed in the usual white suit. "Sir, I wish to resign," he said.

"What is the reason?"

"I live ten miles out of town with my father and mother. I have no bicycle. When I have paid for my fares and food, I have fifteen cents left out of my daily pay. Sir, my life is worth more than fifteen cents (fourpence) a day."

Such frankness was unusual, but refreshing. I shook hands and wished him good luck.

An Indian clerk with large lustrous eyes and a good carriage made a request. "Please give me a pass to Kuala Selangor so that I can see my expectant wife and daughter, who are living alone."

I was forced to explain that, since the Japanese had just occupied Kuala Selangor, he could not get past Klang without a military pass. "You might get shot as a suspected fifth columnist," I added. He could do nothing, naturally. I felt sorry for him and had patiently to repeat my explanation.

Appaduray my Indian stenographer then asked, "Can I go to Tapah to join my people?"

"Tapah has been in the hands of the Japanese for at least a week."

"Yes, sir, but I think I should be with my relatives."

I believe he thought it possible to pass through the military forces. This illustrates, to my mind, the uncomprehending attitude of many educated Indians of the clerical class. Not interested. Spectators only. Further, the upsetting element of war applied a pressure under which they were liable to do crazy things. You cannot blame them for lacking hardness, ruthlessness, the capacity to hate, or the ability to kill. They had not been trained to it.

On 29 December Ipoh was evacuated to avoid a pincer

movement from the north and south-west. Dr Roy Anderson, chief of the Medical Auxiliary Services and Ipoh's medical officer of health, stayed behind.

In Kuala Lumpur after the bombing, most government departments and banks operated from officials' residences on the outskirts of the town, mostly in the gardens district, and the process of drawing government funds involved a grand tour of the lake gardens and Circular Road. But as cars were compelled to stop during an alert one often had to leave the hot airless car and sit meditatively at the base of some leafy tree.

Believe me, one spent hours ruminating on the problems of mankind in general and Malaya in particular, or in scanning that lovely blue sky when the hateful drone was heard. One day I was standing outside the Accountant-General's house when a lone Japanese bomber came over at about five thousand feet. One shot, and one only, was fired by A.A. near by and it scored a hit on the nose of the machine, which spiralled down and crashed in the rubber about two miles away. I experienced a feeling of grim exultation.

The bank staffs are to be greatly commended for devotion to duty, and some day I hope to read a story of how they coped with their frenzied clients. All day and every day they were besieged, particularly by evacuees with accounts in the now defunct branches of Alor Star, Kota Bharu, Penang, Taiping and Ipoh.

I asked Philp, in the Bills Department, if the Chartered Bank would take some papers of mine for safe custody.

"Impossible," he declared. "We are receiving registered packets every day and have no option but to re-address to sender even if the office of posting is now in enemy hands."

So I air-mailed the documents to New Zealand and they got through just before several of the flying-boats were shot down.

The central post office facilities were discontinued.

Branches operated from outlying districts only. Incoming mails, however, could not be delivered and had to be picked up at a house in Bellamy Rise.

We had the weird feeling of never knowing where the Japs were. Any morning we might find ourselves in the front line.

Observer Corps duties had me on the phone one night with the harbour master at Port Swettenham, which was twenty miles east and slightly south of Kuala Lumpur. "We were bombed to-day," he said. "They hit the wharf and sank a launch. My Asiatic harbour staff has disappeared, likewise my servants, and I have forty launches to look after."

From Kuala Lipis eighty miles north of Kuala Lumpur: "We are being bombed. They are machine-gunning now." The speaker was excited, jumpy. So would you be.

Then Stephanie was wafted away with her family just before new year. The war which had blown her out of Ipoh was reaching grasping arms around Kuala Lumpur.

The night before she went we drove several hundred yards up the road and talked.

Stephanie was always a mystery to me. I had stopped under a blue street light so that passing military lorries roaring by, would not hit us. Her expression was cool, matter of fact, as she asked:

"What can I do in Singapore?"

"If the present muddle continues, for heaven's sake be careful."

"The Japanese will never take me alive."

I ignored her remark. "Enjoy yourself in Singapore."

"Pouf. Why should I?"

"Keep your mind off war."

"With no news of my brother? Never."

"Good for you. But it won't work."

"Why?"

"Your nerves are good. Keep them so."

"They were good. Now I am not so sure."

I took her hands. They were exquisitely shaped, firm, and lay milk-white in my sun-browned palms. "Nice hands."

Faintly mocking, her eyes held mine. "So what?"

"Why don't you criticize people, as everybody else does in Malaya?"

"When I went to England as a child I loved Malaya. Now that I am grown up I hate it."

"At twenty years of age?"

"You are teasing me."

The magic of the Malayan night stole on. On the other side of the road could be seen glowing cigarette butts. The guttural intonation of an Indian dialect floated to our ears. Stephanie, eyes starry bright, looked beautiful.

"They think we are lovers," I said.

"Yes . . . they think."

"We love the same things . . . art, beauty, peace, the niceness of understanding. Do you agree?"

"Yes," softly.

"You are twenty, beautiful, and unspoiled. Don't let Singapore . . ."

"But I do not like Singapore."

A huge military lorry shuddered to a stop by my car. The driver was a sun-tanned Australian. "Where is Circular Road . . . this damned black-out . . . oh, sorry."

"Quite all right." I grinned.

Stephanie smiled seraphically at the driver. "Don't you take any notice of him," she said.

He didn't.

"Where are the Japs?" I queried.

"God knows. Our transport is clogged up all over the place and the Japs seem to be everywhere. I have been shot at a few times by fifth columnists."

He pushed his hand through a broken windscreen.

When he had gone, we found that it was midnight. The

rising moon whitened the long boles of the coco-nut trees. In the shadow of the car, a luminous worm wriggled its unending way.

"Whatever you do, get out of Singapore," I argued.

"Where to?"

"Anywhere except Java. Australia is best. South Africa next. Colombo may be all right."

"We will see."

"This war is going to swing around the world. Keep moving, whatever you do."

"Why not Java?"

"Because the Netherlands East Indies is going to be blitzed any time now. It is in the war zone. Please, Stephanie."

"I will remember."

"Let me know your movements. Here are some addresses—a banker in Australia, my attorney in New Zealand."

"I will let you know. And you?"

"As long as I have your address I can write. Now listen. Kuala Lumpur is nearly finished, then *I* am on the move. Where to, God only knows. If in doubt send your address to my bankers at Sydney. Don't worry if you hear nothing for months. Mails will be disrupted. We are going to be scattered everywhere."

We drove down the road to the guest house gleaming in the moonlight. "We leave at seven," she said, "while you are on observer duty," and gave me her lips in a long cool kiss.

Malaya now suffered an attack from a different direction. The world Press screamed slashing indictments against the Europeans who lived, it said, a life of unspeakable vice. Malaya, it was stated, was a land of blimpish officials, whisky-swilling planters and unimaginative pundits. One London writer roared about chota pegs—perhaps he thought

Gandhi was a Malay or that Singapore was situated on the Ganges.

Poor Malaya.

World, what do you mean by it? You dare to sit in judgment on us? Who started the war, anyway? Here in Malaya we may stew in our own juice but *we* do not complain about it. In fact, World, you big hulking brute, we are considerably dissatisfied with you. We think Malaya is a lovely land, so please do not disillusion us. We send you enough rubber to provide for 10,000 planes. Where are they? Our tin will pay for sufficient guns to guard our back door and even the pantry window. Where are those satisfying noises? Here we are, 30,000 white people looking after 5,000,000 Asiatics, and surrounded by 450,000,000 Chinese, 350,000,000 Indians, 22,500,000 Indo-Chinese, 14,500,000 Thais and 65,000,000 Javanese, while Japan leers our way with 100,000,000 war-crazed lunatics. Just think—a handful of Europeans in the midst of 1,000,000,000 Asiatics! World, what are you doing about it? We have our work to do. We 30,000 Europeans control an import and export trade of over $1,000,000,000 Straits, and yet you expect us to—well, what do you? Use your imagination. Who talks about Malaya? Who writes about Malaya? Who pants for vice in Malaya? World, you do.

But who is the white man in Malaya? He was born in every country of the world except Malaya. He dies out here, earning fat dividends for you, or retires at fifty-two and statistics say he is dead at fifty-four.

Send all the world teetotallers out here—and double your consignments of whisky. I am going to tell you a funny story. A confirmed whisky drinker arrived in Malaya.

"Give me a whisky," he ordered.

He was given a stengah. "What is this trash?" he bellowed.

"Iced soda water with a little whisky," explained a friend. "Iced soda is good for you but gives you cramp which is offset with a little whisky." The confirmed drinker insisted on his usual potion.

He died.

Please send us all who wish to make war. Send Hitler and all his satellites. Send Mussolini. Send the war lords of Japan. The sweat of a thousand orations would run into their eyes before breakfast; their appearance would so alter that on publicity alone they would be failures; dreaded fevers would shake their bones and they would pray to be taken back to an accursed Axis country to drink themselves to forgetfulness and death. So we who live in this deadly prison of zooming mosquitoes, Singapore foot, and iced soda water (slightly coloured)—we are astounded.

Have you ever heard a Malayan defending himself? No. Have you ever read of a Malayan indicting the world in passionate self-defence? No.

You have all heard about Singapore being a free port. In your greed to make profits you heaped all manner of goods on to us. Expensive cars, clothes, everything of the very best. Our protests availed nothing. Hot, hollow-eyed, anaemic, we could not throw off your insidious advances. Our clammy hands wrote out cheque after cheque. We asked for quinine but alas the shop-keeper had nothing but whisky. We had no choice. The case is the same as that of offering the Redskin fire water, or a sweating bowler on a village green a mug of beer.

Exactly where were the Japanese? Quickly and surely an enveloping movement was embracing Kuala Lumpur. The west coast was out of our control. Hammer-blows were being struck at us inland. Infiltration stole our morale. We read in the paper of "lines" being re-formed. We asked—what are "lines"? To the Japanese every tree in the thick jungle carpet was a blazed trail finishing at Singapore.

So busy were we at Kuala Lumpur that we heard little of what went on down in Singapore. The capital was quiet. A biting note of sarcasm appeared in the papers there, however, when the first trainload of refugees arrived in Singapore from Kuala Lumpur. The question was asked:

Why should these people—(women and children, mark you)—leave Kuala Lumpur so soon?

And while our outnumbered troops upcountry fought desperately, an outpouring of wrath by the *Straits Times* regarding the real control of the defence measures of Singapore island, flowed over us like water over a duck's back.

On 29 December an editorial appeared in the *Straits Times*, headed "Who *are* our Leaders?" It began:

In this, the fourth week of the attack on Malaya, controversy rages in Singapore as to how responsibility for the defence of the island should be divided. With part of the country already lost, with many towns heavily bombed and our own existence gravely threatened, we hear arguments as to how far this or that organization should be allowed to poach on the preserves of another. That is the most unreal thing in the whole situation. It is more unreal than the thought of Japanese soldiers disguised as rubber tappers firing on British troops south of Penang. The man in the street gazes around him in a state of complete bewilderment. . . . Quite simply the problem resolves itself into this: Is the Malayan Civil Service to remain the paramount authority in all matters relating to civil administration, or is it to pass under the control of an organisation described vaguely as "the military" which is, in fact, not military at all? . . . What is the extent of public confidence in the Malayan Civil Service at this moment? It was never less.

The editorial went on to point out that a new body which was empowered to "do anything" consisted of two members of the Malayan Civil Service and one of the busiest soldiers on the island, while the Civil Defence Committee, presided over by a Minister of State (Mr Duff Cooper), could only advise. In conclusion, the editorial said:

Let Mr Duff Cooper step in and clean up the whole position by whatever means lie to his hand. If he does so, he will find himself backed to the limit by the entire populace outside a few government servants, the legislative tea-party and a handful of people who would give their souls to be invited into that party.

CHAPTER XVIII

SCORCHED EARTH

(1-9 January 1942)

NEW-YEAR'S eve was the antithesis of that of the previous year. The Dog lay dark and forlorn. The tiled roof gaped dismally and rain dripped unchecked into the sacred precincts of the tuan besar. Here, in the past, guests of Empire had been treated with pomp and prestige; to-day, their hosts were in danger of their lives. Wine, women and song had given place to bombs, bullets and bewilderment. The clock was silent, shattered with bomb blast, and as I passed in my car I crawled warily along, eyes watching for figures in the gloom of the black-out.

The ruler of the state of Negri Sembilan, H. H. Tuanku Abdulrahman, K.C.M.G., ibni Al-Marhum Tuanku Muhammad, Yang di-Pertuan Besar, in a message to his people, said, "Let us pray to Allah for speedy victory. We are fighting for truth, liberty and freedom."

On the morning of 1 January, I was electrified by a broadcast by Martin Agronsky, noted National Broadcasting Corporation commentator. An all-out Japanese attack on Singapore by land, sea and air, rather than an attempt to blockade and starve it into submission, was predicted. "Neither the Chinese nor the Dutch could do more than they had done," he said, "and the British have always had guts, if nothing else."

In Singapore food rationing was brought in. One-course meals only were permitted in hotels and frozen butter

consumption was curtailed to four ounces per week. Chinese dishes were defined as follows: Rice or curry rice or fried rice together with a bowl of vegetables, a bowl of meat or a bowl of fish and a bowl of soup, macaroni or vermicelli together with other ingredients normally used in the preparation of dishes such as *chha mee, choo mee, chha bi hoon, chee bi hoon, chha kuay teuw, choo kuay teow,* or *choo mee sua.*

Singapore acts! Slit trenches were now being prepared by the municipal authorities. Breastworks were constructed to stop planes landing.

To my disordered imagination the Japanese seemed everywhere. Their bombing was now reaching devastating fingers far past us. The main road as far south as Johore was bombed and machine-gunned. Singapore came into the news again. Second bombing. Disturbing rumours of a Japanese landing at Port Dickson, well to the south of us, were proved false.

The roads were full of motor transport, and dull as the voice of doom was the heavy pounding of guns rolling south.

Major worries, as always, were relieved by the cloud of detail that still fettered our actions and minds.

I had a belated laugh at the office. About thirty of the staff were standing up in a slit trench, looking west at enemy planes, when a Japanese bomber came low over the building behind us. I yelled "Get down!" and the thirty disappeared like one man.

I was told that when a Japanese plane was shot down in British territory, other Japanese planes would machine-gun and even bomb it.

The European personnel in our department was still further reduced. We rarely saw the Collector-General whose hours with the L.D.C. guarding bridges and warehouses were twenty-four on and twelve off. The Deputy Collector-

General took his wife to Singapore and we daily but vainly expected him back. Later, in Singapore, he said he was on the train going back to Kuala Lumpur when the police authorities took him off at Johore Bharu. His non-arrival disorganized us. Telephone and postal communications with Singapore were still possible but clogging up all the time.

The Asiatic staff dwindled daily. The absence of work let them think too much. I was rather proud of the fact that nearly all the clerks in my unit were still intact, whereas others had lost one-half of their staffs.

The drama of those last few days in the once bustling capital was pitiful to watch. Passive, bewildered, fearful, tens of thousands of natives streamed in from the country for free rice distribution. Vast quantities were handed out. At the godowns natives stampeded and were shot, or the heavy sacks, loosened by eager black fingers, would fall and crush bodies like smashing eggshells. Every conceivable form of conveyance was used by the Asiatics. Bicycles, hand-carts, rickshas, trolleys, and bent straining backs.

Some of the European departmental stores were thrown open. I saw an old skinny Tamil wearing nothing but a loin-cloth, staggering under a load of dozens of European felt hats. Another drunk Indian appeared, his skin covered with unused stamps. A Chinese ricksha puller was struggling with a huge frigidaire.

Asiatic servants vanished from the hotels, which closed. In fact, the Majestic Hotel was the first to shut. The cinemas ceased. Even the Asiatic dancing halls were locked. The streets emptied. It made me wonder where everybody had gone. Towns and communal life mean money and ease to the Asiatic. He loves to laugh, to eat, to watch his theatre and picture shows. Now he was cowering in the kampongs, near carefully hidden goods and food.

The reek of whisky pervaded whole blocks. Many thousands of cases were smashed. One firm hurled $50,000

worth of liquor into a cellar bottle by bottle, then dynamited and fired the building of four stories.

Wherever I went I saw locked buildings. Looting was going on. Asiatics were shot.

I had to leave my guest house. The servants had vanished. Luckily I secured a bed in a nearby house used by observer headquarters, but some of my things were looted before I could change over. Observer Corps headquarters was the only place where one could get a meal. We paid the cook boy daily. He had his eye on the house ornaments and furniture and when we went . . . which reminds me that just before the European proprietress of this house evacuated, I surprised her unwittingly. Shrewd, competent, hard boiled, she was crying bitterly. She had an invalid husband, no money, and was about to set out on that homeless trek. You who have never left your homes, will never know.

Food for the next day was always a worry, but luckily I had some tinned provisions.

Petrol was scarce. I was using up to half a gallon a day on departmental business, in banking moneys and collecting cash. I had the utmost difficulty in getting the precious fuel replaced. Repair shops and garages shut down, or moved south *in toto*.

One heard of cars being machine-gunned on the way south.

Military curfew was brought in. Liddell, an acquaintance, said with a long face, "Now that is bad luck."

"Why?"

"On observer duties, I have retreated from Penang, Butterworth, Taiping and Ipoh, and curfew meant that the Japs would be in occupation in about four days."

Each day, demolition gangs mined bridges and roads.

The ways of fifth columnists are strange. Here is an exclusive story. The greed of an Indian for his neighbour's pigs gives the motive and an explanation.

Ramasubramanian, an Indian living in Kuala Lumpur, coveted his neighbour's pigs. He meditated long and earnestly, then he built two stake fences with arrow heads, the lines of which pointed to the piggery. A Japanese reconnaissance plane came over, observed the arrows, and the pilot reported to his headquarters as follows: "There is an anti-aircraft battery at spot X 2416." His commanding officer called in a squadron leader. "Take twenty-seven bombers and drop your bombs on spot X 2416. It is British military headquarters, and on information received I suspect that General Wavell will be there at 0900 hours to-morrow." Ramasubramanian accordingly lay on his stomach and quaked while the ground was blasted around him. When he peered from his hiding-place, he saw that ten silent squealers lay in the dust. Quickly he carried four of them away before his neighbour appeared. Which was why the newspapers published the following: "The enemy succeeded in killing six, possibly ten, pigs which belonged to a vegetable gardener."

Kuantan aerodrome was lost on 7 January and we vaguely knew of the battle of Slim River, which had gone against us. The three-pronged Japanese drive down the peninsula was developing. Kuala Lumpur apparently did not count at all, because a railway line and a road by-passed us.

We never heard atrocity stories. The Red Cross was respected. Fifth columnists were very active. Many were shot out of hand. Unexplained flares were often seen. Telephone lines were tapped and dispatch riders had to be used.

We never saw any of our planes now. Any news we had of the fighting was usually several days old and this meant possible Japanese progress of thirty miles.

Occasionally, I tuned in to Tokyo, to listen sceptically to the extravagant claims made. However, one morning the joke was on me. The guttural clipped tones of the announcer

said, "We announce the capture of Kuala Lumpur, capital of the Federated Malay Straits."

I leaped to the phone. Spoke to A.R.P. headquarters.

"Has Kuala Lumpur been surrounded by the Japanese?"

"I do not know. Has it?"

"I asked you first."

Black columns of smoke spiralled into the sky everywhere. Rubber stocks and estate buildings were being burned. Every few minutes, shattering detonations told of demolition. One ducked and thought of bombs. Dredges costing millions were wrecked beyond repair. Essential parts were taken out and the dredges fired and dynamited. One electrical dredge had just been completed at a cost of over $2,000,000 and a hard-headed Scotchman had tears in his eyes when telling of the destruction of one of the finest products of engineering skill. Some dredges were shelled by the military.

It is interesting to consider that 66 per cent of tin ore was produced by European concerns, which worked by economical modern methods and owned nearly all the dredges.

It appears that right up to the last days before Japanese occupation there was no planned or systematic scheme of demolition. Various companies followed different methods. Some dredges were wrecked and sunk, others merely "beached" and essential parts removed. Junior assistants would be faced with last minute decisions to destroy plant worth millions. The "back in three months" complex thrived perversely the more disaster grew.

Somehow, worry vanished. The orgy of destruction provoked a detached interest only. Money or material things did not matter now. There were very few civilians left and I did not see any European women.

I paid a visit to the Selangor golf club, at five in the evening of 7 January, just to look round. I was dog tired. The spacious clubrooms were just then being locked up

for good. I could sign for a case of whisky if I wanted to, but I didn't. The fairways, as for weeks past, were studded with posts to prevent planes landing. The now patchy greens still beckoned. Shades of the past! Several hundred bags of clubs in the locker room were seen by my lack-lustre eyes, near-gifts to the Japanese horde! Instead of going over to the swimming pool and lying down in a long chair, I took out several clubs, and actually "cashed" a chit I had won from Flowerdew for three balls. To my amazement, I shot a neat thirty-five on a par thirty-eight. Brassies and irons sizzled down fairways full of poles, to land on neglected greens. But there were no caddies, no refreshment bars, not even the Indian cattle with their strange bird companions.

The immense parkland of thirty-six golf holes was deserted. I thought of cheery Sunday mornings, match afternoons, the delightful comradeship of those scattered friends, and the friendly bickering of the true golfer. Only the graceful casuarina-trees seemed as usual, with their suggestion of peace and aloofness.

After the golf, I went to the swimming pool. The elaborate filtering plant was locked. Some R.A.F. officers turned up. They had some hot beer. We bathed in the nude and threw empties into the water. (Committee members please note.) Then the sun went down in a blaze of glory in the bluish purple jungle on the mountain ranges near by. But—is this the beer talking?—there are Japanese under that jungle.

On the morning of the 8th, I had no idea how much longer I would be held in Kuala Lumpur. It seemed that all our troops had retreated to south of the town. A curious expectancy possessed me. Detonations sounded. Demolition or Japanese? Nobody I spoke to knew anything.

For ten days now we had commenced work at seven in the morning so as to evade the alerts. This meant rising in

the dark, shaving in cold water in the reflected light of a torch, and having little more than a cup of tea. Bully the boy, and he would leave. The Chinese cook, whom we had salvaged from my guest house, arrived too late in the morning to cook me a meal. He was a Mohammedan and slept in a Malay kampong. Usually, staff lived on the premises, but I had to go all the morning on tea, bread and butter. My ribs were protruding more and more each day. I crawled to the office in the dark. The sun would burst over the horizon just as I arrived, as if jealous of such independence. An angry flush would suffuse the heavens, then gradually pale to a delicate pink.

Orders were received at last. The Asiatic staff were to be asked if they wished to go to Singapore. Our 147 had dwindled to less than ninety by now. Relief gleamed in many an Asiatic face. I think more would have left but that they were afraid of incurring the wrath of government when it came to reinstatement. But of the remaining eighty-seven, five only wished to take a free ticket to Singapore. I wondered if the fate of Hongkong was too fresh in their minds, or whether Malta had been too prominent in the news. The Asiatic obviously preferred to be overrun and take his chance. His roots were in the district. He would stay, no matter who the master. It was decided that all clerks were to receive two months' salary. This was the last day the banks operated in Kuala Lumpur, and they shut at one o'clock. Typewriters clicked. Lists and vouchers were prepared, in treble quick time.

I took a Chinese cashier and Kennedy with me, drove through the lake gardens to King's House, where Mr Joynt, the Financial Secretary, certified the amount. He looked careworn and very tired.

I commented, "Rather different circumstances from the tax committee meetings, sir."

His smile was preoccupied.

Then round to the Accountant-General's residence to

see Mr Bird, who said that something else needed certifying. He had to see the Financial Secretary. I had no option but to motor four miles back to the office wondering the while if the bombers would catch us. Here I telephoned the bank to ensure that $16,000 would be available. "Just as well that you phoned," I was informed. "We are just sending to the Treasury for $1,000,000 for specified payments."

Back through town again. It was twelve o'clock. The alert screamed. "Blast the alert," I fumed, and tore through the streets at fifty miles an hour. Asiatics peeped out of ditches, from behind trees. The Accountant-General was still at his desk. Stout fellow. (And he had just returned with his wife from long leave in New Zealand.) The cheque was signed, and away we went again, to be stopped by a Malay policeman. "Tid'apa," I said, and gave up. We sat at the base of a huge rain-tree, first of all looking carefully for ants. The all-clear whined up to scream like a banshee with a tummy-ache and off we went again. Arriving at the private houses where the banks carried on business, I saw hundreds of cars. Europeans, Indians, Chinese and Malays formed a long queue four deep extending over a hundred yards. The cashier joined the hot, perspiring throng and I watched his slow progress. The figure of a nun caught my eye. She was standing forlornly by the roadside.

"Can I do anything for you?"

Her eyes expressed thanks. "I have lost my syce," she said. "I hope he has not run off with my car." Her clothes were dusty and she looked hopelessly exhausted.

"Let me know if I can take you anywhere," I said.

The alert whined again. I hoped the solid phalanx would break, but no. Certain cash was more valuable, apparently, than uncertain life. A growling mutter crept through the air, and intensified. I looked for an antless ditch. The line wavered and broke. My cashier ran. Swearing to myself, I chased him. "Give me that bag and cheque." But the all-clear sounded unexpectedly, stabilized

everybody, and, hey presto, the queue was half as long again without my cashier.

The banks were due to close in half an hour and Malay policemen were keeping a close watch on the milling crowd. From inside the bungalow came the hum of many voices. People pushed and shoved. I hoped for a good bomb to scatter everybody but the sky was empty. So was my stomach. Walking to the back of the house, I passed a policeman to whom I gave a cheery grin and strolled in among the staff. Once inside I was attended to promptly.

The bank staffs deserve the highest praise, and their work affords an astounding example of what could be effected by organized co-operation with the Asiatic. I was also particularly struck with the morale of the Asiatic clerks. Their speed and accuracy were amazing. In ten minutes I had the $16,000. Outside I looked for the nun, but she had gone.

It was one-thirty when I got back to the office, to find that nobody had left for tiffin. The eighty-seven hopefuls tried not to look it. I gloomed to Rozario, my chief clerk, "Bad luck, we missed again." The cashier, however, looked dumb but happy. Milling clerks spilled around the cashier's cage.

I felt sad when saying good-bye to the staff, as if I had let them down. They were cheerful. They knew the Japs were coming, that the Europeans were going. A period of deadly suspense was ahead of them, but the Asiatic crosses his bridges when he comes to them. I believe they felt that the white man would never lose Singapore. One by one my unit shook hands and most of them shyly said, "Good luck, sir."

It is doubtful whether the Straits dollars so carefully handed out to them retained any purchasing value, since the Japanese later issued their own notes.

Long hours on duty, and lack of sleep and food, had sapped my vitality. I had a belated tiffin and fell asleep

in my car just as I was going to drive back to the office. Arriving at two-thirty, I found that somebody had bungled the question of assistance in carting the War Taxation Department records to the station. Loading my car, I drove to the station and promptly fell asleep again. Utterly exhausted, I motored through the town in order to have a much needed siesta. Bridges were being blown up. Preparations had been made to fire the business centre. Everything was ready for evacuation. I called at the A.R.P. depot. Stores lay about. Everybody had gone. The telephone had been ripped off the wall. Some bottles of Burgundy were on a table. I looted them—also some stout rope, my first and only loot, by the way. Then to bed.

At five o'clock, refreshed, I motored to the station. The War Taxation Department van was loaded with records, ready to go. The last train to take civilians drew away. Rain was falling and I was soaked.

I paid a last visit to the office. The huge building was silent and deserted. My steps echoed dismally down corridors. There is nothing so lifeless as a deserted office, where one gives so much of one's self in busy hours. The Sikh jaga turned up. He was bearded and docile and a giant of a man, weighing at least sixteen stone. He saluted me. I gave him a wry smile. Then I remembered my private correspondence and lots of personal papers. I tore up hundreds of sheets and rescued some notes for a diary. I left my Public Relations diary, for which I was sorry later. There was a newspaper cutting of a chairman's address at an annual meeting of a body of accountants, eulogizing the helpful attitude of myself—ahem—and other officers of the department. This address to members concluded with: "No doubt you wallowed in the mire of uncertainty in interpreting the clauses of the War Taxation Enactment. You wallowed in good legal company, but with the truly helpful hands of the Public Relations Officer, I (the President) was guided surely and gently to the shores

of enlightenment." It was the voice of a dead past. As I left I saw some tame rabbits nibbling on the lawns.

It was my last night in Kuala Lumpur. I was too tired to eat. Would I never make up on lost sleep? Doubtless it was my own fault. Observer Corps night hours and endless running about seeing if people I knew needed help had left me without rest. But I was lucky. Other people had wives, valuable possessions to consider. Actually, I was still suffering from the after-effects of over-work and flu. I recalled what a friend had said. "Work as hard as you can and you get no thanks. Run yourself down and your employer is not pleased."

On Friday, 9 January, I packed up. What a change it was not to have to be at the office at seven, and to have breakfast! I remembered that I had left some photographs at the office, and motored through deserted streets to pick them up. "Good-bye, office," I thought. The playing ground in front of the huge building was still littered with furniture and tree stumps to prevent plane landings. They are doubtless ashes in Asiatic cooking grates by now. The huge clock tower had been partly painted grey, and the contrasting white was mute testimony to treacherous surprise.

I sped past the graceful spires and curving minarets in the centre of the town. Beauty seems ever doomed to destruction. The lounge of the Dog still gaped dismally. I stopped my car and walked into the club buildings. Debris was littered over the once polished dance floor. The circular bar was bare of gleaming bottles and the surface was stained, not with spirits and wines, but the dreary droppings of the monsoonal rain through the shattered roof. Even as I looked, a loosened tile slipped and clattered hollowly on to the floor. Echoes surged ghost-like about me, and I shuddered as if with fear. Then I saw a rat. Its loathsome body was pressed on a rafter and beady eyes watched me, unafraid. I hurried out to the sunlight. Bomb craters in the padang remained unfilled and the silent clock had died at eight minutes to eleven on that day so long ago.

A funereal hush pervaded the once busy town. The streets were empty. On a dozen large bridges, demolition squads waited in readiness for the final order. Smoke, never seen in times of peace, surged from many buildings.

Then commenced in Kuala Lumpur the last final orgy of destruction, and the incessant detonations of dynamite followed me as I left the town. The main buildings were fired and all bridges blown up. The commodious Station Hotel was dynamited over the railway lines, and brought the Majestic Hotel down with it.

Where were the Japanese? At any moment they might burst from the rubber. I was warned that they might have infiltrated past to the main road. "Look out for ambush," I was told, but I felt strangely indifferent.

As I wended my way south, black fingers of smoke pointed skywards. I looked for Japanese bombers, saw wrecked transport by the road and watched my petrol gauge. As road travel in the centre of Malaya was confined to a visible stretch of bitumen, a strip of sky, and on each side, walls of rubber-trees or jungle, bombers could catch cars at will.

Tiffin was obtained at the Seremban guest house. I saw members of the M.C.S. from Kuala Lumpur on their way south. A timely alert scattered the Chinese staff and I helped myself to beer, plenty of it. Cool, heavy rain further depressed me and I decided to travel via Port Dickson to Malacca, then Singapore.

I passed strings of natives carrying rice and kerosene. All the Asiatics were fleeing into the hills. Heat and humidity smote again, and I felt done on reaching the coast. Little food or sleep, and continual movement—would there be no end to it?

I rested at a spot with a glorious panorama of the Strait of Malacca. Delicately curving bays were looped with strips of silver sand. Coco-nut palms nodded to the shimmering, pearly sea. Here was peace. This very spot has been described by Bruce Lockhart in his book *Return to Malaya.*

Not a breath stirred. I could sleep here for a whole week. From my vantage spot on a small headland, miles of coastline could be seen. Bungalows with private beaches could be glimpsed just off the shore, and the white waxen petals of the frangipane stood out against the wanton splash of the vivid bougainvillaea. But every bungalow was closed. The vacuum of war had sucked all life away. If only the Japanese would stop. Hark! What was that? Only the whining gears of a lorry.

On I went to Si Rusa Inn, nestling by the sea. The glass entrance of the inn was locked, but a boy appeared inside. He looked scared and would not open the door to give me water to drink. Doubtless he thought the Japanese were pouring along the road behind me. I thought of a delightful holiday spent here a year ago. The sea looked cool, inviting. As there were native women about, I waded in fully clothed and flopped around like a tired jellyfish. The water was warm and gave me a flaring headache.

Then a tropical thunderstorm beat round me as I continued my journey south. Thunder and lightning boomed and flashed while the rain streamed down in a pelting steaming wall. Visibility was reduced to twenty yards. The noise was like hundreds of bombers let loose. I was soaked to the skin and shivered as if with an ague. Suddenly the clouds lifted and the swishing of the tyres sounded unnaturally loud.

Malacca came into view most unexpectedly from about two miles up the coast. The scene was a tonic (even to a blimpish government official) and I drank in that vista of loveliness. No pen can do justice to the breath-taking beauty of Malacca, and I was entranced with the pervading atmosphere of peace. The sea, iridescent and calm, gleamed at the rising moon. The pearly opalescence of the sky was gradually transformed to rose-pink by the rays of the dipping sun, and between sea and sky, the ancient roofs of Malacca were sharply lined. Native craft dotted the sea, their sails the hue of amber.

As the sun kissed the now golden sea, I glided to a stop at the commodious guest house and was lucky to get a room.

Food, satisfying food!

After dinner, friends took me to the taxi-dance hall. They craved lights, movement, distraction from the gloom of the black-out.

I saw a lone figure sitting at a table, and hastened over. It was Bill Dunne, one of my best friends, whom I had not seen since the beginning of December. He was in the armoured car section of the Volunteers.

We talked of many things. I told him how I had often motored past his deserted home in Kuala Lumpur—home where I had been entertained so often; where we had laughed and chatted. I recalled their timid captive mouse-deer, their eager planning over the garden, our talks of far-away New Zealand, my photos of a happy family group and their baby girl.

"I sent Lorna away right at the beginning," he said.

I could visualize the swift journey to Singapore; the all-too-brief good-bye; his wife's five thousand mile air journey. Perhaps even now she was listening to the radio proclaiming the loss of Kuala Lumpur, with all their treasures and savings. In my heart I applauded his swift decision in insisting on his wife's going to New Zealand. She had wanted to stay.

"Can we stop the Japs?" I asked.

"Nobody seems to know. We keep on falling back. A few days ago my unit was guarding the beach at Kuala Selangor, and was relieved just before the Japanese attempted a landing. They loop around us on the coast all the time and force us to retreat."

He was fit but very tired. Reluctantly we said good-bye. A few days later his car was ambushed, and he was officially posted missing.

CHAPTER XIX

FLIGHT TO SINGAPORE

(10 January 1942)

NEXT morning, I gazed in rapture at two large beautiful unwinking fried eggs. And was this bacon? Hot toast! Coffee! I scrunched, swilled, and swallowed with epicurean delight.

Europeans seemed amused at my mud-spattered car. One informed me, "War will never come to Malacca."

At the outbreak of war I had ordered my Indian car cleaner to plaster the gleaming body with mud. He was a scoundrel, that Indian, because the polish and cleaning rags always gave out at the end of the month, but he had a soul. To ensure that he understood the sacrilege he went through the defiling motions in incredulous pantomime; but I was adamant and a camouflage was applied which even a water-buffalo would envy. Torrents from thunderstorms had little effect. Cars here in Malacca reflected the sun for miles.

A first essential was petrol and I was granted coupons for four gallons, just sufficient to take me to Singapore. I looked in on the war taxation office and the local collector asked, "Do you think they will come here?"

"Work it out," I said; "fifteen miles a day gives you about a week."

"Surely not." He looked aghast.

"Believe me, the Japanese are fighting fanatically."

"But," he protested, "I heard that four hundred Hurricanes were seen coming down the Strait this morning from India."

"Humph! I heard that Japan would not fight. I also heard that if she had the effrontery to attack she would wait until the end of the monsoon, in February. I also heard that five hundred thousand Chinese guerrillas have landed at Singapore."

But arguments on the war bored me. I strolled up to the old ruined church of Saint Paul to spent a quiet hour. I was greedy to absorb still more of the peace of Malacca.

Four hundred years ago there lived and preached one Francis Xavier, whose work and example in the Far East were such that he has been made a saint. A stone inside these roofless walls marked his former grave. The upper part of the ancient church had collapsed through the centuries, but the massive construction testified to the then strength and endurance of the pioneer Portuguese. Here was the remnant of a militant church, and this soil, the first to be consecrated in Malaya, should remain for ever Christian.

The Portuguese conquered an army of thirty thousand Malays. Then they built truly and well and showed the way to the Dutch who in turn gave way to the British. Over the centuries, Malacca has had a turbulent eventful history. It was a mighty port long before its life was sucked by Singapore. War, romance, intrigue have held alternate sway, and the story of Malacca would show human nature in all its vagaries. Can you not see the colourful Malays, the Portuguese armed with sword and chain mail, the tiny five-foot guns belching smoke and terrible iron balls, the elephants used in battle, those massive stone forts which look so like guardhouses to-day? You should read the story of Alphonso Albuquerque, the great Portuguese viceroy. Christian fanaticism vied with commercial cupidity, and Malacca was then at the zenith of its fame and power, while Singapore and Penang were nothing more than sleepy fishing villages. The Dutch refer to Malaya as Molucca to this very day.

But there was a restless urge in me to keep moving. Why

should I have found such beauty at this late hour of Malaya's impending tragedy? It seemed wrong that by chance a stray New Zealander should stumble on such a sleeping paradise. All around me at that moment life moved lazily. But war was even then coiling to strike at this loveliness with all the venom of a hamadryad. Regretfully I walked down the steps graced by Saint Francis himself—ahead was British Singapore, girding her loins for a struggle for life or death.

Shortly after I left the town the sirens sounded. Bombers made their first visit to spread death and destruction, and I was told later that in the space of a few hours Malacca was machine-gunned, fired and looted. Whisky was poured into the Malacca River and the smell pervaded the whole neighbourhood. Once again the economic structure of Malaya had crumbled at a touch. Whose fault was it? The fate of a mighty empire was in the balance, and that of Asia's sleeping millions. Were we unimaginative and parochial in our outlook? Was it true that since the days of our last great administrators, Malaya had lapsed into smugness and complacency?

I motored on and there along the road in all its gorgeous panoply, undulated a Malay wedding. The beautifully dressed Malays were graced in golden raiment, as were their ancestors over the centuries. The groom was garbed in robes which made him look like a prince of ancient times. Doubtless he was a member of a royal family, for his headgear was in the nature of a crown. He was attended by all his relations and the easy carriage of the women attracted the eye. Gone was the shy demure glance of the everyday Malay. A spirit of festivity animated their faces and lively coquettish eyes gleamed in my direction. Stopping, I asked when the wedding was to take place, was told "sometime to-morrow", and was invited to attend the feast. But I would have fallen asleep even in the arms of all these houris, and so I concentrated on keeping the car in the

centre of the road. Many times that scene has come back to me.

Crossing the ferries at Muar and Batu Pahat, I left this peaceful coast road then joined up with the traffic on the main highway.

But I was rudely shocked. With a growling roar Japanese planes sped by overhead and machine-gunned a train a short distance away. Three carriages were splintered, and casualties were high. There was nothing to do but speed on for Singapore and the devil take the hindmost. I passed wrecked motor transport, empty cars, mute evidence of the continuous retreat rolling back down the peninsula.

And there, silent but loquacious, lay a steam roller in a small hollow. It had a Selangor registration number—a district two hundred miles away—but the Tamil driver was nowhere to be seen.

I must tell two stories of steam rollers—they are among the minor epics of the war. Steam road rollers were much used in airfield construction work and it was important that as each flying field was lost, the rollers be sent to the next scene of operations. We lost several dozens of dromes in quick succession, and it is amusing in retrospect to visualize the black-skinned Tamil drivers being bombed and machine-gunned at work, then driving south at a top speed of some three miles an hour. Wood fuel had to be gathered as they went, and one by one, on the few roads leading south, the rollers dropped out. But one roller, and one only, made a triumphant entry into Singapore after a retreat of over five hundred miles. It had started from Alor Star and the driver surely deserves the Tamil Cross of Valour, if there is such a one. Captain Owen, a friend of mine, met the driver at Kluang and the Tamil asked him a question. "Tuan," he said, "I am very hungry. Please give me money for makkan." But Owen told me that the faithful old scoundrel was trying to conceal some cheroots on which he had squandered his money.

Another roller was pounding its interminable way south and came to a slope which was too much for its tired gears. The roller started to run backwards and just then the car of the Governor, Sir Shenton Thomas, stopped behind it at the bottom of the slope. His Excellency was on his way back from Kuala Lumpur. The Tamil, however, was equal to the occasion, stuck to his post, and was just able to divert the mass of metal into a hollow off the road away from the car. So impressed was Sir Shenton, that in a broadcast he referred to the Tamil's loyalty and devotion to duty. And there lay the roller on its side, like a stricken elephant, and not all the king's horses nor all the king's men could stop to put him on his feet again!

I ran into a sumatra. These rain storms are unbelievably heavy, visibility being little more than twenty yards. Cars now filled the road in an almost unbroken line. Mine became flooded with water. I had to change into low gear so as to keep going, and felt that Singapore was hundreds of miles away. A watery world surrounded me. Military lorries roared past, going north with the storm, then once again the sun peeped forth.

Johore Bharu appeared. The road swung left in a loop to the causeway. I had meant to have a good look at the road crossing over the Strait to Singapore island, but tiredness was settling in my weary brain, so I motored scross. On the far side I was stopped by a Malay policeman and given a slip of paper reading, "If you have friends, go to them. If not, call at the office of the Billeting Committee."

It took me half an hour to reach the city, where I met acquaintances. Every house, they told me, was crowded to capacity. Never had Singapore been so full. Then I called on Stephanie and her people, and I slept in her bed that night. You see, she was on night duty at one of the hospitals, and early the next morning an astounded girl looked in on my dreams.

CHAPTER XX

THE SPIRIT OF SINGAPORE

(11-17 January 1942)

FEELING refreshed after a good night's sleep, I went down to breakfast. Words buzzed. Food disappeared.

My friends said, "You won't find any accommodation in the whole of Singapore. Stay with us."

"Thanks, but I'll get into a guest house somewhere."

"Where are the Japanese?"

"Entering Kuala Lumpur by now. They landed a little up the west coast some days ago, bombed hell out of Port Swettenham and Klang, were streaming along the main roads, and pushing past Kuala Lumpur down the mountain valleys."

"Any news of the Volunteers?"

"Some are in Malacca. I hear that others are in Johore. But I really don't know."

My mind was unsettled. I had a lot to do. Finding accommodation was not easy, and I walked into any and every house round about for several hours.

"I have my own mattress, mosquito netting and blanket," I said hopefully.

"Very sorry. Even our verandas are occupied."

But the Lodge in Lloyd Road took me in. Wilson, the proprietor, said, "I have room for about thirty and am putting up one hundred and thirty-seven." The house was immense, an old Chinese mansion. I left my few belongings and sped towards the centre of the city.

Singapore always roused antagonism in me, gave me a sense of being challenged. Life here seemed so quick, so fleeting, that you could not grasp it, and the mass of the city seemed spread out in an ugly, uncaring fashion. You had always to gird your loins in Singapore—be weak and be crushed; fight and be exhausted. The pulse-beat of Asia throbbed too strongly for many, but the city offered much to those who gave. There was one course only, the golden mean, and the dividends were rich and varied.

The feeling of being in Singapore after a month of war in the F.M.S. was a peculiar one. Safe haven—or death trap? Its impregnability had been thundered to the world for years by politicians and military and naval authorities; yet we civilians, living in a perpetual atmosphere of "hush hush", had only occasionally seen a few planes, or heard the distant booming of gun-fire.

This city, where I now moved so freely, was the calm vortex of a cyclone that was whipping up to a frenzied climax. Refugees had been pouring into Singapore for weeks. A million people now lived in this much-vaunted island fortress.

Having observed the disintegration of Kuala Lumpur, I wanted to feel the spirit of Singapore. The hammer-blows on morale of ever-continuing retreat and demolition still stunned my mind. Up in Kuala Lumpur one felt that one's defenceless back was turned to the enemy. There were no fortifications. Here it was different. Singapore was a mighty ring of steel. Now was the time to gather strength, to organize and co-ordinate offensive and defensive forces, to clear the island of the unwanteds—women, certain Asiatics and all civilians past military age. This was the testing hour when the defence of Singapore marked one of the crucial moments in the history of the world.

From River Valley Road I turned into High Street, then down to the Victoria Memorial Hall, situated in the very

heart of the city. First of all, I wanted to register under the government scheme whereby all residents in Singapore had to carry identity cards. Portion of the Memorial Hall was also to be my office, since it was the home of the war taxation office.

But to my astonishment the streets were empty and the statue of Sir Stamford Raffles stood aloof and alone in front of the locked entrance to the hall. I stared. Of course, it was Sunday but—the Japanese were progressing southwards twenty-four hours every day.

The city was dead. The imposing façade of the supreme court building over the way was deserted, the wide stretches of road were empty and my footsteps echoed widely as I walked to the rear entrance of the Memorial Hall. Above me towered the clock spire under which I was to work and the yellow crumbling stonework seemed poor protection from bomb blast. A flash of white caught my eye. A Sikh jaga had saluted smartly.

"Office shut to-day?"

"Yes, tuan."

"There are some bags here belonging to me." I explained who I was and, lo and behold, there was the luggage I had railed from Kuala Lumpur and thought I had lost.

"Dhobi?"

The office dhobi, I was told, would be in on Monday. If it pleased the tuan, I could leave my soiled linen and have it returned on Wednesday. I was delighted. Cleanliness in the tropics must be sought above godliness.

I then looked around the vast office cluttered with hundreds of thousands of unissued identity cards. Tucked away on a veranda I discovered the war taxation records railed from the Federated Malay States. So they had not been machine-gunned on that train! There were some thirty thousand files. And now what? I eyed those files dubiously—government instructions would be issued on the

morrow—and I departed for the post office and Observer Corps headquarters.

Again I walked past the statue of Raffles, on the spot where tradition says he first landed. At its feet were two slit trenches. I looked up at two hundred feet of old masonry immediately above and shuddered; but on one hectic occasion later I was to be forced to take shelter in those trenches.

The sun was well up in the heavens now and I was sticky with sweat from unpacking and packing bags. The offices of the Colonial Secretary were on my right. Immensely old, they typified the colonial spirit, and I thought of the tax committee meetings I had attended there and how a few fighter planes had flown overhead, their whistling drone vying with the noise of passing traffic. I walked over the massive Anderson bridge. Some hundreds of native craft were packed in the dirty canal. The bombed windows of Whiteaway's store caught my eye. There was no glass—blast had shattered those windows on 8 December.

The gigantic mass of the Fullerton Building, housing the post office, was shut. I saw a sign with a pointing hand "Evacuee Post Office", and smiled. The people of Kuala Lumpur would now be added to that growing list of evacuees and I wondered where my past month's letters were. I found a vacant lift. It worked. Observer Corps headquarters were on the fourth floor, and up I went. More deserted corridors, empty offices. Then I heard a voice, entered a room—my luck was in. It was Clark-Walker, organizer of the Observer Corps, and his assistant, seemingly at the moment the only occupants of the vast building.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Full-time military duties and, failing that, Observer Corps work." I explained that I was under contract to the government.

"Will the government release you?"

"I will know to-morrow, I hope."

"Good. We want observers for outside work in Johore. Radio-location."

Clark-Walker was humorous, competent, likeable. His job, hard enough now, was to become increasingly difficult. I found my way down and out to the street.

So far Singapore had had little to worry about. Several bombing raids, that was all. Here too, as at Malacca, war seemed to belong to another world. From the bridge over the canal I gazed at the dormant city. Two visions of loveliness crossed the bridge in a car. They glanced my way and, seeing a sunburned hatless figure in khaki shirt and shorts, looked right through me. I walked towards the harbour, where dozens of ships lay on a glassy sea, and saw a lone fisherman sculling his way towards the canal. Suddenly, in the mounting heat, I was conscious of an immense weariness and felt grateful for that Sunday of rest. I decided to settle into the guest house and to enjoy a curry tiffin and an afternoon siesta.

I found that my room on the top bachelor story of the old Chinese mansion was shared by Guy Hutton of the Harbour Board, and Mackenzie, a lean, bronzed New Zealander from Hongkong. On the same floor were Horry and Horricks, two sagacious optimists and great trenchers; the accountant of United Engineers; two tin miners from Perak; and Charlie Wilson, the owner of the Lodge. I was most comfortable and I had a good supply of tinned goods; but I should have been more comfortable still if a 20,000-ton liner had been standing by with ample destroyer and plane escort.

"Where are the blasted Japs?"

"Who's worrying about the Japs?"

"To hell with the Japs."

Our conversation was pungent, pithy and vile, but eminently suited to the dominant topic. Racy anecdotes kept us from thinking too much.

We always clustered round the radio. The calm vibrant notes of Big Ben would boom at six-thirty, Singapore time, and our silence would catch us off guard. Surely, with half of Malaya engulfed by the Japanese, mighty reinforcements must be threading their way towards us across the oceans. A calm, reassuring voice thousands of miles away would announce that Singapore would be held. But we were told nothing of the control of the seas, or of what America was doing, and nothing about planes. We felt that a few hundred fighters would sweep the Japs out of the sky.

Bombing, we argued, was a damn nuisance. It is difficult to say what we really expected to hear during the week up to 17 January. Opinion in Singapore was still optimistic and fluid. The hardening period came much later. Perhaps we hoped to hear of impossible things—that the Japanese had lost their way, and, like the Gadarene swine, had rushed into the sea and drowned themselves; that, finding too much activity rather heating, the enemy forces had succumbed to the lure of Malaya; that Tokyo was in flames; that the Russians had launched an eastern offensive; or that the Japanese Empire was engulfed by an earthquake.

In our helplessness and shallow thinking, imagination soared.

On the mainland, on that Sunday, 11 January, we lost the battle of Slim River, and the Japanese went on to sweep through Kuala Lumpur and the state of Selangor. Kuala Lumpur was not defended. Our withdrawal continued from the state of Pahang and it appeared that our line would now run from Endau, which was 75 miles north of Singapore on the east coast, to Malacca, 125 miles up the west coast. In 33 days of war the Japanese had advanced about 300 miles.

Stephanie and I talked that evening.

"So you have not taken my advice," I said.

"What advice?"

"About leaving Singapore. There was nothing to stop you."

"Do you think Singapore will fall?"

"Nobody knows," I said evasively, "but you do not have to stay. Thousands of bombs will be dropped."

"My brother is in the Volunteers. I love him very dearly."

"That is not the point. He will worry like hell if he knows that you will not go."

"We may go to Java."

"And go through all this again?"

I was angry. These women. Brave yet foolish. Affectionate folly. Was their personal safety to rest entirely in their own hands? There was no compulsory evacuation. I shuddered to think of the fate of women who might be living on the outskirts of the town, out of touch, possibly with no telephone. I heard of some—later.

On Monday morning Singapore awoke to business as usual. Thousands of cars, lorries and buses sped through the streets and the scene was the customary mixture of flowing activity and Oriental passivity. The day before, the streets had stretched hot and empty. This morning the contrast was amazing. It seemed that the million inhabitants of Singapore were swarming into the city. The natives were so numerous as to be in a procession on each side of the streets, and four lines of traffic streamed past under the staggered control of the green and red lights. Speed laws seemed ignored. Carts drawn by oxen, rickshas, thousands of bicycles, buses and innumerable cars, all wended their way along.

It was the Singapore that I had known, but with a difference. Never had the city been so swollen with people, never had military transport so filled the roads, never had business been so brisk, never had there been so dramatic a stage, and never was the price of beer so high.

The problem of getting to the office was no joke. Knowing that I was not allowed any petrol I had to leave my car behind and walked the short distance to connect with the bus route along Orchard Road. For some time past there had been considerable publicity to persuade car owners to give lifts to troops and pedestrians, so I tested the system. All manner of cars rolled by. Gleaming glass cases bearing lords of commerce (mostly Chinese), and humble baby cars (mostly European) streamed past, the average occupants being the usual syce and one passenger. When some hundreds of cars had gone by, the unexpected happened. An owner-driver, a European, picked me up and four Chinese clerks as well. Nobody said anything except about the weather. And soon I entered the office, which was thronged with hundreds of Asiatics, registering for identity cards.

Interviewed by the Collector-General, I expressed a wish to take up full-time military duties and was permitted to make the necessary inquiries. The department, however, would continue its work with at least two Europeans and a few Asiatics.

Fact and rumour overlapped so much at this stage that it was impossible to form a clear opinion on what was happening anywhere. Excitement and suspense crowded every hour, and nobody knew what the morrow would bring. This uncertainty was to grow progressively greater during the month that I was in Singapore and I resolved to keep calm. Above all, to remain cool when and if an emergency arose. Only then, I thought, could I make clear decisions for which there would be no regrets.

The office saw little of me for the next few days. Nobody knew whom I should approach about military duties, and, as always in Malaya, I was thrown entirely on my own resources.

I did my best to get in touch with a New Zealand

military unit. I phoned the officers' mess at Kalang aerodrome.

"Could I speak to a New Zealander, please."

"You are speaking to one now. Levien is the name—Pilot-officer."

We exchanged greetings and I explained myself.

"I am unable to advise about a New Zealand unit. Why not try for the R.A.F.?"

Air headquarters were out at Sime Road on the way to Bukit Timah. Heavy rain squalls were sweeping the island and I set out to get truly wet in my leaking car amongst the swarming traffic. My objective was situated in a clump of trees in the middle of a golf course, and wonderfully well camouflaged.

At an interview with the senior personnel staff officer, I was told, "Send in a written application, please."

No sooner were the words spoken than we heard the "whoosh" of a falling bomb. It did not seem credible. There had been no alert—doubtless the weather precluded that. The noise rose to a flat whistle. The bomb exploded with a dull "crump" quite close. The door of the office was blown in, we found ourselves flat on our backs, and earth was showered on to the attap roof. I had to wait for an hour for the all-clear.

I was just getting into my car when an alert sounded. Heavy rain was still streaming down and visibility was even less than fifty yards. An officer ordered "Everybody into the slit trenches", so in we got. Down we cowered in the rain. I listened to the heavy "grrr" of the laden bombers overhead. They sounded directly above and yet the grinding noise came closer and closer. The rain soaked incessantly into us. A woman secretary, pretty, blonde and efficient, was crouching next to me with several clerks. As a distraction from the bombers feeling around for us, I related an encounter that I had with an Indian holy man on the previous day.

"He said I had good health, would die at the age of seventy-five years, that internal happiness was mine and that a bald headed man would unconsciously save my life. If a number appeared on my right arm I would win that amount in a lottery. Lo, the figure 7444 showed on the palm of my right hand. He then said that if it appeared again I was doubly lucky, and the figure was seen on the inside of my right elbow. I swear he did not touch me. He then wrote a number on a piece of paper, also the name of a flower, and he said that I was born lucky if I gave the number and named the flower. So I said 'number seven, and rose'. Behold, the paper contained just that. He asked me to write down the year of my birth, the first letter only of the month in which I was born, also the initial of the Christian name of someone who was fond of me. It was impossible for him to see the paper and in any case the information was incomplete, but he told me everything, also that 'J' stood for January. He then gave me, for ten dollars, a cat's eye, a nut, a lucky coin, and a satisfied smile. I am positive he did not hypnotize me. I watched the clock because my time was limited."

But my story was capped by one from the girl next to me.

"When I first came to Malaya," she said, "I had a session with a fortune teller too, and he told me that I was going to have a baby exactly a year later." She laughed. "I had one, on the very day. Was I astounded? It took me a long time to get over that."

We found that it was not easy to crouch on our heels in a wet greasy trench and laugh at the same time. It caught me in the muscles at the back of my thighs. Water was trickling into my shoes. The bombers seemed to be flying around in circles and I did not see how they could miss us. Suddenly there was an ear-shattering crash about half a mile away as if several hundred bombs had exploded

at once. The dull muffled "crump" suggested that they had fallen on soft earth, as in fact they had.

"Not a bad attempt," said an officer dryly.

Early that evening, I filled in my application for service in the R.A.F. and posted it. This was supported by the Collector-General and Deputy Collector-General of my department. Then, with my fourth cup of tea, I listened in to the radio.

"The British troops have reformed at Seremban, which is forty miles south of Kuala Lumpur."

My new-found friends talked about the war. "The Japanese will soon be so tired that all we will need to do is walk over and nurse them back to health," said a tin miner.

"One thousand crated Hurricanes have arrived," said someone. "Takes eighteen hours to assemble one, and four hours to fly it in. Flat out, we can put four a day into the air. They will bring down four Japs each a day——"

Somebody interrupted. "If a bomb and a half kills a Japanese and a half in a day and a half, how long will it take a hundred and twenty million Americans to clean up a hundred million Japanese?"

So we joked and laughed.

The next morning was 13 January, and at a quarter to eight Wailing Winnie quickened a million heart-beats. I rushed to the kitchen and stopped a scared Chinese coming out.

"Breakfast?"

He rolled his eyes skywards and I laughed. "Eggs and bacon—quickly," said I, and jingled some coins, which worked the oracle. The table boy was not frightened and brought coffee and toast. Butter was being rationed at four ounces a week, but mine literally vanished when I looked at it. Later I suspected a racket on butter by the Chinese boys.

So far I had seen little of the guests on the other floors. There were a number of families and married women waiting for boats, as well as military officers and business people. The house was huge. Masses of masonry bulged everywhere. Outside were two slit trenches, one for the guests and the other for Asiatic staff. I never ceased to be amazed at the multitudes of Chinese children who scuttled out from the servants' quarters when an alert sounded. A stream of Chinese disappeared into a trench which I would swear could hold no more than one quarter of the number. I preferred the cubby-hole at the foot of the stairs. It was full of lime dust and a sneeze covered you with fine white powder, so you just didn't sneeze. The air soon became suffocating, but was not so bad as that in the covered trench. Being packed in an earthen trench did not appeal to me. A foot of loose earth might stop a falling beer bottle but never a bomb.

In my opinion, a house was the best cover against the anti-personnel type of bomb in use. Any building which had had a direct hit gave one a lot of information. At first sight, there was a terrific mess which surely would have spelt the doom of any one sheltering there, but a close scrutiny showed all sorts of things—that a fragile vase was still sitting on a lightly built stand in a corner, that chairs in certain positions were untouched, and not moved by blast, that perhaps twenty people could have been in certain positions and be unharmed. I estimated that in any *chosen* part of a building one stood twice as good a chance as in a trench.

In the type of trench generally used in Singapore, a direct hit was fatal. At the same time, trenches saved many lives. The best protection of the lot, in my opinion, was a reinforced timber framework in an interior passage, or failing that, a sturdy table on the ground floor of a building. Morale tended to be upset by herding in a sealed trench and the hot air was exhausting.

Having had breakfast in solitary state, I left the house and walked warily along to Orchard Road. The alert was still on and I looked for funk holes. The road drains of Singapore were over four feet deep and made of thick concrete. Every few yards there was a bridge. Eyes gleamed from under each one. It was obvious that the communal life of the Asiatic had extended itself to bridge ownership, and woe betide any one who tried to monopolize the wrong one. In open ground, I saw dozens of rabbit warrens, and here again the ground was alive mostly with Chinese. The lack of proper cover was pitiable.

I saw white puffs about ten miles away in the direction of Kalang, but the sharp crack of anti-aircraft fire could not be heard. Then I saw the bombers. Twenty-seven were flying at about fourteen thousand feet in arrow formation in groups of three. The sun flashed brightly on the metal bodies. A steady drone came to my ears. My immediate concern was the direction of the planes which, however, seemed to be headed in a long curve towards the batteries at Changi, east of where I stood.

Blue sky, by the way, made one feel fairly safe in those early days; but later on odd bombers very high up could not be seen, which was most disconcerting, believe me.

A.A. was getting closer but the bombers flew imperturbably on and curved away in perfect formation. They looked like silver-blue moths. While I gazed, several hundreds of bombs must have been falling, but I did not see a thing. A growling, increasing crescendo of sound swept over Singapore. A "carpet" had been dropped somewhere. Gradually the engine drone died away.

Where were our planes? Asiatics emerged from everywhere about me and pointed excitedly at the vanishing bombers. They chattered like children, then Oriental passivity again cloaked their faces and they looked as old and wise as time itself.

It was nine-thirty when I arrived at the office, but at

another alert, everybody ran outside. The Memorial Hall where we worked had been condemned some years before, and the huge structure might tumble on our heads with small provocation. This time I crossed the street and took shelter in the magnificent supreme court building, descending to the prison cells to sit behind iron grilles with bewigged justices and barristers. Above were four floors of reinforced concrete. Everybody was tense, expectant. It dawned on me that those of us from the mainland had had our baptism of fire and were getting our second wind, so to speak, while this was the real beginning of the blitz on Singapore.

The comradeship of the air-raid shelters was to offer many interesting conversations and mix people as never before—something new to Singapore.

That day there were three raids by 125 enemy planes. They came over in lots of 70, 20, and 35. Our fighters apparently engaged them out at sea, since we in the city saw nothing. I never saw a dog-fight over Singapore. Six Japs were destroyed that day by our planes with four probables.

I found, when sheltering in a large building, that the bombs invariably sounded as if they exploded just outside. Air seemed to puff in and out, though they might have dropped a mile away.

I was told that a Royal New Zealand Air Force constructional unit was operating somewhere in Malaya and I tried many times to get in touch, so as to join up. During alerts nobody was allowed to phone. I wrote to an address given by air headquarters.

It was compulsory to wear metal identification disks. Round ones for Buddhists, oval ones for Christians, square ones for Moslems and so on. One day in a restaurant I saw a Chinese with a gold disk held on his wrist by a thin gold chain. This was at variance with my conception of the

Chinese character, as such a disk would probably be looted. Undoubtedly, the gold one was merely an ornament. Again, I saw a beautiful Chinese girl dressed in an expensive neck-to-ankle frock split to the knee, with a similar gold disk and chain around the ankle. These Chinese were Christians.

It was 14 January and half a dozen Buffaloes were snoring around at a thousand feet. Shortly afterwards the alert sounded. This time we were raided by 50 bombers escorted by 20 fighters. One was shot down by ack-ack—three probables.

I inquired at Australian military headquarters, at the Royal Army Service Corps, the Movement Control Office and the Naval Control Office.

"What military training have you had?"

"None."

The answers I received were: "You would have to go to Australia to enlist. . . . We have no power to take you on. . . . You could probably join up in India." At Naval headquarters they said, "We could give you a land job only, but personnel is drawn from England, and we cannot offer you anything."

I also waited impatiently for my replies from air headquarters and the R.N.Z.A.F. constructional unit.

People I knew quite well were becoming pilot-officers (ground) in the R.A.F. They ranged from rubber planters to members of the Legislative Council.

My departmental head was still away on duties with the Local Defence Corps, which was about to be disbanded. As there was nothing in writing regarding release from government duties I asked for a chit. Perhaps, reasoned I, a letter would help to establish the fact to the military that my official services were not required. But the deputy in control would not give me a letter, and said that the government might still require my services. What a merry-go-round! As a government servant I had been told that I

was not required to register at the manpower bureau, but I thought I had better make sure.

"So you are Public Relations Officer for the War Taxation Department of the F.M.S. Government?"

"Yes, sir, but the F.M.S. territory is for the moment in enemy hands."

"Quite so, but you are still in government employ?"

"Meantime, yes."

"Very well, I will hold your papers. You are not required to register."

Many and varied were the criticisms poured into my ears regarding the transfer of the F.M.S. War Taxation Department to Singapore.

"The records should have been burned. . . . Pity they were not bombed. . . . How did you get them away when valuable stocks of food had to be destroyed?" . . . and so on.

I endured all this in good part and put up the following: "Suppose we stem the tide and throw the Japs back? All government departments will be required to bring order out of chaos. Where would we be without our records?"

An advertisement of our existence was put in the paper and this so incensed the editorial staff of the leading European newspaper that a leader column was headed:

INSULT TO INJURY

The following advertisement is of interest: "The Federated Malay States War Taxation Department is now operating at the Victoria Memorial Hall, Singapore."

Just that—but the heading set tongues wagging.

There is no doubt whatever that the government correctly took the long view, and I leave you to draw your own conclusions on the outburst. As so often happens in Malaya, nobody bothered to ask the erstwhile Public Relations Officer whether there was any specific reason for opening the office. Of course there was. Employers were holding at

least $500,000 due to the government, being tax deducted from employees' salaries for October, November and December, and we had to collect. Refunds were also due to individuals. There was always a double answer in Malaya, and the second one was always right.

The head of my department then appeared in the uniform of a pilot-officer in the R.A.F. and I saw him twice only in the following weeks.

On that day, which was 15 January, the following cable appeared in the *Straits Times*:

> The *Daily Express* publishes a verbatim report of a dispatch to *Life* by the Columbia Broadcasting System correspondent with the caption "The City of Blimps"—Singapore apathetic and unprepared—by the man they banned—exalts bravery of British and Indian troops and acquits Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham for the weakness of our defences.

It was reported on reliable authority that British prisoners in Malaya were being forced to repair bridges by Japanese armed with tommy-guns.

Singapore was now being raided every day. The Japanese claimed to be sixty-two miles south of Kuala Lumpur and to have entered Johore. We were preparing a defence line to hold Malacca.

British and Australian guerrilla troops were now in action behind the enemy lines, as well as Indian troops consisting of Moslems, Gurkhas and Dogras. A nineteen-year-old Sydney lad and three Malayan rubber planters ambushed a Japanese staff car flying a pennant and killed a major-general.

A leaflet dropped by the Japanese read: "Australian soldiers—Thousands of your countrymen have been slaughtered on the Perak front. The British will leave you to fight to the last while transports assemble to take them off."

It turned out that some correspondents had cabled to England utter nonsense, such as:

British troops encased in mosquito nets and fighting a green hell of fever in infested swamps which stink like a week-old dustbin, and covered with khaki-brown water whence numerous crocodiles poke out their scaly noses and enormous crabs scuttle in the mud in the perpetual gloom of the mangroves.

That first week in Singapore gave me a series of swift impressions only. The Japanese were launching a series of hammer-blows shrewdly designed to give no respite. I had the peculiar feeling that Singapore was a city of individuals without cohesion. I suppose that my then freedom of movement was really a handicap to me. Nobody spoke his real thoughts and every conversation lacked substance. When I spoke to military officers I gathered that there was an offhand feeling as regards Malaya and Malayans generally, and a determination to get a nasty job finished. European civilians were complaining about shelters, the servant problem and petrol. Others were worrying about property. The poor Asiatic said nothing. All this made me most impatient. The constructive possibilities seemed illimitable. All around one were courage and ineptitude, fortitude and indifference, frenzied haste and calm fatalism, unparalleled optimism and silent officialdom. The spirit of Singapore was steeling itself to pain with insensitive bravado. The man in the street was bewildered. Where were our planes? Who had control of our seas? Time was the precious factor which, properly used, might yet save Singapore.

On 17 January the main body of Australians came into action at last, and the world waited.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BLITZ

(18-25 January 1942)

On 18 January the naval base was raided and a reservoir of oil fuel fired. Our interest and wonder in the pyrotechnic display during the raid was quickly forgotten as that column of smoke mounted and spread to cover half the heavens, for the black finger of doom was smudged across the blue Malayan sky.

My knowledge of the Malayan campaign and government policy was simply that of the man in the street. I read the daily newspapers, listened to the M.B.C. and the B.B.C. and gossiped as people do the world over. Cinemas still showed animated cartoons and glamour girls, shops were doing business as usual (for cash); and one could order a dinner-jacket if one liked. Life had a quickened tempo, but the city seemed strangely indifferent to the storm that was so swiftly gathering. The position on 18 January over the whole of Malaya appeared to be as follows:

The Asiatics had largely stayed put as the Japanese rolled down the peninsula. The resident Europeans of the country, apart from those mobilized, were now centred in Singapore. Most of the Europeans, being rubber planters or tin miners, were therefore now unemployed. Not only had their employment vanished, but the entire assets of the companies which employed them. A number of these men had been automatically mobilized into the Volunteers from the outbreak of hostilities, and others had taken up duties in Singapore with the auxiliary fire service at Keppel

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Harbour, the A.R.P., the Observer Corps, as well as lorry driving or roof spotting. Skeleton European staffs operated in government, the municipality, banks, commercial houses and retail organizations.

Government chose to maintain a "fluid" position as regards recovery. Clearly defeat was not contemplated. There was either insufficient time or no plan to transform Singapore into a fortress in the strict sense of the word. In any case, I never saw evidence of any proposed variation of the city's normal functions. Johore and Malacca were still in our possession and across the northern border of this narrowing tongue a ribbon of 40,000 to 60,000 troops of all kinds formed a defence line from Malacca on the west coast to Mersing on the east coast. On Singapore island the population, including the military, was upwards of 1,000,000, comprising about 700,000 Chinese, 100,000 Indians, 80,000 Malays and at least 30,000 European men, women, and children (including troops). These figures are approximations.

In Johore, which was now the only state held by us, the Asiatics totalled 600,000. Thus in their 330-mile advance in 40 days, the Japanese had "overlapped" 3,700,000 Asiatics—less, of course, many thousands killed by indiscriminate bombing and fighting.

A city cannot work automatically. The authorities were confronted with immense problems, not the least of which was that of water. The main source of water supply to Singapore was in Johore. The impounding reservoirs had a total capacity of six billion gallons and the water was piped forty miles to Singapore island via the causeway. The initial cost of the waterworks was $36,000,000. The daily consumption of water was thirty million gallons. There were one or more small catchment areas on the island itself yielding up to nine million gallons daily.*

* Ironically, the only source of information I have seen regarding the nine millions, was in a Japanese guide-book to Malaya, published in 1917 by the Japanese Government.

Apart from the Battle of Malaya, we knew that the many-pronged Japanese drive was enveloping Sarawak, Borneo, Sumatra, Celebes and the Netherlands Indies. Also, islands south of Singapore, notably Bangka, were bound to be attacked. I never for a moment imagined that Singapore had to fall first before the encircling movement could be effected, and there was nothing more certain than that the air raids would become progressively worse unless help arrived in time.

Unless help arrived in time—there you have the despairing cry of Singapore.

On 19 January pressure was still being maintained in the Muar-Batu Pahat area on the west coast. The Japanese continued their tactics of infiltration rather than of direct frontal assault, combined with landings at night from native craft and barges, thus threatening the defenders' flanks. Three enemy planes were shot down in Johore, bringing the A.A. total in Malaya to 41 certainties and 16 probables.

Early one morning an unseen Japanese plane soared over Singapore and dropped leaflets. Half an hour later, one fluttered right to my hand. Asiatics were warned to leave the city from the 20th to the 25th as it was going to be bombed intensively. The bad grammar had a humorous effect as far as the Europeans were concerned. As for the Chinese, there was no outward sign of perturbation.

Let the Japs come. Whispers of arriving Hurricanes fluttered about like swallows before a thunderstorm.

Major-General Gordon Bennett stated that the A.I.F. had killed eight hundred Japanese in their first successful clash with the enemy.

A number of Japanese troops at Gemas disguised themselves as Indians, carried rifles above their heads and advanced shouting, "We are Indians."

Urgent appeals were being made for blood donations as the entire reserve stocks of plasma built up over a number of months had been depleted. The response to these appeals

was poor at first among the Asiatics on religious grounds, but improved when it was realized that scores of lives were being saved. The entire staff of one government department, comprising Europeans, Eurasians, Jews, Malays and Chinese went along in a body and gave transfusions.

A.R.P. work in and around the city came in for high praise. Streets were being cleared almost before the bombers disappeared. His Excellency the Governor made frequent visits to bombed areas and even helped with demolition work.

At a meeting of the Legislative Council on 21 January His Excellency said:

The day of minute papers has gone. There must be no more passing of files from one department to another and from one officer in a department to another. It is the duty of every officer to act and if he feels the decision is beyond him he must go and get it. Similarly, the day of letters and reports is over. All written matter should be in the form of short notes in which only the important points are mentioned . . . officers who show that they cannot take responsibility should be replaced by those who can. Seniority is of no account.

Editorial newspaper comment was as follows:

Two years late. Let there be immediate promotion of the few "go getters" that the M.C.S. possesses. We have a sneaking fear, however, that unless this circular is followed up by vigorous action on the part of H.E. personally, nothing very much will happen.

Amid the stress of war, Singapore kept insisting on its usual "bite". The next to hit the news was a complaint headed "Four cents rent". It read as follows:

At government's suggestion importers agreed to store liquor in bonded warehouses, at a rental of four cents a case. One firm had stocks of $10,000 and offered a deposit to cover the four cents rent. Refused. Customs authorities made the preposterous suggestion that a blank signed cheque should be given to Customs to fill in—even for four cents. One service unit called for a case of beer and it was a case of no cents no beer.

Bickering over cents!

Every day, the Bishop of Singapore was uniting couples in holy matrimony. Every newspaper had photographs of happy couples, including Europeans, Indians and Chinese. It was nice to see smiles again, even newspaper ones. Two sets of Chinese twins were married at the registry office. I do not know whether the registrar insisted on fingerprints as well, or commented on the prospects of "quads". I was becoming a sceptic, or a realist. If I heard somebody say, "I saw a Hurricane," I would reply savagely, "What was the date on the periodical?"

Ninety Japanese bombers and fighter escorts attacked Singapore on 20 January. On 21 January I had just arrived at the office after travelling in a bus with clean, well-dressed, intelligent Asiatics when strange sounds were heard above the babel of Asiatic voices. Some of us in the office thought it was a riot—can you not see the spirit of Singapore dying hard?—and pleasantly imagined a million frenzied natives running berserk. Then a procession of 3000 Chinese appeared, singing. Chinese singing is a combination of a wailing dirge and a tuneless chant that massages your ear-drums and vibrates like acute sciatica. These Chinese, carrying large placards, wanted to fight the Japs and among them were 2000 members of the Oversea Chinese Volunteer Corps. In my opinion the lack of a photographer for incidents like this was one of the great propaganda losses of the war. It was a good gesture, and I felt then as I do now—that we are going to win this war.

Generalissimo Chiang Kai-chek offered assistance and His Excellency warmly welcomed the offer. Staff personnel arrived in Singapore by plane.

Insensibly, I found that I was getting settled. Except, of course, that I was daily expecting advice from the R.A.F. and the New Zealand unit. The blur of my first week in Singapore had gone, and I became aware that the city was stubborn and courageous.

The bombing raids also became stabilized, and I quickly established a timetable on the following lines:

a.m.	
6.30	Baby Ben sounds alarm (Japanese bombers leaving Saigon).
6.45	Early morning tea.
7.00	Shave and shower (easy with the water).
7.30	A lone Buffalo buzzed round like a loaded blowfly.
7.45	Breakfast. *Nanti* ("hurry").
8.00	Four Buffaloes supply after-breakfast music, entitled "Japanese Prelude".
8.15	Smart get-away to office.
8.45	Nonchalant alert. Reconnaissance plane only.
10.30	Lively alert. Step on it. Bombers arriving in multiples of nine.
10.30 to 11.30	Deep-breathing exercises, ear-drum massage, heart-thumping, seat-squirming.
11.30	All-clear.

Air attack during the week ending 25 January was intense, but Singapore could take it.

From the 20th to the 22nd, there were 90, 100, and 54 bombers respectively, over Singapore each day. That was only the beginning. I shall never forget my vivid impressions during those bombing raids. My carefully prepared daylight timetable was strained to the limit. I weighed the value of, say, the loss of a hand against half a shave, and I was often down the road before the toast was made. My liking for coffee hot cooled to coffee warm. A downstairs lavatory would have been appreciated. I learned to sympathize with and admire those who were blind. When an alert sounded at night, I could kick my Dutch wife, roll through the mosquito netting, reach sideways for a torch, wiggle my toes automatically into slippers, unhook and pull on my dressing-gown, all in two seconds. Then I opened my eyes and began to wake up. I knew that four paces and a slither took me to the swing door, where two storm steps were, and that a black maw indicated the three

floors downstairs descent to the cellar, lime dust, and safety (perhaps). Having arrived there, my foot sense of touch told me that my slippers were on the wrong feet, and my waking memory that I had left a wallet under my pillow, containing $1500 in cash. So up those stairs I trudged wearily.

During the day, I would have time to reflect that I had not cleaned my teeth or trimmed my bristling moustache, which reminds me of a funny story. (I warn you, even an attempt at humour was funny to us.) A friend of mine stopped me one day and said, "Do you remember my telling you that I could not use an electric razor?"

"Yes, I remember. When the tigers and elephants still had a monopoly of the jungle."

"The hairs would not stand up sufficiently."

"I know what you mean."

"Well, it shaves perfectly now. Strange, isn't it?"

With secret satisfaction, I noticed that others had found the tiled or concrete floors hard on the haunches. Some European and Chinese girls worked in the same building as I, and each now carried a large soft cushion over to the supreme court during an alert; so did some of the males. Our growing preference for the cells in the vaults had been checked by authority, and now we spread ourselves over the ground floor in the wide spacious entrance hall. The four stories in the Singapore supreme court building were surmounted by a reinforced concrete dome visible over almost the whole of Singapore. Opposite was the cricket club and a large padang (playing field) fronting the harbour.

In the air-raid shelters I saw crowds of interesting people of all classes. Some day a book will be written by psychologists on human reactions under the bomb influence, but it will not interest me. The pseudo-nonchalant type amused me. He would listen intently, then stroll over to the entrance, peer hurriedly forth, then stroll back again. Others were obviously not quite satisfied with the safety of

their spot and would move. These I called "creepers". Then there were the "fidgies". They were usually in the helmet class, and would fidget around like a mongoose at a snake party. They took four to seven minutes to pivot in a circle, alternately swinging the helmet and clapping it on the head. Those who afforded me the greatest interest were the "gloomers". The eyes were set in a sombre stare, mouth compressed, and head pushed slightly forward. I suspected that mighty problems of Empire were surging in those busy brains and I much admired the deliberate setting aside of inner personal considerations. The "standers" could be divided into two classes. First, those who sat too much at other times, secondly, those who had not heard the whistle of a bomb. Chucklers were few. They grinned like Siamese twins.

The psychologist was unsettling—he distrusted the safety feeling of a crowd. But he was not as bad as the fatalist who wanted to make sure that he was getting what was coming to him. I looked long for the whisky-swilling type, but never smelt a thing. The hissers aroused my deepest suspicions. The Japanese hiss with pleasure and these might have been fifth columnists.

Most people belonged to the blank class. They had neither arrived in Singapore, nor had they left it. They had no thoughts. Theirs was a world without war. It was neither Monday nor Wednesday—it was every day.

The official type was best. Serious, preoccupied as usual. Was there a war on? I belonged to a select class called the helmet-clappers. Very few European women had tin helmets and they were fascinating to a pitiable bachelor. So when the bombs were falling I clapped my tin hat on a fair head and whispered into a pretty ear. In particular, I remember two girls at the Fullerton Building. The alert had gone and they walked into a small entrance near the evacuee post office. One scampered up a few stairs and

sat. The other huddled with me on some fragile aluminium ware. They were nervous of those bombs at first. Afterwards we talked. I wonder if they'll write for an autographed copy of this book—that brunette and that Irish colleen?

Speaking of Japanese bombs. At a picture theatre about a year ago I saw a film taken from a Japanese bomber and the deadly cargo could be seen as it sped down, down, down, to explode in puffs of white smoke on a defenceless Chinese city—Chungking, I think it was. It made me wonder how such a film came into our hands and on what basis payment was made. The fact that the death of some Chinese was deemed to have a news value to me via a Japanese source seemed a hideous mockery of our aid to China. One moment I was sitting in a Japanese bomber behind a camera, and now I was in focus myself, possibly by the same camera. I have a horrible certainty that one of these days I will sit in a cinema and see bombs falling on Singapore. Believe me, my posterior would gyrate intensely on my seat, and I would probably fall flat on the floor as the bombs landed.

Two city raids in particular during that week stand out in my memory.

I had developed the habit of walking smartly over to the post office immediately an alert was sounded. This was fairly simple in those days. On arriving at the office I would place my tin helmet on my desk, together with a spring file of blank paper on which to take rough notes for this diary and also write, at times, very impulsive letters to friends overseas. At the first whine of the alert, I would jump up and be off. The distance to the post office was about four hundred yards. Everybody else preferred to go to the supreme court, which was only half as far. One day, however, I tried an experiment. When the alert sounded I walked over to a grass patch by the seaside next to the canal, wishing to get a good view of the bombers. I did.

First of all I was aghast to find no slit trenches. It was too late to go elsewhere and a perturbed European came along.

"Where can we go?" he asked.

I nodded to some distant puffs of ack-ack. "Nowhere. There is only the grass, or those trenches at the foot of Raffles's statue."

Our position afforded a panorama of the harbour and the city. Ships, silent and vigilant, waited expectantly. Far along the waterfront I could see the Seaview Hotel. On the land side of us in a big semicircle, were the post office, canal bridge, colonial offices, Victoria Memorial Hall, cricket club, supreme court, and the municipal buildings. Wide stretches of road and grass lay between us and the buildings.

He gauged the distance with dubious eyes. We sat down on the grass.

I said, "A bomb on the Victoria Memorial Hall would bring a thousand tons of masonry down on Raffles's statue *and* the trenches."

"You are right."

We could now see the bombers. They were coming straight towards us, twenty-seven of them, at a height of about twelve thousand feet. The engine drone came faintly to our ears, while the sun glinted on the bombers' burnished bodies.

There is a peculiarly naked sensation in lying out in the open in a city during a bombing raid. We were lying flat by this time and I knew that a carpet of bombs released about two miles away could put us in the Houdini class without an encore. In fact one bomb alone could cope with me and my diary without leaving even a split infinitive.

Apart from that engine drone, all life seemed to have ceased. The sun shone hotly in a brazen sky, gleaming on lifeless buildings and deserted streets. The red flag denoting a raid hung limply from the tall mast on the small rise at the head of High Street. This was the warning to shipping,

but the multitudinous craft in the wide waters of Keppel Harbour looked like toy boats on an artificial sea. There were hundreds of them, ranging from fishing boats close at hand to cargo vessels, liners, warships, and hospital ships, several miles out. Thirty yards from where I lay the oily sea lapped the stones lazily, and I heard the scaly rattle of a lone crab. A roll of rusty wire lay still uncoiled on that undefended beach.

Underneath some shrubs near by lay some Tamil coolies. The leafy shade obviously gave them a feeling of security. Others squatted behind a huge wooden drum for coiling wire, oblivious to the probability that a blast could blow it over and seriously injure them. No life was visible on the padang, which was covered with slit trenches and mounds to prevent plane landings.

Straight towards us came the bombers. My feeling of nakedness grew and an inexplicable longing came over me. There was no sense of fear, but a growing feeling of tenseness. Then suddenly a sure conviction came to me that man used not one-hundredth of his potentialities; that he stumbled inarticulate and impotent through the marvellous ecstasy called life; that his sufferings, his efforts towards beauty and harmony, were all part of a divine purpose; and that even the sinner could make his contribution to the sum of human happiness.

This flash of omniscience, in the midst of my incoherent reasoning and meagre knowledge of life, filled me with a boundless optimism, a joyous confidence in the purpose of living. No fierce exultation, this, but rather a consciousness of suffering to come, of obstacles to surmount, and of a self that would emerge purified and enriched by gruelling experience. The glow that was within me wanted to live for its own sake.

A noise like a stick being drawn along a corrugated iron fence came to my ears. Bombs were spilling down, dropping three miles away, and even then spinning through the air.

The noise grew in intensity as the lane of destruction lengthened. Louder and louder grew the reverberations and I could feel my stomach pressing on the ground as if an elephant were kneeling on my back. My cheek was against the grass and I was just able to keep my eyes on those bombers. My ears strained for that whooshing, whistling sound of falling bombs. The anti-aircraft fire was more accurate now and puffs appeared just in front and underneath. Suddenly the far right wing of three was broken up but the bombers kept on their way. Seconds passed. A dozen bombs a second—each bomb leaping a hundred yards closer. Closer and closer rolled the reverberations until the very ground seemed to shake and growl in protest. Ah! The bombers were slowly curving away. But the inhuman blasting of the city was not yet over. Would those explosions never stop? Closer and yet closer came the bombs. The air quivered and palpitated—agonized gasp of Singapore—and I expected the near horizon of tall buildings to disintegrate into smoke and flame. My faculties were keyed up as never before. My calm yet tense mental self seemed apart from my body. I conjectured coolly what I should do if I saw myself bleeding and could not stop it. The sun was searing my body. The detonations had a sharper sound now, more whip-like. Dazed with the approaching blast, I still tried to remain alert, to stave off that fatal blank when the mind is brought to its last defence. The man lying next to me had his eyes shut, mouth tensed and outflung hands tightly closed. A whistling noise was heard. I listened to the bomb as it came down in a long dreadful slant, as if it were trying to race its own sound. With an ear-splitting crash it exploded in the sea sixty yards away. A fountain of water shot up. We lay there in tense silence and then became aware of a great quiet.

I sat up, and felt the sunburn searing my neck. The bombers were now disappearing over Changi. Mushrooms

of smoke were mounting skywards. None of the buildings near by was hit, but bombs had been spilt along several miles of Orchard Road. The Cathay Building had had a near miss.

My acquaintance was a rubber planter from Kedah. "How did you like that?" he asked.

"He is lucky who says he has heard a bomb whistle," said I, repeating a joke then running around Singapore.

His face was white and drawn.

"Those bombs came right across the city," he said, looking at the ever-spreading smoke and spouting flame.

A growling mutter came from Changi. We listened critically.

"Sounds like another packet," he said. I agreed. His eyes strained after the bombers. "Yesterday I put my wife on board a steamer bound for Colombo," he continued. "I hope the ship is all right. Our bungalow in Kedah was bombed on 8 December, and we were in the Dog at Kuala Lumpur when it was bombed. Two days ago the house we were living in was wrecked. All my surplus money is in rubber shares and my company's head office is in Hongkong, which fell a month ago. I had to borrow money to send my wife away."

People were streaming out of the supreme court and the municipal buildings. We parted.

During that raid a Tamil taxi-driver was driving in to the city. In accordance with the regulations he stopped the car and jumped into a ditch. Singapore was singularly blessed with deep commodious ditches to carry away torrential rains and smells, and tens of thousands daily jumped ditchwards. The taxi-driver was no sooner safely in his ditch than the bombs came down. One scored a direct hit on the taxi-cab and blew the engine from the chassis into the ditch beside the astonished Tamil.

Another bomb landed five yards away from a sandbag wall and those sheltering behind were shaken but unharmed.

Some people in a slit trench were buried. One man had been leaning against the side of the trench and the impact of the blast, travelling through the ground to his body, broke most of his bones. The rest were unharmed.

The rumour of poison gas sped through the city. It turned out that the cold storage premises close to my place of residence had been hit and escaping ammonia caused people's eyes to stream with tears.

That evening, Mac, Guy and I used a precious pint of petrol. We ran the car down Killiney Road and along Orchard Road to look at the damage. Dozens of bombs had landed in more or less open ground just off the road. In soft ground, the hole was about seven feet deep. One scene in particular has remained in my mind. A small house, lightly built, was set at the back of a section with possibly forty yards of vegetable garden. Two bombs had landed among the spinach and beetroot and blasted the branches off a tree at the entrance. Palings were torn off a fence and the house veranda leaned drunkenly. The picture was completed by a Chinese and his wife seated calmly on the veranda steps, smoking nonchalantly. The Chinese being an industrious, painstaking race, I wondered why those palings were not being replaced and those vegetables gathered. Had John Chinaman decided to move to a safer part of the island or was he philosophically waiting for the Japanese to come? Perhaps numerous relatives were on the way, or, more probably, the landlord; but this passivity amidst destruction seemed incongruous.

One learned a lot from observing the effect of blast. For instance, here was a motor-car eighty yards from where a bomb had landed on the tar macadam road. All four tyres were punctured and neat holes were punched through one side of the car. In Singapore, I often observed cars with splinter holes through both sides. I emphasize that structural damage done by the sixty-pound anti-personnel bomb was not heavy, but blast accomplished the most amazing

things. Supposing a bomb landed on a hard road. The blast alone would wreck a lightly built two-storied house about thirty yards away. The walls would stand, but all nailed boards might be ripped off; likewise plaster board. Doors would be torn off hinges and flying glass embedded in opposite walls. On the other hand, a direct hit would wreck one or two rooms and leave the others untouched. These bombs were set to go off at the lightest touch and did not penetrate before exploding. Blast also tore the tiles off roofs. Houses in the tropics are very lightly built, and have not to stand up to temperature variations or high winds.

Retracing our steps, we made our way to Cyrano's, a restaurant and beer parlour in Orchard Road. It had suffered two direct hits but the ground floor was intact. The proprietor was a Czechoslovak. We were hot, tired and thirsty. A pint of beer, ice cold, amid a battery of fans, was the obvious thing to have. It was good to sit on a high stool and stamp one's foot on a familiar brass rail. This was my first visit to Cyrano's. The place was a sweating mass of humanity, soldiers, sailors, airmen and others. Darkness was falling and the closed shutters necessary for a black-out made the place an inferno. However, this was far better than brooding at home.

The three-mile strip of bombs laid along Orchard Road was just the beginning of the blitz on the city. A peculiar psychological effect is created when a string of bombs commences to explode several miles away and comes towards you.

Several days later, on 22 January, clumps of cloud were scattered over the sky, so that bombers could cut their engines, glide down and bomb us very nicely at our desks. However, that did not happen—quite. The alert screamed about ten-fifteen. I made my way towards the post office. Having ignored the nearest so-called shelter, I was one of

the last to get under cover, but once in the shade of the huge post office building I usually chose to wait outside and watch developments. Once only had I gone down to the basement to the shelters, but the cumulative heat from a thousand persons had a most tiring effect. I sat on a heap of timber and kept an eye on the northern skyline. Shortly, the familiar puff of ack-ack appeared, and I saw twenty-seven bombers about six miles away. They disappeared in a bank of cloud, and seemed to be making for the forts guarding the approach to Keppel Harbour. Nothing happened for about twenty minutes. I went in to the evacuee post office counter and persuaded an attendant to look under letter "F". Cheers! An air-mail letter from New Zealand. Posted on 8 January, it had taken only fourteen days to arrive. Two newspaper cuttings were enclosed and I glanced through one stressing that New Zealand had sent a large number of men overseas. The second cutting brought me up with a round turn. The heading was "New Year Golf Tournament" and I was indignant, though there was no good reason why I should be. I had attended this particular tourney for at least a dozen years and a cursory glance told me that the number of entrants had decreased by over two-thirds. But five thousand miles away, there were people whose main concern was a six-foot putt—and my chief worry, while it also had to do with six feet of earth, was of a more serious character.

The alert kept on, and, fed up with waiting, I walked back to the office. The empty desks told me I was a fool. I stepped outside again, then walked along fifty yards or so of sealed road to the Colonial Secretary's offices. Here I found a rubber planter and his wife wondering where to go. I warned them to get a better place and directed them. Then I saw Buckley, a friend of mine, peeping out of another exit near by in the Colonial Secretary's offices.

"Tell me," he said, "is there an alert on or not? And where do you think you are going?"

"Like you, perhaps," I smiled, "I am fed up and tired of shelters."

We looked at the huge, deserted roadways. Scores of empty cars were parked, but their drivers had disappeared Nothing could be heard. Merciless heat enfolded every thing and white masses of cloud drifted slowly overhead.

"Seems rather stupid," I said. "Singapore is underground and we are standing here like a pair of fools."

We had moved towards the main entrance of the Secretary's office, when the local alert operating on the top of the post office near by shrilled quick warning. This hastened our steps a little. Two Chinese coolie women in black were kneeling just inside the entrance. Their eyes were shut, their lips moving. The anxious expressions on their lined, careworn faces struck me as being something more than a natural outcome of fear for themselves. For whom were they praying? I wondered. They moved clasped hands up and down as if imploring Kuan Yin, the Chinese Goddess of Mercy, to be kind. An ear-splitting crash sounded outside and half a dozen coolies rushed in. They were gibbering with terror. Buckley and I moved farther in along a corridor, under a huge arch that looked horribly unsafe. But there was no choice. Then commenced a series of terrific detonations that sounded to my confused ears as if the whole of Singapore was being levelled. We dropped flat. I could feel the ground trembling as if a giant were hitting the island with a huge hammer. The Chinese threw themselves on top of us, probably reasoning that the white man knew the safest place. The air became filled with dust and I would swear that I could see the masonry just above loosening and swaying. How far away the bombs had started dropping I do not know, but louder and ever louder grew that cataclysm of sound until my ear-drums felt as if they could stand no more. Certain that the whole

building was disintegrating, I held my breath and waited. Again I experienced that feeling of intense longing, yet boundless confidence. . . . Pieces of mortar dropped on me, and for probably twenty seconds I could not see for dust. My hands were tightly clenched. A man next to me commenced to tremble convulsively. The Chinese were throwing themselves about trying to force their way down to the ground. A shattering explosion just outside covered us with debris. Several bomb fragments spanged violently into the wall just above me, half demolishing it. A piece as big as a saucer dropped near my right hand.

Was that rumbling sound falling away? Gradually we realized that there was a great quiet. The Chinese stopped trying to wedge themselves in. One put his hand on the piece of bomb casing and shouted with pain at the burn. Large gobs of mud were spattered around as if from a bomb explosion in the canal near by. Choking dust filled our nostrils and mouths and still hung in the air. Stiffly I walked outside and my legs felt wobbly for several seconds. The Victoria Memorial Hall could not be seen. Good God, I thought, it is a heap of rubble. Then the tower emerged as the cloud settled and I could see the clock face, glass shattered by blast. Later, we saw that the clock was still going. Trees were torn down near the padang. A number of cars were blazing furiously. Gradually the dust settled, and I became acutely aware of the smell of cordite. One of the Chinese thought it was poison gas. Everybody was quite calm, but shaken. Walking out into the open, I gulped in some fresh air. Black holes gaped in the cricket club building and, as I watched, flames burst forth. I looked round for Buckley. "Come on," I called. He was as white as a sheet and I suppose I was too. We ran across to the fire. Already the Chinese fire volunteers were getting hoses out and in the next hour I saw splendid work done by the voluntary defence organizations. Two poor devils—a Chinese and an Indian—had got it in front

of the P.W.D. building, which was completely wrecked. A number of Europeans and Asiatics were grouped in the doorway, looking dazed. They were sheltering in the only part not destroyed, and had had a near miss. One plunged into the building to find his cine-camera. High Street was a shambles. Huge pieces of masonry had toppled into the street, and one had completely flattened a Ford V8. Pieces of timber straddled everywhere. One had pierced the windscreen and rear window of a sedan. How it got there was a mystery. Then, to my amazement, I noticed that I still carried the cutting of the golf tournament in my hand. Picking our way down High Street to Northbridge Road and back, we carried timber to help barricade the road. Looking around the padang, I could see several dozen bomb craters; one bomb had landed right on the grass plot where I had had my experience of several days before. The entrance to the supreme court was slightly damaged, and the side windows facing High Street were shattered.

Willing workers swarmed everywhere. Lorries carted debris away and once again I admired the quick matter-of-fact way in which the Asiatics, under European supervision, brought order out of chaos. My car was parked outside the P.W.D. building. It was unharmed. The three next to it were wrecked.

People were calm. Many were dazed, their faces blank. Fires were blazing over in the Chinese quarter. I had to keep a grip on myself. A flood of emotion threatened to engulf me. There seemed to be two of me—one holding tightly to an icy calmness, the other wanting to rave at this insensate, wholesale murder of the weak and helpless.

I entered the Memorial Hall. Fine dust lay everywhere. A shell splinter, still warm, was on my desk. My papers were on the floor. Patiently, I brought my mind back to office routine, sorted out a financial puzzle, studied a letter in which a taxpayer claimed a refund of $14. I added and subtracted, figures slipping tiredly into place; drafted a

reply, pointing out where he was $1.15 out in his calculation. I worked on. A hundred yards away lay dead bodies. The smell of blood had gone now.

Sharp at one o'clock—for I was told that office hours had to be strictly observed—I walked to Raffles Square, which had not experienced any further bombing since 8 December, when Guthrie's Building had been wrecked. Everybody I passed was bustling along. It seemed as if nobody ever caught up on urgent personal business or had time to think. Just as I arrived at Robinson's, the alert sounded again. People rushed and did not study the order of their going, but the haste had no suggestion of panic. "Tid'apa," I said to myself, and walked down to the basement. Here, customers and Chinese and Indian shop-assistants sat on packing cases, while clerks tapped away on typewriters specially provided for such an emergency.

Pedestrians of all kinds streamed down and I watched them idly, suddenly to stiffen in astonishment. Surely I knew that face. Surging memory swung five thousand miles away to the Balmacewen golf links in New Zealand, to a keen biting wind and the zest of holding par on a soggy course.

"Noel North! You old son of a gun!"

"Stan Field—how long have you been here?"

Quickly, I told him how I had flown up from New Zealand, of my experiences of 1941; and in my outpouring I explained that I was endeavouring to get a full-time military job.

"I am medical officer in the R.N.Z.A.F. constructional unit. Why not join up with us?"

"Whoopee! Just what I have been trying to do. How soon can you arrange it?"

"Leave it to me. But you might have to do anything—drive lorries, build hutments, supervise native labour—and we get blitzed every day."

"Just tell me what to do." I felt absurdly happy. Being with a New Zealand unit would be paradise.

"Write a letter of application, and I will see everybody necessary. Just wait until you hear from me."

The trouble at the moment, he explained, was that the unit was on the mainland and about to move, but in a few days an interview could be arranged. There might be difficulties in the way because enlistments could take place only in New Zealand; but if I had no objection to joining up as a civilian—no rank——

"Anything."

"As a civilian, you will still be paid, and be able to mess with the officers."

"Go right ahead, Noel."

After tiffin Noel took me for a run in his car down Northbridge Road and a three-mile lane of devastation and horror sobered our joy of meeting. Smashed buildings, bodies, cars, burst water mains, drifting smoke. The sight of those courageous workers picking up their dead wives, children, aged parents, blasted to pieces in many cases, filled me with a shuddering realization of the agony that was enveloping Asia. These natives had no shelters, but you could not *dig* in what had been a swamp.

Buckley phoned me early that evening. "Do you know how many Japanese planes were over Singapore to-day?"

"No idea."

"One hundred and twenty-seven. Ack-ack brought down nine certain and our fighters, four."

"How many casualties?"

"Just tops the thousand, so far. By the way, I was heading for the P.W.D. offices when you stopped me. Good work, pal."

Military activity on the peninsula was intensifying. Malacca was enveloped by the Japanese in two days, and only Johore lay between the enemy and Singapore.

But my memory of Malacca is still one of eternal peace. War may strike that lovely paradise again some day, but those who live there could never hold hate in their hearts.

I could not understand the military situation. We had lost the Muar River battle, and then the same day we heard of fighting at Batu Pahat, thirty miles nearer Singapore. Mersing was still being held by the Australians, but the west coast appeared to my inexperienced eyes to be more important. A portion of the Australian forces was now in danger of being cut off, and Tokyo in fact claimed to have surrounded a large number of Australian troops. Most of these ultimately fought their way out. In a few days, therefore, we lost about seventy miles more of the west coast. This meant that the Japanese now had control of one-third of the state of Johore. They were concentrating the fury of their attack down the west where the shallow coastline meant that we would not check infiltration.

We learned that our planes had intercepted several flights of enemy bombers and broken them up before they reached Singapore island. I did not see any aerial combats over Singapore, but, of course, numbers of fights may have taken place over dromes and the naval base. Over the city enemy bombers had only anti-aircraft to worry about and kept consistently high. Stories of the bravery of single pilots fighting enemy planes came to my ears. Alas, many epic feats will never be told, for the Japanese Zero could run rings round our Buffalo Brewsters.

I heard a belated compliment from a bomber pilot on the Kuala Lumpur black-out. He had flown over Kuala Lumpur in early January on his way to bomb Sungei Patani one night and said that he didn't see Kuala Lumpur. I told him that I was on Observer Corps duties that night and that not only had I heard the bombers but our observation posts reported them all the way up country.

"R.A.F. headquarters were pleased with Selangor

Observer Corps," he said, which was nice to hear. He had now just returned from bombing the enemy-occupied aerodrome at Kuala Lumpur. "And it is still hard to find," he complained.

On 25 January, fifty-four bombers raided Singapore. They were protected by a bank of fighters. Six were brought down, with two probables.

The Japanese were now seventy miles from Singapore and as day after day went by without more of our planes taking the air, it was amazing how our optimism remained. What was it based on, I wondered? Courage or complacency?

CHAPTER XXII

BOUNDLESS CONFIDENCE EVERYWHERE

(26-31 January 1942)

BOUNDLESS confidence radiated everywhere. What matter if bombs dropped, if stupid leaflets proclaimed impossible things? Singapore would for ever illustrate her invincibility. The Singaporean lived for the hour. Here it was. There was no analysing, no summing-up, no fierce questioning, no doubting. Optimism reigned supreme. From Singapore would leap the mighty forces that would destroy Japan.

Certainly a minor victory was ours. Leaflets had proclaimed that Singapore would be razed to the ground a week ago. Let Nippon boast. The city still stood. Singapore would stand a siege for years. Singapore was the world's impregnable fortress.

Daily, I expected to take up military duties, but government still controlled me and civil life claimed my thoughts. I sorely distrusted myself.

I did not know it, but I was undergoing a complete readjustment of values. I was two persons. One went to work, acted automatically and presented a smiling exterior to the world; was optimistic, cracking jokes, patient, good-natured. The other was that secret self, jealously guarded, which rules the mind and directs the important steps in life. My outer self conscientiously helped that important thing called morale; but my inner self was testing, accepting, rejecting, and I was slowly but surely arriving at inescapable conclusions.

In hot Malaya, the secret self of the European was for ever under a mental and moral strain. A man's body was always tired; his energy dripped away. Life was an unending social round, with stimulated cheerfulness its unwritten code. The gay mockery of life in Malaya—so misleading to strangers from overseas—was doubly difficult to analyse with the Japanese hurling themselves down the peninsula.

The Singapore of three weeks ago had given me an impression of amused tolerance; the bomb lashing of the second week had not stung Singapore out of its complacency; and at the beginning of the third I felt stealing over me the dazed paralysis I had known during my last days in Kuala Lumpur. I felt I had to guard continually against lack of initiative, against too much fatalism. We were all too close to the war to have clear opinions, but I found around me an inability to think constructively. Our definition of the word "impregnable" had too long been "protection, dollars, good living, and the right to sneer at the world". Yet there was boundless courage and the ability to take it.

The right spirit was there but, surrounded always by an air of "hush hush", it was systematized, reduced to a traditional formula suggestive of infallibility. Speed, grip, incisiveness were required as never before. Over twenty millions of pounds had been expended in this island on defence; but money alone produces inert concrete, passive steel. We developed Malaya in terms of peace, on the assumption of our inviolate control of the sea.

At least seven thousand women and children were being evacuated. Ships were leaving every other day, but at Lloyd Lodge, where I was staying, there were still quite a number of families.

Most people fondly imagined that a thousand bombers and fighters would fly into Singapore any fine morning and blast all Japanese craft out of the sky. The cry for aircraft was a mania. No opinions were offered as to how the

infiltration methods of the Japanese would be countered. This, to my mind, was just as important as planes. We had lost about twenty flying fields and it was difficult to imagine how any number of aircraft could maintain control of tiny Singapore island. However, I kept these thoughts to myself.

Coast fighting occurred at Jemaluang, south of Mersing, on 27 January. The Japanese were using a division of the Imperial Guard, the élite of the Japanese army, and were now sixty-five miles from Singapore.

An editorial in the *Straits Times* headed "Getting About" said: "Wrecked cars, recumbent lamp-posts and damaged traffic islands are becoming increasingly common in Singapore."

Endau, just north of Mersing, was lost. An Australian pilot, whom I met later in Batavia, told me how they bombed the Japanese troops landing from beached transports. "It looked like Dunkirk in reverse," he said.

It may be interesting to note that the films made some years ago of the "Bring 'em Back Alive" series by Frank Buck, and lately revived in "Jungle Cavalcade", had been filmed in the Johore jungle where fighting was now going on.

Daily I expected a reply from air headquarters. Noel North had promised to let me know developments regarding his unit. I waited impatiently, expecting each day at the office to be my last.

All my spare hours were taken up with helping people to leave. Steamer passages from Singapore were rigidly controlled. Married women had priority according to the number of their children. Elderly married couples without children had waited weeks for a steamer. Before anybody could leave the procedure was as follows:

First of all, the director of manpower had to be satisfied that the applicant was not required for the war effort, in which case he issued an exit permit. The immigration

authorities then stamped the passport and retained the exit permit. Thirdly, an appearance had to be made before Mr Justice Aitken, who, if he had no objection, would give a letter of instruction to any shipping company to book a passage, subject to the prior rights of all women and children. The regulations, then, were very strict and half a dozen men of over fifty complained to me that they had been refused exit permits. I make no comment on this except that the director of manpower—not a young man—had a very onerous job and it was generally conceded that he did his work thoroughly and well.

I could not therefore leave Singapore of my own free will and even if I had a permit it would be subject always to the prior rights of all women and children. I knew of men who were about four thousand down the lists, and had been booked for weeks. At the present rate of sailing, it appeared that these would not get away until May at the earliest.

There were several thousands of women, many of whom had been waiting for steamers for some weeks. Each applicant was told by the shipping companies, "Please call or telephone us *every day*." The P. and O. offices were operating from private houses about six miles out of town, near Bukit Timah Road. Numbers of women had no telephone number, or car, and were virtually stranded when it came to sudden notice to board a steamer. Every day the roads to the shipping offices were full of anxious people. I saw many heart-rending scenes—husbands saying last good-byes to wives and children.

For about the tenth time, pamphlets fluttered from Japanese planes. These forecasted the capture of Singapore, but the morale of the city was unaffected.

On 27 January, which was 123 years to the day since Raffles had founded Singapore, I left the office at four-thirty and walked up High Street to catch a trolley bus. So well had the street been cleared and the bombed premises

boarded up, that the limited effect of the bombing of the previous week could be seen in its true perspective. Bombing is never as bad as you think it is, but you always go on thinking.

The Malay policeman on point duty was as smart as ever and his large white gloves and the white board hung across his back betokened his efficiency. Around me was the inevitable crowd of white-clothed Asiatics acting for all the world as if life in Singapore were the same as ever. The small curio shops near by were filled with soldiers in khaki shorts.

As I waited, I saw many pretty Eurasians. Their fate was now doubly precarious—rejected by Europe, scorned by Asia, and now running the risk of Japanese domination.

I missed my car badly. Before the war it was considered beneath the dignity of a European to travel in a bus. I did not particularly want to travel with Asiatics, but there were no objectionable odours and the Asiatic has very good manners. In a crowd I often had to inquire of a Chinese or an Indian where a certain stop was, and my request was invariably answered with a blend of deference and cheerfulness. Admittedly, I kept an eye on my hip pocket, but for nine cents (twopence halfpenny) I could travel three miles at least. When I stepped off the bus at Tank Road, I had about a thousand yards to walk.

Carrying my helmet (which I never wore), I sauntered up Oxley Rise, and breathed deeply because the air seemed sweeter here. Frangipane near by had a delicious, heady fragrance, and the gardens along the roadside were radiant with orchids and shrubs. A vast weariness descended upon me as I walked. Lack of proper food and sleep over some seven weeks had taken toll. Physical fitness is a fetish with me, and yet I had lost over twenty pounds in weight. Although tired, I was content, for whenever I was alone in Malaya its peace and beauty always tugged at my heart. Every Malayan knows the magic of such beautiful moments,

and most far more than I; yet he will seldom confess what he must feel under the spell of this quiet loveliness.

Life at that moment seemed such a topsyturvy thing. A quiet lane, flowers, towering coco-nut palms against a milky blue sky—the world seemed to stand still. What matter if the headlines of the world were shrieking about Singapore—Sydney with trenchant bitterness, New York in questioning concern, New Zealand in astonished admonition, London blaming a pre-war government, and the Axis powers in demon hysteria? Let them! This moment was mine. This air, this fragrance, this bountiful nature was all mine.

The Japanese horde was panting fanatically as it advanced a few miles away. Planes were zooming from our lost airfields to bomb and blast us. Our warships were manoeuvring near by in narrow seas, anxious eyes ever watching. Convoys were threading their tortuous way to our help over thousands of miles of ocean. In countless factories all over the world millions of men were working with demoniacal haste, turning out engines of destruction.

An ivory flower dropped from the frangipane. I picked it up. Delicately veined, fleshy, its white perfection lay in my browned hand as helplessly as Singapore was held in the grip of war.

And then, as I turned a bend in the road, the heavens darkened and I saw a huge pall of smoke fed by an ever-writhing spiral, as if an evil genie hiding therein had set fire to an Aladdin's lamp in the bowels of the earth and was now peering down with slant eyes and with arms outstretched to snatch at Singapore. Or perhaps he had kindled a fire so as to toast Singapore slowly, like a ball of opium, to give a Nipponese conqueror heady dreams of Empire.

My walk was nearly over. On one side of me, beauty was set against a silvery sky, on the other the black menacing smoke pall gloomed larger and ever larger. Singapore was

doomed. The Japanese hordes would burst down this peaceful road, eyes aflame with lust; the city would undergo an orgy of rapine and slaughter, and human suffering here would reach its tragic climax of blood and tears. I felt within myself a steeling of mind, a gathering of strength, and a wonderment at my calm. Busily, my secret self tackled this insistent problem. My steps quickened in sudden interest.

"Boy, cassis tea."

"Yes, tuan." His glance implied that he had heard me clump wearily up the stairs. This Hailam Chinese, full of shrewdness and faults, refused to be bustled, and bargained like a Shylock. For instance, I had contracted through him to pay a dhobi $10 a month and when I settled with him, for twenty-one days out of thirty-one, the proportion was not two-thirds of $10. Oh no. Instead of $6.66 he must receive $6.78. But he always served tea hot and *ayer panas* did mean hot water.

The guest house commanded a wonderful view towards the naval base and Changi, so at night we used to stand on the balcony and watch a pyrotechnic display ten miles away. Bomb flashes could be seen many seconds before the sound of the explosion reached us. Mac tried to argue that they were flares, but we howled him down.

The tea we drank was grown in the country. The hot, bitter brew was most refreshing and I sat gazing at the last rays of the setting sun, sucking a pulpy kind of passion-fruit served with tea, or caressing the larynx with a piece of chilled papaya. Above my head I noticed a new biggish hole in the iron roof, made by falling flack.

So passed a pleasant hour, my first relaxation for many a day. Then Horry and Horricks, our two good trenchers, put in an appearance, loaded with two cold duck and pickles "just to tickle the palate".

At six-thirty, Malayan time, Big Ben boomed round the

world. This day, 27 January, was the anniversary of the day that Raffles set foot on Singapore. We insignificant mortals listened in for news of the Malayan battlefront. "The Prime Minister has asked the House of Commons for a vote of confidence," said the announcer, "and regarding the Far East he utters a warning of bad news to come." Then Mr Winston Churchill's voice was heard. Regarding Singapore, he said:

> We have had a great deal of bad news from the Far East and I think it probable that we will have a great deal more. Wrapped up in this bad news will be many tales of blunders and shortcomings both in foresight and action. No one will pretend for a moment that disasters like these occur without there having been faults and shortcomings. I see all this rolling towards us like the waves in a storm and that is another reason why I require a formal solemn vote of confidence from the House of Commons, which hitherto in this struggle has never flinched.
>
> While facing Germany and Italy here and in the Nile Valley, we have never had any power to provide effectively for the defence of the Far East. . . . The limiting factor has not been troops or even equipment. The limiting factor has been transport. . . . The decision was taken to make our contribution to Russia and to try and beat Rommel and to form a stronger front from the Levant to the Caspian. . . . Sixty thousand men, indeed, were concentrated in Singapore but priority in modern aircraft, tanks, A.A. and anti-tank artillery was accorded to the Nile Valley. . . . On December 7 the Japanese by a sudden attack, delivered while their envoys were still negotiating at Washington, crippled for the time being the American Pacific Fleet and a few days later inflicted very heavy naval losses on us by sinking the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*.
>
> For the time being, naval superiority in the Pacific and the Malaysian Archipelago has passed from the hands of the two leading naval powers into the hands of Japan.

Silence gloomed round our circle. Horry looked over to his friend. "Horricks, old man, you don't think that means us, do you?"

"Who wants a drink?" said Horricks.

So we bolstered up the swashbuckling reputation of Singapore.

"Tell us a story," said Mac.

"Right," said I. "Have you heard the yarn of the attempted suicide of the sensitive Malayan?"

"Never heard of a sensitive Malayan," chorused all.

"When the cable news was full of wild and envious accusations against whisky-swilling planters," I continued, "a sensitive Malayan in Johore was prostrated with the falseness of the accusation and in his delirium tremens—I mean delirious frenzy—he decided to commit suicide. Being a true Malayan, he was very thorough in everything he did, so he first of all picked out a hundred-foot cliff by the seaside. Then he obtained a good stake by wantonly felling a young rubber-tree. He dug a hole and firmly wedged the stake therein. Next he bought a rope fifty feet long, opened up a large drum full of petrol and mixed himself a powerful dose of arsenic. He tied one end of the rope around the stake and the other round his neck, soaked himself in petrol, set himself alight, swallowed the arsenic, and took a flying jump from the cliff."

"I thought it was a story of attempted suicide," growled Mac.

"The rope broke, the sea extinguished the flames, he swallowed some water and the salt caused him to vomit."

"What happened then?"

"He had to swim for his life."

But the next night we tuned in to Sydney to hear the Prime Minister of Australia warning Australia to expect bad news. Horricks solemnly produced a sheet of paper, cleared the table of whisky bottles and stengah glasses, and drew a circle to represent the world. Plotting London and Sydney, he slowly dotted Singapore in between and said in sepulchral tones, "Horry, old man, I wonder who is right?"

Horry cocked his head wisely on one side, gazed reflectively at a distant billowing mass of smoke and flame that

seemed to be eating slowly but inexorably towards us and exclaimed, "It is hard to say, but personally I back Winston every time."

But Singapore was unshaken. Boundless confidence still remained. Those words of fate might never have been uttered. Some women even refused steamer passages in order to wait indefinitely for news of their husbands.

The telephone rang several seconds before the fifth alert. Singapore was having a busy night. I jumped down the stairs three steps a time and eyed the vociferous instrument. One never knew. Someone might be hurt. Picking up the receiver, I found that Guy Hutton was on the line.

"Would you like Chinese makkan to-morrow night?" he asked.

"Rather," I replied.

From somewhere up above a harsh "Grr-grrr" floated down. It sounded like lorry engines labouring in low gear. The rays of moonlight suddenly seemed more garish, more revealing. Silence filled the big guest house. A dog started whimpering.

"Be quick," I yelled.

"At the New World. Bring the honey blonde. Also Mac. Call for you . . ."

"Whoosh!" I flattened out. "Whoomp!" The sky flashed orange yellow and a terrific blast smote my ear-drums. A peculiar pattering sound from the next street sounded for all the world like hail. Bombs had torn the tiles off roofs by the hundred. Smoke surged into the sky, then flames burst out. I lay supine until I was conscious that my stomach objected to the cool tiled floor, and got up. Under this staircase was good shelter, in my opinion, but the Indian jaga was the only one whose intellect matched mine on the subject. He was a peculiar man in that when under the bomb influence he spoke perfect English, and otherwise a garbled Malay. Money-lending—a habit with jagas—was

with him, I am sure, a well developed art. Which reminds me that there was a ragged, dirty jaga in Kuala Lumpur who could lend $50,000 at an hour's notice. His wages were probably $20 a month.

As quickly as they flared up, the flames died away—probably only an attap roof had caught fire. The engine noise had gone now, and I ventured out, my silk dressing-gown and thin sarong just right for the cool tropic night. The serpent tongues of the searchlights were almost invisible in the full glare of the moon.

From the woefully inadequate shelter dug out of the ground by the gate, a woman called.

"Any news of my son?"

"No. The phone was for me, Mrs Harrison, but I'm sure you will hear something good soon."

Her son of eighteen had added several years to his age so as to join the Malay Regiment, officered by Europeans, and he was officially reported missing in Johore. He was a charming lad, and his mother was holding on, hoping against hope.

The all-clear whined up to a steady sustained note, then faded. The guests streamed out of the stuffy shelter.

"Hullo, Bobby," I said. A shy child smiled at me. What the devil was he still doing here, in a man's war? And women? And helpless civilians?

Mackenzie came over. A stubble of beard was clearly visible. "How's Samson to-night?" he asked. "You hold the house up and we will stay and watch."

"I'd rather stay in the house than in that death trap." I nodded towards the shelter. "One foot of earth. Pshaw! I want to hear the bomb that has my name on it. It isn't made, Mac, my lad. In scores of raids I haven't seen a single building laid flat by one bomb. Nobody seems to have noticed that pertinent fact."

"Who was phoning?"

"Guy Hutton. Suggests a dinner party to-morrow night at the New World."

When I saw Stephanie next day she said, "It will be a change having a run for our money," and so the dinner party was on.

I still thought that she was the sort of girl who had no right to talk intelligently and look helpless. Just twenty—in the tropics. Surely no honey blonde was so perfect. She cared not for herself, and combined the sweetness of a Cinderella with the magnetism of a Pompadour. Blond hair set off an oval face, the eyes enigmatic, faintly mocking, the complexion flawless. But here were modesty and a chastity that scorned the insubstantial emptiness of flirtation. Stephanie, stay like that!

Then Noel North telephoned unexpectedly. "Nothing definite so far about a job with the New Zealand unit," he said, "but I am getting somewhere."

"Thanks. Can you come to a dinner party to-morrow night?"

"As it so happens, I can," he said.

Guy Hutton was tall, fair and good looking. He had applied a long time before for active service with the R.A.F. and was fed up with waiting around. Next evening his car roared in through the Lodge gates. Then Noel turned up.

And now I introduced them to Stephanie, who had apparently been admired from afar by all the males of Singapore.

We rolled through the ghost-like streets. Guy turned to Stephanie. "A party with a girl in it——"

"Look out!" warned Mac. A huge military lorry roared past without lights, and we sucked in our breaths audibly.

Inky shadows were splashed over the road by the fickle moon, so black that one winced, thinking of parked lorries waiting for parachutists. Over at the naval base a rosy glow and dull detonations told of history in the making.

Feeling our way round the huge Cathay Building, we eventually crawled to the New World Cabaret, and ditched the car across a slit trench half filled with muddy water.

Guy turned a torrent of Malay on some nearby figures. They proved to be half-drunk Free French sailors who thought that the flaming onions bisecting the sky over at the naval base were Chinese crackers. Their eyes were incapable of focusing on a car straddled over a muddy hole.

"Food. I must have food," said Noel. I agreed. We were actually weak with hunger and left the car.

Now under a merciless, all-revealing moon, the city seemed dead. No lights. The revving up of motor transport always sounded, in these nervy, late days, like the siren's upward lift. "Which direction is home?" asked Stephanie, as we stood outside the huge cabaret building, wondering where the next bombs would be likely to land. Bombers could slip over in a matter of seconds and the dull "crump" of bombs could—and did—beat the siren.

The atmosphere of the cabaret was like the regions of the damned. No air conditioning now! A thick bluish cloud of smoke fought the huge electric lights. All windows were blacked-out. The heat smothered me and I was soon sodden with sweat, even in khaki shorts and shirt. Taxi-dancers, soldiers, Asiatics—hundreds of them—filled the floor. Chinese boys, obsequious, aloof, inscrutable, slippered round with trays of drinks. Here was light, here was excitement, here was blessed relaxation, here was food in satisfying quantities. Not whoopee, just a letting-go. For death stabbed from the sky and this was the end of January 1942.

No siren would be heard here, but the all-seeing eyes of the East are on the job twenty-four hours a day. In any case, one bomb through the thin iron roof would soon clear that cigarette smoke.

As we threaded our way past the tables, Guy whispered in my ear, "See you later." He joined a taxi-dancer and

immediately plunged into animated conversation. We pushed our way into a corner at the bar.

"Cold beer?" No. So we had high-balls. I glanced at Stephanie, who looked perfectly cool and poised in a shark-skin costume. She liked to listen and observe. One of her mannerisms was to treat everybody, including me, as if she had just been introduced. A defensive shyness, but it took some detecting. She was enjoying herself immensely to-night.

We danced, then ordered Chinese makkan. We were all hungry. Frightened boys will not cook, nobody is allowed to buy more than two tins of food at a time, and shopping is restricted on account of air raids. I had lost a stone and a half already. Mac was so lean he looked like a death's head when he smiled. Noel was eminently fit, but then he had army rations.

I drifted over to Guy.

"Meet Anita," he said.

So this was the famous Anita.

"He thinks I'm clever," she said. "And I am just a poor little taxi-dancer."

"Did you ever see such a leg?" marvelled Guy.

"Stop it." Anita pulled her short shorts down half an inch. "Nice moon to-night?"

"Come outside and see," said Guy.

Anita snapped her black eyes at me. She was one of those tremendously vital persons, with inexhaustible energy. About twenty-five, with all the trimmings, and dressed in possibly one ounce of clothing.

"I am a virgin," she claimed.

Her eyes twinkled as we strolled back to the bar. "That girl is inaccessible," Guy said. "Strange, isn't it? She's had all the offers in the world, but she just won't play. What a movie star she would make! And she dances like a faun."

The restaurant was in a room apart from the cabaret and small oil lamps on the tables were the only lighting.

They gave a heightened effect to the scene. I studied the tables near by. The comparatively few Europeans were in khaki. In the bright smoky light the most inconsequential glance seemed invested with a diabolical meaning, and the flashing eyes and teeth of the reclining taxi-dancers implied all the vice in the world. How different was this from my last visit in pre-war days, when the music was muted, the dancers like marionettes and the air caressingly cool, air conditioned. The tempo had quickened, but the basis, the almighty dollar, still ruled. Life had not yet been placed first in the list of values.

We talked of everything but the war. Was not Singapore impregnable?

A steaming dish of shark-fin soup was placed in front of us. We filled our porcelain bowls. Dishes of rice, fish, sucking pig and duck were then set out in delectable array and we were just about to commence when a small Chinese boy raced past us, eyes distended. We froze, and listened. Above the noise of the cabaret rose a low growling mutter. The sound crept into every corner; then we suddenly became conscious that we could no longer hear the band. Pandemonium broke loose. Everybody except us stampeded for the exits. I looked around for other Europeans, but could see none.

Guy had an idea. "Where did that kid come from?" We had our torches—who didn't these nights?—and quickly made our way out past stinking drains and kitchen offal.

Cool, sweet air enveloped us. It was like coming out of a Turkish bath. At the moment, no noise. But our eyes couldn't see for a while. Then we saw that stabbing search-lights held in their beams half a dozen bombers. They were heading our way.

With one accord we dashed for our car and the slit trench. No sense in being caught by bombs, flying sheet iron, or fire. People cannoned into us. I don't believe any one panicked.

"Whoosh! Crump!" A red glare sprang up a few blocks away and I had the horrible certainty that bombs were whistling straight towards us at that very moment. We raced madly over the ground. Sliding into the trench I managed to push Stephanie under the car, where she partly had her weight on me.

"Who-oo-sh! Crump!" A surging, spattering, hissing sound filled my ears, then there was a great quiet. I swore gently but with intensity. Why should filthy, smelly mud crawl up my thighs just like that? Ugh! Around my waist, too. I heard a strange sound and felt a heaving motion from Stephanie. Good God! Was she hurt? What had happened to my voice? I smeared away mud—thought it was brains at first—choked, and listened again. Somebody behind me was gasping. And, believe it or not, Stephanie was giggling. The ludicrousness of the position caught her for about one minute. I then found out that Mac, behind me, had hit the mud head first and lost his false teeth. Poor chap, he nearly choked to death. Guy and Noel were not far away, strangely enough, with Anita, who was proving how hard-boiled she was by weeping bitterly.

The bomb had landed a hundred yards away. Nobody was hurt, but the side of the New World was blown in and our delectable dinner wasted. The hissing sound was explained by the deflated spare tyre. Several splinters had pierced the back of the car and smashed the windscreen. And none of us heard this happen. Funny thing, blast—I have known it to strip one man of his clothing and raise another to his feet, unharmed. On the other hand, I have seen—but let us skip that!

There was only one thing to do—go home. The local wardens were coping with the wreckage. I felt in the grip of a curious inertia—we all did—but we pulled the car out and set off without a word.

On the way, nobody thought to look at that ominous

glow in the north-west, nor listen to those rumbling reverberations.

"What made you laugh, Stephanie," I asked later.

"You," she said. "The sucking noise you made in the trench—I could feel you going right into the mud—your swearing too. After all your lectures on keeping cool." In the moonlight, I saw tears on her cheek.

The evil genius of Singapore flared with bitter expression over the retirement from service of Mr S. W. Jones, the Colonial Secretary. A bewildered person such as myself did not know what was behind most of the mouthings of the Press; it was apparently considered fit and proper to make statements without giving reasons therefor. Mr S. W. Jones had completed a lengthy period of service and his place was filled by Mr Hugh Fraser, Secretary to the Federal Government. The editorial is given hereunder:

We received yesterday an official communiqué announcing the appointment of Mr H. Fraser to act as Colonial Secretary, S.S., in place of Mr S. W. Jones who has left for the United Kingdom. Accompanying the communiqué was a long eulogy of Mr Jones, publication of which would have required at least a column of space in the *Straits Times*. The article was prepared by the Acting Director-General of Information and Publicity, Malaya. We did not suppress it because of any shortage of space. We did so because publication would have involved a degree of hypocrisy to which we are not prepared to descend. People who will regret the departure of Mr Jones are remarkably few. For ourselves, we are prepared to state quite frankly that we have been hoping for it for some time past and we welcome it warmly. The only thing we regret is the departure to the United Kingdom. In the article from the Department of Information and Publicity there is an indication that Mr Jones did not leave this country of his own free will. That we accept unreservedly.

The next day one of Singapore's leading citizens wrote a spirited protest against this attack.

After a day at the office—which included rapid marching in time to that ever-popular number "Wailing Winnie" and the stomach's oscillating wind-up to the shattering crump of bursting bombs, my telephone rang.

"Come out to the swimming club," said a voice. "We have just been bombed, so you will be quite safe."

"But I have no car."

"Get a taxi."

The swimming club was some miles out. So, having told the Sikh jaga to get a taxi, I settled the fare in advance, tipped the jaga, and set forth.

My clothes were dirty with stomach-pressing on concrete floors caressed by Asiatic feet, and my knees were reminiscent of Rugger days. But I was not unhappy, and the kaleidoscope of Asiatic life and its pungent odours actually seemed to refresh me.

The brown hands and feet of my chauffeur circled, pounded and danced like a musician playing a Christie organ. The car swerved like a successful bomb dodger and skidded, shuddered and snaked through the traffic with a celerity and deftness that appalled me. Then in the back of the car I noticed some rusty holes made by machine-gunning and I lay back and laughed. The brown eyes of the Indian gleamed at me through the mirror with inquiring seriousness. "These tuans are incomprehensible," his look seemed to say. That laughter was as good as a massage.

The road past the Seaview airport was barred by the military, and a detour was necessary. Then bomb craters made an appearance. One in particular made me blink. It was fully twelve feet deep and at least fifteen feet across. All the houses in this area had been evacuated for some weeks. Two bombs had burst just in front of one two-storied house, which gaped drunkenly, with shutters askew and tiles ripped off—but it stood. Farther down the road was a small bomb dent in the tar macadam. Forty yards away a car was overturned. Trees were stripped of branches. Blast thrives on a hard surface. Next to the swimming club was an anti-aircraft battery and one of four guns had been overturned by a direct hit.

Slipping through the sandbagged entrance, I signed a chit for a costume. The sandbags slightly amused me, when

the swimming pool was open to the heavens, but as with most things in Malaya, there was a good reason when you looked for it. My friends were waiting for me. I listened to a patter of optimism.

Perhaps a mile out at sea an oil tanker was burning. Flames were soaring hundreds of feet up into the sky. Somehow it seemed an ordinary sight. The sea about the vessel also appeared to be on fire. "No survivors," I was told. The black smoke spurted redly as it doubled and twisted upwards and ever upwards to join that pall above, fed from the naval base fifteen miles away.

An hour before, the Japs had come over. "See, that canvas awning has been ripped. The chair you are sitting on is scarred with shell splinters. A bomb landed twenty yards away from here, blew the barbed wire off the beach. See these bomb fragments?"

Like a group of doctors reverently examining prehistoric aids to surgery, we peered at those razor-sharp, jagged pieces of shell, and fingered them carefully. The iron seemed to have been tempered in such a way that an explosion ripped it apart in a slanting fashion. So when you hear a bomb coming, lie flat and stay flat! I wish I had a nice murderous piece in front of me as I write—my pen would be inspired to dramatize the peace-time story of two deposits of iron. First, the agglomeration of steel buried in the Singapore naval base, and secondly, the deposits a few miles away in Johore, from which the Japanese were taking away 1,500,000 tons every year for the glory of Nippon.

This was my second bathe at the Singapore swimming club, and I thought ironically of my first swim some eighteen months before, when an orchestra played delightful music on a dais, and hundreds of swimmers spent the whole day eating, drinking and generally enjoying themselves. Everybody who was anybody in Singapore was a member—or should that be put the other way round?

A party of war correspondents shared the pool with us. They represented papers all over the world. Now that is a job I should like. Just fancy crawling on your stomach into the front line and yelling into the ear of an active machine-gunner, "What are your impressions of the Malayan climate?" or "Have you got Singapore foot?" Then it would be fun asking a general whether he had studied the influence of Japanese morals on the growth of manpower, or the history of the Japanese in Malaya. The Japanese have a terrific advantage over us. Their generals have acted as hairdressers and as masseurs in Malaya for many years. They have stretched the European throat, caressed it with a razor and hissed pleasantly the while. They have kneaded the European paunch and pummelled the European buttocks, still hissing. What a field for inquiry by the foreign correspondent! What a field for investigation by the military psychologist and the Hairdressers' Union!

On 29 January the papers published the copy of a cable received from London, reading, "Wild and irresponsible criticisms of Malaya's community, branded as 'whisky-swilling planters, unpatriotic business nabobs and blimpish officials', died away shamefacedly as cables were received in London of news regarding Singapore's calm courage." But we in Singapore were not worrying about what London thought of us. Our anxious thoughts were focused on Johore, where, for forty-eight hours, there had been an ominous lull in news of the fighting.

Noel telephoned me. "I cannot tell you anything yet about joining up," he said. "Leave it to me. Will phone you next week. That is all I can say."

Which I interpreted to mean that his unit was busy transferring to the island.

On 30 January our deadened minds received the news that the Japanese were eighteen miles from Singapore island. An editorial in the *Straits Times* stressed the need

of slit trenches. A military curfew was enforced in Singapore from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. From London we had comment on control in Singapore, stressing that there were four types: (i) the Governor, (ii) G.O.C. troops, (iii) independent naval and air commanders, and (iv) a minister from London.

Nine raids shuttled us back and forth that day like mice in and out of holes, with a huge Japanese cat striding above us, paw lifted to strike. I believe I can control myself as well as most but at one stage I quickly ran the gamut of surprise, exasperation and amusement. The alert made me scuttle out of the office and I was giving a good imitation of a man rushing to keep an appointment with his wife when the all-clear sounded in another part of the town. Pausing with one foot in mid-air like a good retriever, I spun on my heel and retraced some twenty steps. Then up and down went Wailing Winnie, turning me about again; and no sooner had I turned than her wail trailed off into the high sustained note of the all-clear.

"Huh," thought I contemptuously, still standing in the middle of the crossroads, and bombs began to explode half a mile away. Both my feet left the ground at once, but my body stayed still. I tried again. Same result. My mind had telegraphed full speed astern to my legs but my body thought I was going ahead. Then ack-ack whistled up, and like a homing pigeon, I did a complete circle and headed for shelter. The pity of it was that I did my heel-tapping tango in a deserted square to a deserted city. I wrote to my mother that day and reassured her as follows:

Up to yesterday this was a very simple war. When the siren wailed you took shelter. It has been a comfort to be in the air-raid shelters and hear the bombs bursting. The all-clear was a sort of luncheon gong and one ate with celerity and safety. System is a great thing. But to-day even the fifth columnist must be puzzled because the alert, the all-clear, bombs and ack-ack are all going at once. I will probably finish up by sitting out in the road, toying with bomb splinters and thinking they are devilled kidneys.

The answer, of course, was a simple one. It had become increasingly obvious to the authorities that a raid confined to, say, the harbour should not paralyse the whole city. Many large buildings now had roof spotters. One large concern employed six hundred men on hourly rates, and the Asiatic employees preferred to "rest" half the day in the shelters. This was not only costly to the company but damaging to the war effort.

I heard a story of one spotter who stayed at his post five stories up when a carpet of bombs was dropped. His roof was hit simultaneously by four bombs. He was found unconscious on the road, but unhurt. "Fainted from sheer excitement," I was told.

One incident stands out sharply in my mind. I found that one of my car tyres was flat. I left the wheel at the Chinese "Kwikpatch" repair shop in Tank Road, but unfortunately the owner had shut up his shop and disappeared into some vacant land equi-distant from the naval base, Seletar, Changi and the harbour. Day after day I called and hammered at the locked door, then, in desperation, I asked an elderly Indian chemist next door if he could assist me. Taking my telephone number, he later not only obtained my spare wheel but paid the thirty cents charge. The Indian was educated and cultured. Obviously I could not tip him. I paid the cost of the repair and thanked him. With a gentle smile, he said, "This is the time to help each other." I can still see those quiet serene eyes, the high intellectual head and modest demeanour.

Every other night I met evacuee women from the mainland. The heart-rending stories were always the same. Their husbands were somewhere in the fighting forces and they did not want to leave without them. Nobody knew when steamers were leaving. The harbour seemed always full of ships. People would vanish overnight from hotels and houses. It seemed a phantom world. Police activities

appeared to be suspended. A thousand murders could have been committed.

On a number of mornings—from seven o'clock—I took various women down to the docks in an endeavour to secure passages for them. Each morning the bombers came over and we sheltered as best we could, sometimes in Hume concrete pipes. These trips depressed me, for on each occasion I saw military personnel strolling on to ships, batmen carrying luggage, and I even saw golf clubs and tennis rackets. Such simple things I found infuriating. A strenuous hour with heavy suitcases before breakfast caught me at a low moment, but it was tough seeing military and R.A.F. headquarters packing up and sailing away. Naturally, the news soon sped round the city, and the prospects of being interned loomed ever closer.

It was tacitly understood that the R.A.F. could not operate from an island which even now was accessible to artillery fire from the mainland and would shortly be the object of an all-out attack by land, sea and air. We were told nothing. The shipping offices were still besieged daily by hundreds of women asking for passages. As I have stressed, each person was preoccupied with his or her personal problem. If you had no petrol, nobody could give you any. Once I was walking home from the bus and an old man stopped me. He was hysterical. "I have waited six weeks for a ship and was to have been on board two hours ago," he raved, "and I cannot get a taxi."

"Telephone."

"There are no cars available."

This was my fourth successive day of little food or sleep. Had my own passage been at stake I could not have walked several miles for a taxi. I was fagged out. I advised him to wait in the street and tip a driver ten dollars. I never saw him again, but he caught his boat, so I was told.

Several European women asked me to help them to take some heavy suitcases to the docks. Transport lorries could

not be had for love or money. Would you have refused? I telephoned the office to say that I would be in later. Then commenced a hectic rush which would have seemed easier if I had not been so tired. At the docks fires were still smouldering, and bomb blast everywhere testified to the fury of the Japanese attack. A hospital ship had had a near miss. Putting my friends on board, I had to do some urgent business for them at the bank, where I pushed a tedious way through a crowd of Asiatics. It was ten o'clock when I appeared at the office. My reception was amusing. The Deputy Collector-General looked at me as if it were strange that I had come to the office at all, and pointed out that he had had to take an interview from a man who was entitled to a refund of tax totalling $6.85 (say, 16s.). Also, that he was tired of looking for me at my desk, and would I observe precise office hours in future? For once, I hit back. "Will government allow me to find military duties, or do you require me at the office?" I demanded. "I have been helping to protect human lives, and I propose to continue to do so at all times. Human life means more to me than a refund of 16s."

The shops were still open, government and commercial houses were active, but the city seemed to be like a ship without a rudder, with the engines still driving her towards an unknown port. I scoured the shops for a stout pair of shoes, strong enough to carry me hundreds of miles. If the Japanese *did* succeed in taking Singapore, I was determined to make a break for liberty, even if the sea exit was closed. Not for me the rigours of a concentration camp, or working for a Japanese overlord.

The military position in Johore was reaching an anti-climax. Undoubtedly, the Japanese expected us to contest every inch of those last few miles. One of the fears which beset Singapore during January was the possibility of an enemy landing on the island itself when our military strength was engaged on the mainland.

It appeared that the Australians had held the line at Mersing until the last, and their troops had even infiltrated in turn, taking a leaf from the Japanese. A large number were then encircled but fought their way back with surprisingly few losses. Japanese infiltrations continued down the west coast, where they maintained greatest pressure.

The sudden retreat to the island stunned us all. At one moment we seemed to be solidly entrenched across Johore, and the next we had evacuated a depth of forty miles. Our last toehold on the mainland had vanished.

There was no time to ask why we could not hold the Japanese. Events to come dominated our thoughts. But amid the welter of confusion, retreat and demolition, one incident shines in sparkling relief:

Early on Saturday morning, 30 January, the skirl of pipes rent the air over the Johore causeway. All our troops had crossed except the gallant remnants of two famous Highland regiments.

First came the Gordons, to the stirring strains of their regimental march past, the "Cock o' the North".

Then the Argylls—first in action on the border—who were the last to leave the mainland. Can you not see them, haggard and exhausted, but with shoulders squared, the unquenchable spirit of a courageous race gleaming in their eyes? Can you not hear the defiant skirl of the pipes, epilogue to victorious retreat and prelude to the siege of Singapore? Less than 20 per cent of the Argylls remained, but they marched into Singapore like conquering heroes. For fifty-three days they had fought an epic retreat for over five hundred miles. And while the triumphant notes of "Blue Bonnets" and "Jenny's Black Eye" skirled among the giant coco-nut palms and shrilled stirringly over the blue waters of Johore Strait, demolition squads made final preparations to *breach* the causeway.

At eight o'clock that morning, terrific explosions rocked

Singapore island. The causeway was severed, but, alas, the yawning headlands of the mainland still more than half encircled the island. Yellow fangs would sprout from these menacing jaws in an endeavour to crush this island stronghold.

On 31 January Lieutenant-General A. E. Percival, G.O.C. Malaya, issued the following message:

"The Battle of Malaya has come to an end and the Battle of Singapore has started. For nearly two months our troops have fought an enemy on the mainland who has had the great advantage of air superiority and considerable freedom of movement by sea . . . our task is to hold this fortress . . . any enemy who sets foot in our fortress must be dealt with immediately. There must be no more loose talk and rumour mongering. Our duty is clear. With firm resolve and fixed determination, we shall win through."

Still-born fortress! Demolished naval base!

CHAPTER XXIII

ESCAPE

(1-6 February 1942)

Besieged!

The Battle of Malaya was lost, the Battle of Singapore about to begin. All beaches were manned. Feverish last-minute preparations were made. Work was commenced on trenches.

Military transport hurtled through the streets. People scurried everywhere. Cars swarmed. Streams of natives thronged the footwalks. An added tempo could be felt, a sort of exultant defensiveness. Everybody was abstracted, curt, uncommunicative. Lips smiled, words tumbled out, but eyes were bleak, belligerent, telling of mental torment. Our bodies rose, clothed themselves, fed automatically.

I rose at five on 1 February, which was a Sunday. The brooding dark was pierced by orange fires flickering in the west. After drinking iced water from a thermos, I shaved in the dark, washed and dressed. Getting dressed was simple. When retiring for the night I placed my shoes on the floor with a stocking in the heel of each shoe. Then I placed my shorts for the next day on a chair with underclothes and shirt.

The curfew ceased at five each morning and at the quarter past, I motored to some friends to help them to the docks. The dawn was breaking as we sped towards the harbour. Angry, saffron-coloured, the sun pierced the black smoke pall above. It almost seemed as if the hopes of

frustrated mankind were being consumed in a devouring holocaust, so that puny man could surrender reason and live as animals do.

We spoke little. We had already said good-bye. At the harbour we ditched ourselves in a bomb crater and laughed. A difficulty that could be realized and rectified was sheer delight. Other cars rolled up. People looked drawn and haggard in the pearly grey light.

The boat was a small one. The effect of seeing a steamer about to leave was always peculiar. The air of hush hush about these sailings made me feel like an unbidden guest at a party. The luxury of travel—or was it escape?—was denied to me. I looked curiously at civilian men walking nonchalantly up the gangway. Neither envy nor resentment was in my heart now—just a blank curiosity. Women gossiped. I noticed that the cool class distinction of Malaya was still alive. All these masks were human, yet the warmth of understanding was withheld. I saw the personnel of the Malayan Broadcasting Corporation stepping off Malayan soil. Officers, batmen with baggage. I experienced a feeling of desolation.

The calm scene on the wharf might have been that of a subdued picnic party. The war seemed a thousand miles away and the sun kissed all caressingly as it climbed into a pearly sky.

Time dragged on. My stomach shouted in protest. The bombers dropped their visiting cards here every day. My knowledge of the docks was scanty, and whenever I drove down I invariably boxed myself. I recalled the story of the Asiatics down at the harbour who rushed to the shelter of a building. A bomb scored a hit and oil drums showered them with burning oil.

My friends were going on board. "Good-bye," I said, "good luck."

"Good luck to you. And thanks for taking care of the car."

That wooden feeling! I grimaced in what was meant to be a smile. My friends wanted me to take care of their car. Malay syces had been known to disappear with them.

With a snarl, the car swung away from the danger area. As I topped a rise, I saw natives running into ditches. An alert was on, although I could not hear anything in my glass case. Gritting my teeth, I drove fast through empty streets. Then I saw a woman sitting on a suitcase. I skidded past, stopped, and reversed.

"What are you doing here?" I demanded.

"Going to Colombo," she replied, wryly.

I liked her smile and steady eyes. "Listen," I said. A faint growl came to our ears. We stared. Clouds were wisping across the sky. Then the engine drone disappeared.

"My taxi has not come," she explained.

Her coolness was refreshing. Instead of racing round in a frenzy, she just sat. It was almost unbelievable. I laughed and piled her bags into my car.

Racing back, I threaded my way about the deserted streets. Everybody was underground. I remembered stories of ships that had cast off precipitately, of passengers left behind. She was not leaving on the same boat as my friends, who were going to Java.

Quickly, she told me her story. "My husband and I lived on a rubber estate near Kuala Selangor," she said. "He was mobilized and I have not seen or heard of him since. On the morning that I left the estate, I had no idea that the Japanese were nearer than seventy miles. They made a surprise landing on the coast fifteen miles away, and the road from the estate ran towards the sea. I was warned by telephone and given twenty minutes to take *one* suitcase and leave by car. The servants had just tidied the house. Everything was spick and span. I did not know what to pack. I was paralysed. Family pictures were left, and the treasures of fifteen years in Malaya. Somehow I threw a few things into a case. I forgot insurance policies, share

scrip and my cheque book. As I left I told the servants to take anything they wanted. My last memory is their waving to me as the syce drove away. Since then I have been doing M.A.S. and canteen work."

I was silent, distrusting my voice. Her ship was found. As I bade her good-bye, I asked how she was placed for money.

"My husband's company has an office in Colombo," she said. "They will look after me."

The European women in Malaya deserve the highest praise for their war work. At least 90 per cent were actively engaged in an auxiliary service of some kind. But with their nice sense of social values and their rare ability in entertaining distinguished visitors, they incurred regrettable, yet understandable, criticism.

Arriving back at Lloyd Lodge, I found that I had no appetite. Looking around it seemed that there were only a few of us left. We had given up asking for absentees. A shrug intimated a ship. Careless words cost lives. "Good luck, people," I thought. Several times after I had taken friends down to a boat, I had seen an ominous pencil of smoke mounting the heavens from over the horizon, to haunt my dreams.

I delivered the car belonging to my friends to a specified garage. Looking over my own car I found that I had about a cupful of petrol left, and telephoned the petrol controller. When waiting for the connexion I reflected that this, my fourth Sunday in Singapore, was very different from my first one. I asked for two gallons.

"Impossible. Government wants cars. Take yours out to Newton Cross for valuation."

So I motored out to Newton Cross, which was surrounded by wide grass fields. About two hundred empty cars of all kinds lay in a paddock, as if left by mourners at a funeral. I found a European at a desk in a tin shed. Blue eyes gleamed whimsically. A cigarette hung from a lower lip.

Most of his front teeth were missing. The fierce sun sent waves of headache pulsating through my brain.

"A Morris Ten," I informed him. He looked it over. Tested the compression. He listened carefully to engine revs and I was handed a chit. I walked up to Monk's school to pick up a cheque, but was not asked for driving licence or registration papers, for which I was thankful. They were lost in Kuala Lumpur. Chinese clerks worked expeditiously. I moved in a queue, to a European making out cheques. A military officer was just ahead of me. He was asked: "Suppose government buys your car, will the military commandeer it back?"

Astonished protests.

"It has happened," said the European drily.

The alert wailed. Most people vanished. I sat on the floor, not caring. Through open shutters I could see the bombers and watched them unwinkingly. Bombs dropped about a mile away. "More Asiatics blasted," I thought. The slogan Asia for the Asiatics was a mockery. Asiatic was killing Asiatic, deliberately, wantonly. The all-clear sounded. Those who had sheltered reappeared, some smiling.

I was given a cheque for $800. Then I discovered that I had to walk back to town.

Heat struck from the sky, shimmered up from the tar macadam. Cars rushed by. I tried to hitch hike, but my outflung arm was ignored. Drivers probably feared I was an officer and wanted to commandeer. My eye was caught by a fluttering white object about two hundred feet up; I saw another, then scores—pamphlets. A Malay policeman rushed past me, chasing one. He pivoted and leaped like a ballet dancer. Triumphantly he clasped the fluttering sheet with both hands. He eyed me suspiciously as I approached, but let me have a look. Nippon said, "Why does the British soldier submit to the intolerable torture

of the malarial mosquito merely to pamper the British aristocrat?"

Well, well!

The plane, I found out afterwards, had flown over so high as to be out of sight and sound.

The time was ten o'clock. "Little by little," I said to myself, "you are losing your freedom of action. The curfew is on. Your friends who are mobilized are under the control of the military and will be evacuated first. Others are leaving every day. You have lost your car. Taxis are unprocurable. Walking to the docks would take you an hour at least. You have now lost thirty pounds in weight. But you are lucky. Things could be much, much worse. You have your health, a voracious appetite, an inquiring mind, and —you can swim——"

A bus came along. Gratefully I took a seat. A cheerful Tamil conductor collected six cents. The city was about three miles away. More pamphlets eddied down. Grinning, gesticulating natives raced and tumbled in childish glee, gathering in excited groups. It was against the law to retain pamphlets. A Malay police sergeant in the bus apparently considered it beyond his control when dozens of pamphlets could be seen flashing whitely against the blue sky. He did nothing, and avoided my questioning glance.

But I was in the wrong bus. An unfamiliar canal appeared. I was in the heart of Chinatown. The vehicle ran into an old corrugated iron depot. I was stranded. Then the alert wailed. Chinese ran everywhere. At a loss, I stood like a fool. The noise of the bomber engines growled down to me, getting louder and louder. Shuddering, I jumped into a filthy ditch, cowering just above a vile-smelling stream containing slops and God knows what else. A few yards away, about ten Chinese stared unwinkingly at me from under a bridge. They were of the coolie class. The men wore dirty shorts only and the women black trousers and jacket. One woman held her long plaited

hair from falling into the stream. The bombers were high. Sunlight flashed from their silver bodies. They had a macabre beauty. A stutter of machine-gun fire drifted to me. Was that the signal to drop bombs? I waited. If blast stunned me I would drown in this filthy mess. My wallet would be looted. Contrary to regulations, I was not wearing my identification disk. Umph! But was I entitled to any better shelter than these poor coolies?

Shattering reverberations surged from the direction of Seaview. Stiffly I got out. The Chinese smiled at me. I made my way along streets smothered with indescribable hovels. Tens of thousands of Chinese were clustered here. Dirt, squalor, overcrowding was their portion and their choice. The Chinese communal life has to be seen to be believed and their capacity for happiness is incredible.

Emerging into a broad thoroughfare I saw a European being driven slowly along in a baby car. He was standing on the seat, long body thrust through the sunshine roof, and was peering anxiously at the sky. Obviously he was intent on getting hold of the latest pamphlet. Whether it was his immaculate whiteness, disproportionate height, or complete disregard of direction, I do not know, but I roared with laughter. Still chuckling, I looked for beer. But the Chinese restaurants had warm orangeade only. Gathering my reserves of strength, I clumped another two miles to my digs. Sweat poured into my eyes. I thought of many walks and climbs among the virginal snows and peaks of my beloved New Zealand mountains.

Smoke billowed from fires. Detonations shook the island. Dissolution was in the very air.

The house was quiet in the noonday heat. I dragged my mud-caked feet up the stairs, to find two letters awaiting me. Judge of my surprise when one informed me that a car had been left for my use by friends, with three gallons of petrol. Cheers!

But the other note! Stephanie had gone. But—but surely

I was having tea with her that very afternoon! She had expected to sail on the morrow. I was dazed. Life was speeding and desperation was striking into the heart of Singapore. Days were condensed into precious minutes, yet seconds seemed like hours. I read and re-read the short note.

I called to say good-bye. We go to Batavia. We were given one hour to be at Clifford Pier. You were out. My heart is so full to overflowing that I cannot express myself. My feelings are numbed. May God guard and protect you and all those left behind. Whatever happens I will remember. With love from Stephanie.

Simple, artless, the heartfelt cry of distress stripped of subtlety affected me deeply. I visualized a golden head bent perplexedly over a sheet of paper. So Stephanie was launched on the great adventure. The seas were no more safe than this bomb-blasted island, and yet she thought only of those who could not get away. Even as I read I heard bomb explosions from the direction of the harbour.

Afterwards I learned that Stephanie was on a cattle ship that lay out in the roads all day. She watched fires burning in Singapore. The ship left at dusk. She had not been cleaned, and some cattle were still on board. More than six hundred passengers slept on the decks, some near the pens, and ate their own food. There were two lavatories only. One woman was awakened one morning by the rough tongue of a cow licking her bare feet. Huge soft white worms which lived on dung crept everywhere, even on to one's face at night. . . .

Just before tiffin, I had a talk with Charlie Wilson, my host.

"Everybody is leaving, it seems," I said. "I speak to people and they say 'I do not know' to everything."

"Yes," he replied. "Over the last few weeks I have seen scores of people come and go in my house. My life's savings are here. If I could get away I would be a penniless refugee. Are you going?"

"I have no idea. I am still under contract with government but I am expecting to take up military duties any day. It is so difficult," I confessed. "I was going into the Observer Corps in Johore, but that was washed up and, besides, I wanted something more active than lying on my back in the jungle watching the sky. I wish somebody would come along and give me definite orders."

Never had I felt so lonely.

The gong went and I descended to find a beef curry on the menu, then gula malacca. I toyed with my food and went upstairs to sleep. I dreamed I was swimming for my life in a turbulent sea. Raging surf beat me down with white fury but I fought myself upwards, ever upwards, and exultation possessed me.

At four-thirty I bathed in a minimum of water, then drank innumerable cups of tea and watched two Hurricanes flying about. Strangely, there had been no raids since midday. Then Mac burst into the room.

"Hullo," he said. "I am going."

"When?"

"Right now." He flung a few possessions into two bags. "Been waiting for a passage since last November. Up at the P. and O. office all day." He was excited. "Good-bye," he said, turning to face me.

We shook hands. "Cheerio Mac," I said, "and good luck. Where are you going?"

"Colombo." He flung the name over his shoulder as he burst through the swing doors.

I looked at the litter of papers, old neckties, and discarded clothing on the floor. There was an old magazine with the photograph of an eminent person and the caption, "Impregnability of Singapore a bulwark of Empire." Hell! I pulled myself together and walked out to the balcony.

Mac had had an anxious time. Employed in Hongkong, his contract expired just before hostilities commenced.

Arriving in Singapore, his steamer had been diverted and he had to cool his heels during the whole of the Malayan campaign.

Voices drifted up to me. "Look after yourself, dear." Murmured replies. So the Hastings were going. And the Greenwoods. So they should. They had children.

The funnel of smoke still writhed from the naval base. I watched a dream of empire dissolving. A distant rain squall was sweeping across the heavens. The smoke pall stirred restlessly, was shredded in places, and sullenly reformed again. Shuddering explosions of demolition continued regularly like the tolling of doom.

My eye was distracted by a fluttering blur near by. Two homely sparrows alighting on a wireless aerial chirped cheerily and fluffed themselves. I am sure they were lovers. Their nonsensical preening and watchful indifference held my attention for a moment.

Horry and Horricks appeared. I could have kissed them. We sat and talked. "Where are the tin miners in the room next to mine?" I asked.

"Left three days ago."

Again I felt a surging sense of desolation. I poured myself a stengah, my first for a week. "A toast," I declared. "Here is to Java. May it hold out longer than Singapore." My friends looked at me in surprise. This was unusual for me. Tins of salmon were produced. They ate. I refused. Resolutely I pushed away my feelings of gloom and disaster. There were still a million people on this island—I was not alone. But it interested me to realize that there was absolutely no fear in my mind for the future, rather an eagerness to learn the worst.

Some time over the last forty-eight hours, the cherished hopes of aeroplane support had died for ever. But optimism remained. Nothing but optimism, I reflected bitterly. But were not those newly arrived transports in the harbour?

Two stengahs were enough to make we wuzzy, even when sipped. What a confession for a Malayan!

Horry propounded a puzzle.

"What is the difference between a Japanese hairdresser and a Japanese general?"

I pondered. "None."

"Use your artistic perception," Horry growled.

"The bombing on Pearl Harbour," I said brightly.

"No. The hairdresser used a brush full of suds and the general a jungle full of thugs."

Considerable enemy activity was reported from Johore. Our guns were in action. But the naval base was not being used. Where it was hidden by the mainland, the Japanese could blast it to pieces—if they wanted to. Three airfields on the island could not be used, since they were within range of the enemy's guns.

That night the alert wailed and as I sheltered in my lime-dust cellar I stared into the velvet blackness and thought while the bombs burst. Singapore island was twenty-six miles by fourteen. Its length lay along the tip of the mainland. Soon there would be shelling, plenty of it. Where were our heavy guns? "Facing the sea," said informed opinion, "and they cannot be turned around." Later, when the all-clear sounded, and while fresh fires were blazing in the city, I looked up Mr Roland Braddell's book *The Lights of Singapore*, published in 1934. Concerning the guns guarding the island, I take the liberty of quoting Mr Braddell on p. 66:

> The defence of Singapore has caused England much perturbation from time to time. In the 'fifties there was a thorough overhaul of these defences, with the result that Government House was removed in 1859 and the Hill was converted into Fort Canning. The top of it was levelled off and seven 68-pounders were put in position *facing the sea.*

The italics are mine.

The outside world had meant nothing to Singapore for weeks now.

On Monday at breakfast there were empty chairs all around me. The boy told me that my ration of butter was finished. I stormed. Here was I carefully apportioning my four ounces over seven days. The servants had thought I was leaving and there was a racket on butter. I demanded the butter left by departed guests, to be met by shrugs and blank looks. So I ate one fried egg and dry toast.

On my way to the office I met Griffiths, who had joined the Malayan Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. "We are having a lot of fun," he said, "creeping up the coast at night as far as Batu Pahat and picking up troops who have been cut off. One thousand to date. Last time we saw the blessed Japs mounting guns but got away in time."

Griffiths had been a civilian until two weeks ago.

"How do you like being under orders?" I asked.

"Fine. Before, I never knew where I was. Now I wait for orders and do not worry."

He was based on the H.M.S. *Laburnum*, a small warship permanently moored in Telok Ayer basin. "You had a near miss the other day, so I am told," I queried.

He laughed. "Yes. Was shaving. Heard the bomb whistle and dropped. Splinters penetrated the sides of the ship as if they were cheese. One smashed my mirror to smithereens."

His beaming smile as we parted is my last memory of him.

It dawned on me belatedly that I was fortunate. We all wonder how we will behave in a bombing raid. To my relief, I found that I was not unduly afraid of bombs. The man who says he likes bombing is a damn fool or a liar, but when you have got to wait and take it, you become a fatalist. Many persons had said to me that under bombing

they were sure they would be paralysed with terror. I found that these people were invariably the coolest.

Yet, while physical hurt seemed to hold no terrors for me, possible internment by the Japanese caused my mind to revolt. To be confined under Japanese domination—that would be worse than death.

The Chinese make me wonder. Supposing Marco Polo had continued to live in China for hundreds of years, would he have been able to analyse the present behaviour of the Chinese in Singapore? I doubt it. Do they think that Singapore will fall? This morning the Japanese are mounting artillery along the coast of Johore Bharu. Soon shells will scream over. The city is within range. Any point can be pin-pricked. I thought of the huge sign that some wag had put up underneath the bomb-blasted clock on the Victoria Memorial Hall. "They can't stop our clock." Whereat Raymond, who worked with me, had said gloomily, "Why did they do that? They will come back and finish the job and us with it."

The shops were still open as usual. My everlasting wonder as to where so many people could be going increased. Was there an undercurrent of nervousness? I had the feeling that this teeming multitude was wholly incapable of visualizing immediate danger, let alone death. No matter how I puzzled, the answer eluded me. Fear was seldom *seen*. Panic simply did not exist. Bewilderment, yes. Excitement? Not even that. Yet, daily, death encompassed these people.

More and more burnt-out cars littered the roads. Blasted trees looked queer with bare, broken branches.

The morning paper explained that an "air umbrella" would be maintained over Singapore from Sumatra, and that the nearest base was two hundred miles distant. But Sumatra, I thought to myself, was inadequately defended. The oil fields there and a refinery costing eighty millions

sterling, would fall like a ripe durian into the claws of the Japanese. Our fighter pilots, outnumbered and bombed incessantly, were heroes, all of them.

A letter was awaiting me at the office—from air headquarters. In two short sentences I read that my application was not successful. I told the Deputy Collector-General. He said, "Why worry about a military job? We may want you here, to take over."

I reflected bitterly that I was no farther ahead than when I had fled from Kuala Lumpur. I was still under contract to the government. For all I knew, I might still get a job with the R.N.Z.A.F. as arranged, but government might now refuse to release me.

A few letters demanded my official attention. All minor matters. The addresses given had now changed. Replies would merely lie at the post office. I pictured a Volunteer calling eagerly at the post office for news of his lost wife—and being handed an income tax demand.

I spent an hour on the telephone, trying to locate the New Zealand air unit. "Communications have been bombed. Out of touch." So I sent an urgent telegram.

Singapore smarted under considerable air activity. Bombs from high-level and dive-bombers screamed at the human pygmies scuttling into shelters.

At eleven, the alert sounded again. Something warned me that I was foolish to attempt to get to the post office, but I thought that a letter might be waiting there for me. I was the only one to leave by the front entrance. The others invariably left by the rear exit on the short cut to the nearest shelter in the supreme court. Skirting round the base of the Raffles statue, I was horrified to see Japanese bombers coming straight towards me. I was plainly in view. Quickly I scrambled into the trench at the foot of the statue. Despite myself, my heart was going like a trip hammer. From where I crouched, I could see the outflung arm of Raffles silhouetted against the bombers as if in

protest against the desecration by the Japanese planes of the city he had founded. My ears quivered, listening for bombs. None came. After a minute, I contemplated a dash over the deserted square. Above me, the cream-coloured dingy mass of the Victoria Memorial Hall towered against the cerulean blue. Speeding clouds gave the illusion that the clock tower was falling over. Jumping out of the trench, I ventured out into the open. But over the tower, from the opposite direction, appeared more enemy planes. Again I ran back, feeling like a rabbit diving into a warren. The engine drone deepened, growled over, and was gone. I could feel the sweat trickling down my neck. Well, well. What was it to be? Cooked by the sun, squashed by Raffles's statue, or a bomb-dodging gallop over to the post office.

Again leaving the trench, I walked quickly over the square feeling as if I might be shot in the back. Nothing happened. I was swallowed by the huge protective mass of the post office, wondering at myself. There I cooled my heels for an hour until the all-clear sounded. I went to the evacuee letter counter, Kuala Lumpur section, "Any letters for me?"

"No."

And no bombs. What on earth was I worrying about!

At one o'clock I left the office, and walked the mile round to Raffles Square, passing the usual motley collection of Asiatics, Europeans and soldiers. No white women. Hundreds of cars were parked along the kerbs. Shops were open for business, most of them protected from blast. Some gaping walls told an eloquent story. Malay police were everywhere.

I had tiffin at Robinson's restaurant. Singapore observed two meatless days a week but to-day was not one of them. I had thin soup and a tiny meat dish that left me more hungry than before. Around me were Europeans, a few Eurasians, and many officers. Several dozen men were

enjoying beers in an adjacent lounge. People looked tired, but moderately cheerful. I saw Gilham-Brown, to whom I had owed five dollars for three months, and went over and paid him. I had not seen him since November. He was with Pape, a friend of golfing days in beautiful, lost Kuala Lumpur. We joked and chatted. Their wives had left several weeks before. Nobody asked "Is Singapore going to fall?" Nobody ever asked that.

At the office, during the afternoon, three men called to obtain income tax clearances, which, however, were not now required. They told me they had passages booked. I reflected that most civilians whom I had met over the last two weeks had now left the island.

That night Horry brought home a leaflet dropped that day. It was headed "EXTRA. The Yankees tender the olive branch." It suggested that Singapore should be proclaimed a neutral zone. This news purported to emanate from Lisbon, and added that America had proposed her separate peace negotiations to Nippon, on 14 January 1942. It was signed "The Nippon".

Rather a tame sequel to the threatened extinction of Singapore ten days previously!

During an air raid in the bright moonlight that evening, the Japanese thought they saw lines of military lorries and dropped bombs squarely on to a number of trolley buses used to transport poor Asiatics and stranded Europeans. We should have put a sign up, or perhaps borrowed a leaf from Nippon and dropped a plaintive message to the children of Tokyo, such as: "Please ask your daddy to come home while the sailing is good." It is a fact that one leaflet dropped earlier in Kuala Lumpur by the Japanese read: "Daddy, I am so lonely in Australia and you must be so hot in Malaya. Please come home." Yes, this must be total war!

The muttering of the guns hurling steel across the narrow Strait of Johore grew steadily in volume. The

maniacal frenzy of the Japanese beggared the imagination. The natives would be organized to move heavy guns. Artillery supremacy meant everything as a prelude to an all-out attack. Our guns pounded the breached causeway but the break in that solid roadway was lamentably small. The causeway was built of stone and cement, carried a railway line and a road twenty-six feet wide and, apart from the short bridge on the Johore side, had foundations in the bed of the shallow Strait.

Japanese bombers now came over at varying levels. My timing was often upset. A flight of nine would attract the eye, then planes would be seen several thousand feet higher. To our distress, the bombers could almost beat the alert, and the crash of falling bombs would drown the sound of our speeding feet. People *ran* from their desks as soon as the alert went. Motor traffic now stopped immediately instead of speeding to objectives. People became badly unsettled when rushing to a shelter.

I had to send a cable, but was informed at the post office that they were subject to heavy delay with a minimum of at least a week. Leaving the post office on my way to the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, I heard the alert and finished up in Boustead's air-raid shelter. Sitting on a sheet of newspaper with my back against the wall, I spent an interesting hour watching people. Crowd psychology, I noticed, afforded a "safety" feeling that was often fictitious. A European came over to me and confided that if he were caught alone in an air raid he suffered the torments of the damned. But if somebody else were near, he felt safer.

"Do you prefer slit trenches?" I asked.

"Every time."

I grinned. "I prefer this type of shelter."

Violent opinions were often expressed regarding the place to which you entrusted your life.

Near by were four Eurasian girls of about twenty. They were lovely, with exquisite, willowy figures, piquant faces,

large lustrous eyes, and black wavy hair. It was difficult to define what mixtures were here. Their skins were clear but slightly sallow. Perfectly self-possessed, they had a full measure of woman's gifts. Many observed them, envying their laughter. One of the girls whose eyes alone would move most movie stars to hopeless envy, was making up with a delicious sang-froid. Ostensibly, I read a sheet of the daily paper. My outward manner certainly showed no interest in those unattainable girls ostracized by European society. Then coolly, seriously, her eyes met mine, remaining unchanged, yet granting the intimacy of a smile, gleaming in subtle feminine mockery. How I should have liked to talk to those girls!

Alerts were liable to disrupt life at any moment of the day or night. After office hours, I wasted no time in getting up to Lloyd Road. The smoke pall above was blacker now, closer, fed by fires in various parts of the city. At seven-thirty on that Monday night the telephone rang. My name was called.

Cheers! It was Noel North. He spoke quickly. "Have you a car?"

"Yes."

"We are at Raffles Hotel. Come here quickly. I have some news for you. We have had three moves in the last ten days and that is why I could not get in touch with you."

Action at last. Completely forgetting the impending curfew, I drove into town. On the way I saw a new Dodge sedan lying upside-down in a ditch, and completely crushed in on one side.

Raffles bar was full of tired military personnel.

Noel was lean, haggard, but in good spirits. "Time is the all important thing," he said. "Can you come out to see our commanding officer at our camp at Bukit Timah? Good." He laughed. "We are bedded in the maternity barn of the Singapore Dairy Farm."

I followed his car, doing a crazy sixty miles an hour, eyes glued on a red rear light. Dodging bomb craters, we passed the Ford motor factory which was doomed to be the scene of the tragic surrender twelve days later. Then we turned to the right at the Singapore Dairy Farm and drove up to the mess of the R.N.Z.A.F. constructional unit.

I had a long yarn with the accounting officer and others, and was told that possible duties might cover anything.

"Suits me," I said.

It was then explained that I could not be enlisted even as an aircraftman, and could join up only as a civilian.

"All right." I bit the words out. How tired I was of saying them.

I met the commanding officer and dined in the officers' mess. The pungent language of the "Pig Islander" would shock even the ghosts of still-born calves. It was good to be among New Zealanders again.

There followed an hour of consideration by the officers. Meanwhile Noel and I reminisced under the stars, and watched the giant yellow moon rise over the coco-nut palms. Then I experienced a bitter disappointment.

"We want your services badly, but the unit has no power to take on anybody overseas," an adjutant explained. "A number of local applications have already been turned down. There was a possibility that you could be engaged in a civilian capacity, but the unit could not take you away when embarking."

A view of myself waving good-bye to a steamer while the Japanese crept towards me was quickly displaced by a surge of anger. My tiredness got the better of me. This was the last straw. I was curt and independent. Then I realized that the unit must have already decided to go. A ship was, in fact, already loaded, but I did not know this. Twenty-four hours later she was bombed and sunk in the harbour.

One of the difficulties in taking me on had been the

constitution of the unit. While nominally independent, it was also under the P.W.D. Malaya, and air headquarters had to be consulted. Had there been more time . . . they wanted my services, but red tape. . . .

I stress that I found it difficult in Malaya to appreciate the independent point of view of a military unit operating in a strange tropical land. My civilian status was extraneous to all matters military. I had been athletic all my life. I realized keenly that I had built more than I imagined on the probability of joining the unit. Everything had seemed so certain. My services, I had been assured again and again, would be valuable. I felt like a David without his sling, a Saint George without his sword. I was now thrown back entirely on my own resources, which seemed precisely nil. A sense of impending catastrophe flooded my mind, and yet found me strangely indifferent.

Noel was more disappointed than I. As we walked along the crest of a hill, an alert sounded. Shortly, we saw searchlights flickering over at Seletar. Bombers were seen side-slipping. Orange bomb flashes flared twelve seconds before the noise of the explosion came to our ears.

But the night was peaceful about us. We talked of many things and I shall always remember the bewitching beauty of the stars, the palms and the treacherous moon that was helping to destroy Malaya. Fireflies sailed along like ghostly lanterns held by troubled spirits of the past. Our talk finished, we shook hands and wished each other good luck. Then I found that I required a chit to enable me to pass the curfew.

With the necessary permit, I drove without lights slowly into town. Huge trees cast great shadows. Speeding military transport missed me by inches. Bright moonlight, when standing still and when moving, seemed two very different things. Lorries appeared to hurtle at me. Somehow, my mind seemed dead. Had I run into a column of marching Japanese I think I should have been quite indifferent. The

city was ghostlike, an air of mystery filling the night. My car engine sounded strangely loud. I was not anxious to drive quickly and get a bullet through the windscreen, and could not understand why I saw no military police. I nearly ran into a lorry capsized across the road, for there were no warning lights to guard against an accident. Getting warily out of my car, I found that the driver was absent. My hand smeared into blood on the lorry seat. Blankly I looked at the stain, then hastily resumed my journey. I did not want to be shot as a suspected looter. Then, when I was driving past a stationary car, a military policeman charged across to me, rifle raised ready to shoot. "Why didn't you stop?" he demanded.

I couldn't think of a reply, and handed him my permit. He shone a torch into my face and demanded my identification card. Plainly, his nerves were on edge. "Be more careful next time," he growled.

I reached Lloyd Lodge and heaved a sigh of relief. As I crawled wearily up to my room I noticed that the sound of the guns was louder now. My tired mind relaxed. Unconsciously, I had become infected with the blind faith of the civilians about me.

Next day was Tuesday, 3 February. I woke with my eardrums vibrating to the sound of ever-increasing artillery fire. Shells were screaming along Bukit Timah Road. Smoke surged overhead.

The *Straits Times*, in its zeal for the common good, featured a leader titled "Appointments and Disappointments". Apparently there was an amicable argument regarding Messrs Farrer and S. B. Palmer, and concerning the control of the Manpower Bureau. Among other things, the editorial said "While civil servants continue to fill important offices without distinction, unofficials who are far better qualified to hold those particular posts remain unemployed, and this is total war!"

Life in Singapore still flowed on as usual, except that the military was commandeering cars and bicycles, and complaints were made that the Asiatics could not get into the city to staff shops and offices. Thus Europeans could not buy food as freely as before. The supply of vegetables was causing worry. The consumption was eighty tons a day and local production only twenty tons.

I heard that an Armenian millionaire, who gambled in millions, was buying up as much property as he could get, at gift prices. Nice work!

Clinics had been opened by the government, to give injections against typhoid. After an air raid I walked to the post office for the first treatment. "You must come back for the second one on 12 February," I was told, "otherwise no good is effected."

A European in the clinic came over to me and spoke excitedly. "Seventeen bombs dropped in our grounds this morning, and my house was not hit."

"You were lucky."

"Yes, but my vegetable patch was ruined," he mourned. Some people are never satisfied.

Wailing Winnie never left us alone now. Our safety margin was non-existent. It was lucky for me that the raids were not directed to our quarter, for bombs were always exploding before we left the building.

At five o'clock on Tuesday, 3 February, I met Buckley. He drove me down to Raffles to meet Spratt. We were hot, tired, restless. Leaving Raffles, we saw a cinema placard reading " 'Ziegfeld Girl' now showing."

"Do for a stop-gap until dinner," Buckley observed. So in we went. The place was packed. Owing to the black-out all windows were shut. As we went in I saw rows upon rows of glistening faces. The Asiatics love the cinema.

Stifling heat drenched us with sweat. A raid started and bombs were heard, but nobody moved. This was my first visit to a picture theatre since "Andy Hardy's Private

Secretary" on Sunday, 7 December. For over two hours we looked at a strange world. A news review shouted impregnability. A crazy cartoon made us laugh. Lovely Hedy Lamarr gave us glamour. But a sense of tenseness was still with me.

I spent the later part of that evening trudging up and down dozens of stairs. There were fourteen alerts in twenty-four hours. Outside, ghostly fingers felt for enemy bombers, orange flashes lit the sky, and explosions rolled around us like an unceasing thunderstorm. The sound of the guns firing across the Strait of Johore was a menacing background ever whipping up to a climax. Our household was now reduced to a dozen people. Horry and I heard a new whining sound, followed by an explosion. Shells. But the papers gave us no information the next morning. Demolition was going on and flames were leaping hungrily at the naval base and down at the docks. Sharp explosions stabbed the air as burning oil drums burst.

Leaving the office at four-thirty on 4 February, I met Adams, an officer in the R.A.S.C. "Do you know," he inquired, "that the Japanese can now pin-prick any building or house in Singapore with gun-fire?"

"Go easy," I complained. "I have already had one birthday this year."

"Want a lift home?"

I got in.

"I have to go down to the docks first," he continued.

I moved as if to get out. He laughed. I slammed the door. "Make it snappy," I entreated.

Lying back in the seat, I enjoyed the cooling rush of air and half shut my eyes. The traffic was blurred. Cars seemed to be intent on running us down. My nerves protested. Then near the docks, hell broke loose. The syce braked the car hard and it skidded to a stop. Wide-eyed, I saw people tumbling into trenches. We got out, ducked,

and ran. I heard the engine shriek of enemy planes dive-bombing. They seemed to be hurtling straight at us.

Flinging myself towards a trench, I felt myself falling and rolled over bent backs. I heard the whistle of bombs which seemed to be slanting right in amongst us. Then followed a tremendous blast. Gobs of mud were thrown over us and earth piled in. Luckily I was lying against the side of the trench away from the explosion.

Taking a breath that seemed to travel down to my feet, I realized I was still alive. That sticky mess on my leg was mud, like the mess on the back of my neck. My left arm throbbed painfully. It was badly bruised on top of the anti-typhoid injection. Warily raising my head I looked straight at Adams, who was also peering from the next trench. His left eye was covered with mud. He was spitting distastefully. The angry glare in his free eye broke the tension in me. Looking round I saw a house in flames; telephone wires were down, and the bright gleaming car that we had left seemed to have disappeared. In its place was a mud-spattered wreck as full of holes as a Gorgonzola cheese; the glass was shattered, bonnet ripped off, and the tyres were flat. I walked round the car. Even the leather upholstery was ripped by bomb splinters. Strangely enough, nobody was hurt in the immediate neighbourhood. Adams joined me. He had two complaints. This nice new car belonged to him, he mourned, not to the military. And his left eye, he said, was gummed up for life. Down the road a burst water main was bubbling furiously. We washed the mud off.

There was nothing to do but walk back to town. On the way, Adams told me a story of the night before.

"Sentries on duty at eight o'clock at the causeway saw three men swimming over to the island. Two were captured and proved to be Japanese masquerading as Chinese. The third was allowed to land. He was followed. Quickly making his way several miles down the road, he was picked

up by a waiting car, which drove into the city. He disappeared for an hour into a certain house which was surrounded and entered by us. In the confusion he got away, but luckily the military police shot him in River Valley Road. Nothing was found on him except a sheet of paper covered with figures and a rough drawing of Keppel Harbour, with markings."

"For an attempted landing?"

"The experts say that is impossible. One theory is," and he lowered his voice, "that the map shows where bullion has been planted in the harbour by Asiatic banks. The map has been well put away."

This was interesting. "If that story gets about," I said, "the sharks in Keppel Harbour will have a feast. Whew! Millions might be lying anywhere."

"Exactly. Every move we make is watched by fifth columnists." Suddenly he clapped his hand to his hip pocket and yelped.

I was astonished. "What is the matter?"

"My insurance papers. I left them in the car."

"But surely you cannot claim for damage?"

"No, but I could cancel my policy and get a refund."

I had to laugh loudly.

Wednesday night.

For forty-eight hours my mind had been dead. Since my rejection for military duties, I had not thought as an individual. I had surrendered tiredly to the mass optimism of Singapore. But now my secret self shocked my brain into action.

As a civilian I knew nothing. Nobody had my telephone number or address in case of emergency. There were no plans prepared for evacuation. At any hour the Japanese might invade the island and I possessed but a pair of bare hands.

But I was still expected to be at the office at eight-thirty

each day. Tiffin hour one to two, and I would leave at four-thirty. I had no work to do now; I did not know the address of even one of our taxpayers, and I knew that the acting head of my department was leaving on a steamer in a matter of hours.

My reason told me many things.

What should I do? Wait for death or internment, or ask a commonsense question?

So between raids that night, I put my question into a letter.

On Thursday morning I took the car left for me by friends to the office. Then I interviewed the director of the Manpower Committee.

"I insist on being given full-time military duties. Government will permit me to accept."

"I cannot accommodate you. And, if you still insist, you will have to see the Colonial Secretary."

"Have you any objection?"

"Certainly not."

I walked to Mr Hugh Fraser's offices, was passed from under-secretary to under-secretary, then finally in to Mr Fraser. I tabled a letter recounting my efforts and desires to obtain military duties, as permitted by government, and asked for his direction.

The Colonial Secretary was curt but attentive. I had a feeling that he realized that Singapore was doomed, that in a matter of days the Japanese would burst into this very room.

"I was sent to you, sir, by Mr Farrer," I explained.

"He need not have referred you to me." Then he added unexpectedly, "There has been criticism of government's policy in retaining skeleton staffs. The number of officers so held is very small and cannot affect the military position."

Perusing my letter, he wrote an endorsement to the Manpower Committee, stressing that "surely there were plenty of military duties offering".

Mr Fraser had been Colonial Secretary for a matter of days only. I had known him in Kuala Lumpur, where he was acknowledged to be a brilliant administrator of rare ability. He was the very man, in a time of crisis, to apply swift competence with savage ruthlessness.

Courage and strength gleamed in his eyes. And did I sense correctly a grim resignation to the fateful days to come? For the stage was set. Nothing could prevent the last scene of all; nothing could now accelerate those ships of mercy. How I wanted to express what was in my mind! The urge of my heart died still-born. A subordinate official was not expected to think, let alone say, such things.

Back at the manpower office, Mr Farrer perused the note, smiled, and to my vast surprise, filled in an exit permit. He wished me good luck. My thoughts were chaotic; sadness mingled with surging anticipation.

But time was getting short. I drove to the customs building, where I had to use the back entrance since scores of Asiatics choked the long counters. My exit permit was taken and my passport chopped by the immigration officer, who was gaunt, haggard and unshaven. Official machinery had him tied to that desk. As I came away, I saw an elderly Eurasian of about seventy. His palsied hands could hardly hold a grimy passport. He was more than half blind. Spittle drooled from yellow teeth. I half carried him through the pushing crowd and saw that his passport was stamped.

Round to the P. and O. booking office, where I filled in forms, appeared before Justice Aitken and was permitted to make a booking. "Ring us every day," I was told by a clerk.

I sped to the K.P.M. shipping offices.

"Can I book a passage?"

"We have over fourteen hundred names booked already; we can take no more than three hundred people a month; so we cannot do anything."

I looked round the office. Cabinets were being carried out. The office was being evacuated, if I were any judge. My brain buzzed.

"Will you take a note of my name?"

A book was placed in front of me. I entered my name and, most important of all, my telephone number.

It was nearly dark when I drove to Lloyd Lodge. There was no elation in my heart. Horror was going to be piled on horror in this city—one man's glimpse of freedom meant so little. In any case, a booking was one thing, a passage another. A few days at most and the curtain would drop on an unended tragedy.

That night the glare from fires reflected redly from the ever-growing smoke pall. Detonations from the naval base still shook the island. Shells screamed over from Johore and dropped in the city residential area. We played a grim game of guess for a while, but the stakes were too high. The piecemeal destruction of Singapore had begun.

Out at sea the *Empress of Asia* burned furiously. Carrying 2500 troops, she had been hit by four bombs at the entrance to the harbour. The Australian sloop *Yarra* had stood in, while they drifted into a minefield, and rescued the military personnel and crew.

The unceasing artillery duel across the Strait was swiftly rising to a climax. Shells landed on each side every few seconds. The Japanese all-out mass attack was commencing. Tens of thousands of enemy troops were ready to spill across to the island. Special invasion boats brought overland from Thailand were ready for commission.

And—belated, pathetic contrast!—only that day an A.R.P. official had broadcast an appeal to build shelters for the poorer Asiatics. Each bomb strip across the city cost as many as a thousand Asiatic (and European) lives.

The bombers overhead were lit up by defenceless searchlights. Our A.A. disappeared. The whine of the alert lifted

our hearts into our mouths. The strain of lying in the darkness, listening to the growl of enemy planes, probed into the very depths of our beings. Death struck everywhere. Bombs had now dropped north, south, east and west of this old mansion. My throbbing arm prevented sleep.

At one-thirty in the morning, I stumbled past the telephone as it rang after an air raid.

"Hullo . . . who? . . . yes, speaking. Yes, I will be there." I felt dazed. Surely my ears had played me false. It was incredible. How could things happen so quickly with me when others had been waiting weeks—or had the final dissolution and evacuation of Singapore begun?

I replaced the receiver. I had just been informed that a passage was waiting for me on a Dutch boat. I was told to be at the office in six hours, and to take a mattress and tinned provisions for four days. But that would be seven-thirty. I had to go to the bank. The alert whined again. For the last time I lay flat on my stomach in the lime-dust cellar. Then I packed. My left arm, swollen from the anti-typhoid injection, was useless.

Before dawn I paid my account at the Lodge and said good-bye. The boy must have thought he was rich indeed when he found the clothes I left behind. The small car was loaded with my mattress and luggage. Driving slowly down River Valley Road, I turned into High Street. The city was still asleep. Patrolling police and sleeping jagas could be seen. On the way to the shipping offices I stopped outside the Chartered Bank. A jaga on watch actually thought I expected to find the bank open at sunrise. On a sheet of paper I scribbled the following and pushed it under the bank door. "Please send T/T $1000 to Sydney and the balance to my New Zealand bankers." The $1000 was sent on 13 February—just before the surrender—and the balance of some $1800 stayed in Singapore.

At the K.P.M. office I was given several precious hours.

"Come back at ten o'clock," I was told.

This allowed me to get some vital things done. I had still not fully realized that these were my last hours in Singapore. My thoughts had been centred for so long on the probability of never getting a steamer that I had to keep thinking, "I am really leaving to-day. This is good-bye."

Returning to the bank at eight-thirty, I found scores of customers swarming everywhere. I saw two officers whom I knew.

"Hullo. What are you doing?" they asked.

"Leaving to-day," I said. My voice sounded queer, as if I didn't believe it.

One leaned over and whispered in my ear, "Our unit is evacuating to-day, and the Japanese have launched an all-out attack over the causeway."

As I waited to cash a cheque, the alert went. We cascaded down to the vaults and here I found all departments functioning as usual. I was given my money. A polite Chinese clerk smiled and said "Good luck" to me.

The exchange control office was operating as usual. Round I went to Boustead's and a European who attended to me said, "Good luck to you. I wish I could go, but I am tied to this desk."

I sped round to the offices of the Federal Secretariat in the Colonial Secretary's offices. Senior officers of the M.C.S. were at their desks. I spoke to Mr Pretty, Under-Secretary to the F.M.S. He said to me, "You can go." Saw Mr Joynt, Financial Secretary, and Mr Bird, Accountant-General. The Colonial Secretary, Mr Hugh Fraser, was being waited on by a seemingly unending queue.

Food was the final consideration. Entering Robinson's I eyed the stacked provisions with a speculative eye. "You are leaving," my brain was telling me.

Quickly making up a list of a dozen tins, I handed it to a Chinese.

"Impossible," he declared.

A European attendant arrived. "I am leaving by a steamer," I explained, "and I must take sufficient food for four days."

"Against the regulations," he said. "You can buy one tin only at a time."

"Don't be stupid." The light of battle was in my eye.

"All right."

All right? Of course it was all right. Wasn't I going away after nine weeks of bombing?

A Malay peon carried my provisions out to the car. When opening the door he accidentally banged my swollen arm. Pain shot through me and I staggered. I felt sick and giddy. Sitting for a while in the car, I suddenly saw a smiling Chinese face. "Remember me, sir?" He was one of the clerks in the war taxation office. He could see that I was going. "Good luck," he said. I shook hands with him.

Driving down to Clifford Pier, I passed lines of gleaming cars. The wall of every building was chipped by bomb splinters, but Singapore still pulsed as usual. I saw Asiatics queuing up outside a picture theatre. People were shopping. So fine had I cut my petrol that the engine spluttered. Fortunately there was not far to go.

Cameron, a friend of mine, stepped out of a car behind me. "Hullo," he said. "Going?"

"Yes. Are you?"

"No." He pulled a paper out of his pocket and showed it to me. "Have just sent a cable to my wife in Australia," he said. I read . . . "am confident Singapore will be held. . . ."

"You really think so?"

"Certainly."

"Tell me, is that the general opinion?"

"Quite sure of it. And the risk at sea is at least as great. Ships are being sunk every day."

The pier was crowded. A coolie picked up my luggage.

I showed him a five dollar note. He grinned. Launches were plying to and fro, taking passengers two miles out to the waiting steamer, for ships had been sunk at the docks.

Crisp, the Deputy Collector-General (Income Tax) of the Straits Settlements, appeared. To my astonishment, he said good-bye and shook hands with me. "Aren't you coming?" I queried. He was over sixty.

"No," he replied. I felt completely aghast. I wished I had the power to force him to leave, the more so because the Deputy Collector-General of my department was leaving on this boat; but we from the F.M.S. had no jurisdiction in the Straits Settlements.

My coolie tossed the mattress into a launch and I stepped off Malayan soil. The shark-infested waters of Keppel Harbour rippled as we chugged away.

All day long we lay in the roads. The decks were smothered with people. The ship's tonnage was about five thousand. In silence, we watched the grey-white buildings of Singapore underneath the funereal pall of smoke. Four large fires were raging. My eyes sought the bomb-scarred mass of the Victoria Memorial Hall, where the statue of Raffles still stood, and I thought of the many hours I had spent in that building. Within myself, I felt no bitterness—I had gained more than I had lost of things that really mattered.

Again I tried to grasp the spirit of Singapore. The city had suffered. Bombs had spilled down for a month on end and yet the Asiatic smiled. Singapore, lusty, independent, indifferent. Fifty thousand ships fed you so that five million pygmies could toil in your treasure-house. Created from mud, your feet were of clay. Your million inhabitants scratched in vain for security in your watery bowels. The almighty dollar stifled your imagination, paralysed your thought, fettered your action. Riches dripped from your jaws and you traded in human souls. The poison of a hundred races coagulated in your veins.

15 AUG 1978