

**MEMORIES**  
**BY**  
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## Memories by W M Iversen

When looking back on my life it amuses me to think how far back I can remember. I remember all the way back to 1896 or 1897 when I was a very small boy of three or four and we lived in my father's school in Farimagsgade, the building which today houses the social democratic newspaper 'Aktuelt'. The school was 'Lyceum' and was one of the private schools in Copenhagen, founded by my maternal grandfather Hartvig Marcus Frisch who was married to Elisabeth née Mourier from Høveltegård near Birkerød. The school had started in St. Kongensgade but before my grandfather's death in 1892 it had moved to the above mentioned building in Farimagsgade, which was owned by my father and his brother-in-law, Aage Frisch father of Hartvig Frisch who was to become Minister of Education. When my uncle Aage died in 1896 my father took on the sole responsibility of the school and I recall the wonderful home my father and mother, Asta née Frisch created right up under the roof of the building. Father and Mother were very vibrant people and as many school-people in those days they had young people staying with them until they graduated. They often gave parties for the young folk when Mother developed her dramatic talent by putting on small plays in which the youngsters all took part and Mother had painted the sets. I remember that my little sister and I – at the age of 3 and 5 - took part dressed up as a prince and princess in some fairy tale. We were quite difficult to control, as we loved to crawl in and out between the sets and appear at the strangest moments.

At the end of the 1890's private schools, as far as I understand, had a very difficult time and several of them merged in what was known as 'The Ring'. Due to financial reasons some schools amalgamated with others and in 1899 Father's school 'Lyceum' joined up with 'Nørrebro Realskole' which was in Ravnsborggade No 1 and the school was called 'Lyceum Nørrebro Latin og Realskole' and we moved from Farimagsgade to the top floor of the school in Ravnsborggade. The school continued there until it was closed in 1910 – much to my father's sorrow. The pupils in the third Gymnasium class of which I was one who were to graduate in 1911 were transferred in a special group from 'Lyceum' to 'Scheekloths Skole' on Værnedamsvej with our own old teachers who took us up to our exams – and we were therefore looked upon as Students from 'Lyceum'.

Our home in Ravnsborggade was lovely. It was as lively here as in Farimagsgade. But there was the one problem: my mother did not really like living in Copenhagen and she managed to persuade Father to move out of town – to her childhood home 'Vilhelminelyst' in Kongens Lyngby where my maternal grandparents had had a large home. Mother told us a lot about her beloved childhood home and I remember finding a real harness on the loft which would fit very small horses. It was the harness Mother had used when a young girl when she went riding with her father in his dog carriage, drawn by four Great Danes in the eighties. When I was very young I met a very old man on the Smedebakke who knew the family and told me how they had laughed when Mother came smartly down the hill drawn by her four dogs and suddenly met a cat that jumped across the road which caused the dogs to chase it – but the harness was caught in the fence that the cat had jumped.

After having lived at 'Vilhelminelyst' for a number of years Mother now got the idea, that she did not like living there after all, she saw ghosts – and felt the presence of the old aunts in the rooms – and she wanted to move again. We moved back to Copenhagen, but after some years, Mother was of the opinion, that it was unhealthy for us children to breathe in the bad air of Copenhagen – and we moved back to 'Vilhelminelyst' once again. Poor Father. In spite of Mother and Father building a small summer house in Kikhavn in 1908, – a house Mother designed herself where she could really display her artistic talents, they remained at 'Vilhelminelyst' in Lyngby, while the summer house was being drawn up by an architect – her sister, Gyrithe Lemche's (the author's) brother-in-law the architect Søren Lemche. The house was built under mother's supervision and totally furnished according to her plan. She carved the furniture herself, she wove the curtains and upholstery for everything in the house. To really fit into the landscape the house had a thatched roof and was artistically most delightful. While living at 'Vilhelminelyst' I graduated from school and could celebrate my Studentsymposium, as my classical-academical Father called it – in one of the arbours in the garden, that had been built by my Grandfather. I spent wonderful years as a boy in the old house, especially with my cousin Hartvig Frisch, who was the same age as I, and who often came to stay with us for extended periods, as I used to visit him in his home, where he lived with his sisters and his mother who was a widow. They lived with his maternal grandparents, my paternal grandparents, the old headmaster Conrad Iversen at 'Hillerød Statskole' and my grandmother Christine Jørgensen of the Utzon family from Kolding.

In the large 5 acre garden of 'Vilhelminelyst' we boys had the most wonderful playground – and at this time we were deeply involved with Walter Scott's book 'Ivanhoe' – and therefore we played that we were knights. I still have letters in my drawer written by Hartvig Frisch addressed to The Hon Cedric the Anglo-Saxon, as well as I wrote to him, to His Majesty Richard Lionheart, c/o Conrad Iversen, Hillerød. In our large garden we went on crusades and armed ourselves with dead raspberry canes as lances, and fought wildly against the gruesome barbarians. My father was the barbarians. He sneaked around the garden – also armed with his spears and he did not treat us too kindly when he caught us. Neither did we – if we could catch him. Here at 'Vilhelminelyst' we used to play with our tinsoldiers in the dining room. The dining table was extended and an extra leaf was added and here we set up our soldiers. Father often took part in this too – and that day the dining table was out of commission for dinner – the deployment could not be disturbed. Father who was a history master used to help us. Among other things we re-enacted the Battle of Sedan helped by Father's historical knowledge, with the troops standing in the actual positions known from history. Strangely enough I was given the very question at my final history examination: 'The Battle of Sedan' and managed to get a good mark – I had been there myself! This being together with Father who suddenly would pour out a historical tale from the ancient Roman times or would sit at the piano playing his own fantasies gave the home a wonderful atmosphere. Mother and I played fourhanded, or Mother would accompany my sister Eli with her enchanting songs. Mother could also gather all the youngsters around the round mahogany table at night and read aloud to us, or we had our cousins, the elder children of Dr Johan and Gyrithe Lemche, or Hartvig Frisch and his two sisters, or my mother's sister Vibeke Salicath's children here for charades. All in all, there was always something going on – and much of it of a spiritual sort. I remember my brother Bent and his playmate who was the same age, our younger cousin Willy Salicath playing in the garden – they would have been about four or five years old. Not to have to keep them under constant supervision my mother had tied them to a tree with a long rope so that they would not disappear. They had wandered off one day and the two little boys had walked down to Lyngby. A mad hunt was instigated until they were found at the policestation where the old chief of police in Lyngby recognised them and saw to it that they

were returned to my petrified mother, who had immediately imagined that they had run down to the fortification canal at the other end of the garden. The canal has been covered since then.

When I stayed with my grandparents in Hillerød, Hartvig and I played wonderful games. When we were a bit older and had read more, the games turned into Dumas' 'Three Musketeers'. I remember that Hartvig took on the part as the arrogant philosophical Athos, another friend, Gerhard Kemp, was Aramis, a third friend, Aage Nielsen was d'Artagnan and I got the part of Porthos, the simple but happy Musketeer. Hartvig was the obvious leader and distributed the parts, and as the other two were his friends in Hillerød, the part of Porthos was good enough for the cousin. We had some wonderful outings to 'Teglgaardshegn' outside Hillerød, where on an island in a lake in the forest by the name of 'Island of Fantasy' stood Frederiks VII's hut, where the interior walls were clad with shells from the oysters Frederik VII had enjoyed – it is told. A narrow bridge with a wooden gate with 'wings' on the sides led to the island, so that one could not crawl past the gate which was always locked. We boys, however, soon found a way in which we could crawl under the bridge. It was very exciting and in some mysterious way we also succeeded in getting into the hut where we held our meetings. We naturally formed a highly secret Order of Knights and 'floated' in the most idealistic atmosphere. We had another wonderful play area at Frederiksborg castle where we had friends who let us go up into the lofts where many old objects that were not exhibited had been stored. Here it was fun to find a knight's suit of armour that we put on – it almost fitted, as the knights of those days were not very large compared to the present generation.

They were good days at the old school.

A totally different memory has always remained with me from those days – the caretaker's son, returned from the Boer war in 1901 appeared for us in his khaki uniform with his hat with turned up brim. It was a breath from the big world that could awaken a young boy's imagination. We had wonderful years in our youth – right up until our student days – full of fantasy.

Eli, my sister who was two years younger and Hartvig's sisters Karen and Betsy often took part in our games, so much so that my old grandmother was horrified, when she surprised us one day during a tournament with lances, shields and swords in her back garden. The knights were beautifully adorned with the sisters' and cousin's ribbons and scarves – anything that was needed, when they were smart, while the ladies of the court, the aforementioned three, also beautifully attired sat on the grandstand, the garden stairs – observing the tournament and applauding the splendid knights. Grandmother, with her hands at her side but with a rare loving expression in her face, quickly made us surrender our weapons and take off our finery. It was reported to Grandfather; he blinked, muttered like an old bear and obviously enjoyed it all immensely.

As said, I graduated from school in 1911. My father had always wanted me to study but in spite of the academic atmosphere in my home I had – already before finishing school – always known that I did not want to study further. Probably because I instinctively knew that I was not up to it – I wanted to be a farmer.

In spite of this I started to read law, but it bored me and I was easily distracted by the many temptations of a student's life. Father was disappointed and did not refrain from explaining to me – again and again – about all the things that might happen to me, or not, if I did not pull myself together and concentrate on the task I was to solve. I grew more and more dissatisfied

with myself and naturally became more and more opposed, as I constantly felt that there was something else destined ahead for me which I had to obtain to satisfy myself.

When still at school I had been given an impression, which had stuck consciously or subconsciously, in my mind. My Father, as director for the Massman Sundayschools had taken me to a service at Holmens Kirke, where Pastor Fenger spoke to young apprentices about life and advancement in life. Among other things he said, that one could compare luck with a bird that flies by – which you must understand must be caught in flight. By reading law I could see no possibility of getting close enough to a bird to be able to catch it. Pastor Fenger's words, which I have never forgotten, impressed me immensely. Added to that I was rejected at my first draft board, although I was 'Akademisk Skytte' at the outbreak of WWI, due to a doctor's certificate indicating a slight corporal fault, which did not bother me. It was quite smart then to be able to say "I escaped easily", but strangely enough deep down I felt as a second class citizen for having been rejected which caused further disruption in my self esteem, my talents and my future. I can add that my Father felt and often quite strongly expressed his disappointment in what he called later 'the son and heir's development. Without doubt I was a very difficult son and I also felt that I did not quite live up to our aesthetically beautiful home. All I seemed to be able to cope with then, was to play the cello accompanied by my Mother, and although my father liked it, it was really not quite good enough. He often told me, how I would end up – on the gallows. Well, he was a schoolman. But my mother actually understood the turmoil in me and she also knew that the opposition to Father's wishes, which grew ever stronger, did not come from strangers as we - through Mother's forebears - descended from the Huguenots who always fought against pressure – and therefore one fine day I decided to leave home.

I went to Norway as an agricultural apprentice. I was going to show him, the old man, whom I deep down admired, that I could cope on my own. However, it did not turn out to be a great success. I got a job with a widow on a farm far away from civilisation somewhere between Oslo and Lillehammer. My first job was to bury a sweet, dead little Norwegian horse, all by myself. I was told to keep on digging around it and under it until it sank and was covered by about 2-3 feet of soil. This gave me a 'wonderful' impression of the joys of farming. My next job was up in the woods. Armed with my lunch and a huge axe, I had to fell some fir trees that stood by the road up above the mountain. I had of course superficially been told how to fell a tree so that it does not end up by falling on you yourself, but after a few days' work I succeeded in making the axe slip in such a manner that it implanted itself deeply in my left shin. I still have the scar which later on in my life during WWII became a great help as a personal mark of identity.

The wound bled more than I can describe. As I had been a Boy Scout I had learnt to ligate and after I had survived the shock I started on my return home along the road by crawling on all four. I have no recollection of the distance to the farm but even today the distance seems endless. I managed to pull myself up to the kitchen door and was immediately told that I was a total idiot – and now I better get off to the doctor's. A little horse was harnessed to a boatshaped Norwegian gig that I had to drive at least half an hour to the nearest doctor's. His treatment was humane enough and to help me with my pain he gave me a cigarette to smoke while he helped me. I was put back in the gig and drove back to the farm. I was not very happy and was immediately given a fortnight's notice. I was only paid very little, but managed to reach Oslo, where a friend of the family's was the Danish consul who managed to get me on a boat to Copenhagen. The prodigal son came home and was received with a

slaughtered calf. My father had a twinkle in his eye and Mother's care consoled me in more than one way.

I had to return to my studies but it did not take long, before I suddenly realised that it would do me good to receive some discipline. Therefore I returned to another draft. We have reached 1915 by now. I did not show them the doctor's certificate but explained that I was extraordinarily healthy and strong – and was accepted into the Infantry. My parents received a letter from me a short while later, marked Aarhus, in which I informed them that I was a recruit there.

It is amusing to look back at this decision that I took then. To become a soldier. As life has turned out for me I can but be grateful to the Danish military for all it taught me. It was a hard school as the army was very short of officers at the time and we youngsters had to be trained quickly. We were a large contingent of 'Akademiske Skytter' at the recruiting school in Aarhus and there was actually no one who asked us if we wanted to, but we were soon selected to become 'Kornet' (cadet) pupils and sent to the 'Kornet' school at Kronborg, the school that still has as its motto 'To be able to order, learn to obey'. A rule which is not only of value in the army but is just as important in civilian life – and for me of greatest importance in my later life in the East. I served in the army until the spring of 1919, and from 1916 as lieutenant at the garrison at Vordingborg. I experienced an interesting episode in connection with the disintegration of the German empire toward the end of the war. We were serving at Gedser ferry terminal in connection with the passage to Warnemünde. One day a contingent of German marines arrived with their officers from Norway from the interned German cruiser 'Berlin'. They were on their way back to Germany and were waiting for the departure of the ferry in the waiting room. The private marines took advantage of this to start a minor mutiny against their officers and tore the imperial eagle off their uniforms and we had to step in to protect them with our loaded pistols. Our chief marched a platoon up in front of the windows of the waiting room and ordered them to load their guns. This could be heard by the marines – who subsequently calmed down. I also recall some freight cars that arrived from Germany and rolled in on to Danish soil where we found some poor Russian prisoners of war tied under the wagon. They were starting their escape home to Russia in this manner after having been prisoners in Germany. We untied them from the freight train and explained that they would be returned to Germany. We stood talking to them near the quay and when they understood what was going to happen to them, they immediately jumped into the ice-cold water. We fished them up and dried them off, fed them and managed to get them onboard the shortly departing train to Copenhagen. When the train drove out of the station we all had our backs to it and did not see them as they disappeared. We hoped, that on arrival at Copenhagen, someone might help them, so they could return to Russia via Sweden – and later on we were told that this is what had happened.

As I spoke English - since I during my so-called law studies in 1918 had gone to England to work on a farm for a year, I was employed at the reception of English officers, who were being repatriated from German imprisonment via Denmark back to England. It was while I was doing this job that I made several English friends, amongst others an officer, who later on should be of the greatest importance to my future in Malaya. He became one of my Birds. One of the things that impressed me most as an officer was when my battalion towards the end of the war was sent to supervise the old border of South Jutland. I felt it most odd, that I as a Dane could not cross the border, but had to suffice with looking across the old, then German, Southern Jutland, where my father was born in 1864, when it was still Danish, and my father's father in 1833 – and where my paternal grandmother's family hailed from and

still lived. When I look back on it, it was one of the greatest experiences of my life when I was invited by my old battalion in 1955 – once again as a Danish officer, to make a speech at the Light Festival in Haderslev to the citizens of the city, the follow-townsmen of my father. Colonel Gabel-Jørgensen, the Garrison commander of Haderslev had honoured me with this invitation.

The life of an officer had grabbed me so and I seriously thought of continuing in the services as a permanent officer. But at this very time, the beginning of 1919, rumours were rife of cuts in the defence and senior officers were talking about compensation and moving over to civilian life, so I was much in doubt about whether it would be the right move.

My second bird flew by. I contacted Westenholz who owned large estates in Malaya and who was looking for Europeans to become assistants on the estates – and the farmer in me came up as the work was with soil – and I accepted a job as an assistant planter.

I sailed on the East Asiatic ship ‘Malaya’. We were four passengers – all of us young Danes who were taken under the wing of a delightful old captain who gave us masses of advice about how to behave in the East and resist all its temptations. On July 14<sup>th</sup> we arrived at Port Said, which was gaily decorated – not for us – but because it was Bastille Day.

I remember how strange this journey appeared to me after having gone through the Straits of Gibraltar and sailed through the Mediterranean towards the Near East. It was so very different from what I had seen on the trips that I had previously been fortunate enough to take. I had already been signed on as they say, as a ‘doctor’s boy’ with a discharge book on one of ‘Det Forenede’s’ ships that sailed to America on which my father’s friend was the doctor. My father and I went to see the doctor on what was then a very large and brand new ship ‘Oscar II’ just before the summer holidays and I was so taken by the huge ship and for the general idea of travel, that the doctor asked if I would like to travel to New York during the holidays. Would I?! I was fitted with a new sailor’s suit and a hat with ‘Oscar II’ on the ribbon – but fortunately there was a proper doctor’s boy on board.

I remember that I became a sort of exhibit for the passengers, which was not terribly healthy and I was chronically spoilt for over a month and a half. We went to Oslo, which still was Kristiania in those days and continued westward. One day I was summoned up on deck to see the lonely rock island Rockall north of the coast of Scotland, where one of ‘Det Forenede’s’ ships the ‘Norway’ had recently gone aground and sunk. An event that occupied the mind of many people in Denmark at the time. I had the great sorrow, that in my eagerness to see the rock island I forgot to put my new sailor’s hat on firmly resulting in the wind tearing it off my head and sending it into the waves in a foul swoop with the golden ‘Oscar II’ ribbon and all. I bemoaned my loss bitterly and a kind elderly lady among the passengers who wanted to be nice to me asked me to fetch something for her where she sat on deck and gave me a 25 øre piece. In my agitation and with a slight bow I said, “I do not accept tips” and went my way. It is important to maintain one’s dignity – and I was after all the doctor’s boy with a discharge book!

I was dreadfully seasick and was comforted greatly by two sweet Danish nurses who were going to San Francisco. Several years later, when they had returned to Denmark I often visited them and it was very interesting for me to hear them tell about the great earthquake in San Francisco which they had experienced in 1906. I do not remember much from New York

apart from the impression of entering the harbour, the Statue of Liberty, the Brooklyn Bridge and the tall skyscrapers, that today seem small, on Manhattan, and Holborn which seemed so strange with the wooden decking where the ship anchored. We then returned home and arrived at 'Frihavnen', where Mother stood and received me. When I came down the gangplank she cried and exclaimed, "How fat you have become". I obviously had a good time on board and the journey gave me the taste to travel and meet strange people all over the world. In 1912 I set off on my next journey, this time I went to England, to be an agricultural apprentice on a farm in Sussex where my older cousin was the manager. Here I learned to ride a horse and took part in English foxhunts and also learnt to treat hot tar with great care. One day I was told to tar the bottom of a harvest cart and I discovered that it was excellent and comfortable way of doing it by lying down on my back under the cart and painting the underside. I totally forgot that the tar was hot, very hot indeed, and that it has a tendency to run and it sprayed my face and burnt off the skin where it hit. I was the laughing stock of everyone and walked around for several days with the prettiest burns on my face. That taught me to think a bit in future before attacking a new task. Mixing with strangers gave me a desire to be with foreigners – not the least the English. Their way of life and thinking appealed so much to me that it was not surprise that I grabbed the chance to go to an English colony.

But in Port Said in 1919 you definitely realised that you had arrived in a completely different world – so different from anything I had experienced before. We four young passengers on the ship the 'Malaya' were naturally curious to see everything there was to be seen in Port Said, but our old captain looked after us and warned us strongly from being persuaded by 'friendly' Egyptians, or whatever race they might be, as all races mixed here, who wanted to show us the strangest things from belly dancing etc. It was a dreadful place and has always had the reputation of being so. The visit to Port Said did not last long as it was the turn of our ship to sail through the Canal. I sat on deck and looked at this masterpiece created by Lesseps whose statue stands at the entrance, a man's thoughts that were executed and made the shorter route to Asia. I remember that it struck me, that the will of a single man if executed in the right manner can become very valuable. The landscape that surrounded me, the Canal with its neatly maintained banks, the road along the Canal where you would see old-fashioned types of vehicles with donkeys or oxen, the occasional car and further away a train and the next moment on the other bank the desert with a lonely caravan that gave me the impression of what the Europeans have been able to create outside Europe. We sailed through the Bitter Lake towards the town of Ismaelia with its beautiful white houses, so lovely and luxurious that it is hard to describe. The colours were so gorgeous from both earth and sky that took on the weirdest tinge of dark blue at dusk and moved me deeply. I made up my mind, whilst thinking of my family at home, that I wanted to make my future in the East. I wanted to perfect myself in such a manner that I had the right to enjoy all the good things in life – and at the same time I wanted to show the old man at home, that I had the ability to stick to an idea, to work for it and succeed and thereby make him satisfied with his first son.

In the Red Sea, where the heat was quite unbelievable, we experienced something that does not often occur there. A sudden short cloud break. We four youngsters who were panting from the heat thought that we would have a nice cooling shower, undressed and jumped down on the foredeck where we stood in the pouring rain. It did not take long before we ran for shelter – never had we been so cold – and by now we were shivering with the cold. The old captain and the sailors were laughing like mad.

We travelled for many days heading for Colombo – and one day before we reached Colombo I was called up on deck by one of my travelling companions who pointed at an island we were



passing and shouted “Look Iversen, look at the palms”! The island was completely covered in palms of a different species than what we had previously seen. It was the island of Minicoy just to the west of Ceylon. I was in awe at the sight and that it struck me all of a sudden ”But, I have seen it before”. I hardly know where I got this impression that it was nothing new to me, but I had forebears among the old Eastindian merchants from Copenhagen who had worked on the east coast somewhere near Madras, and even as far away as Macao in China, and one of my great great grandfathers had been a planter in the West Indies. His name was Tutein, and I had seen his painting since I was a little boy. The family had a disrespectful nickname for him “The Sheep” and insisted that I resembled him. Now it did not upset me any longer. Strangely enough, by seeing this palm island, I felt at home. It is odd, that I on my way to Malaya to become a rubber planter and the rubber tree is deciduous, as our trees at home, was fated after a very few months on a rubber estate to end up on what then was the first and only oil palm estate in Malaya – and consequently ended my stint out there by being the oldest oil palm planter in the country. ‘The Sheep’ also planted palms in the West Indies – but not oil. There are many moments when I think that great great grandfather and I have a lot in common.

On August 1 1919 we landed in Singapore. This vast city inhabited by Chinese, Malays, Indians, Europeans and many strange combinations, this gigantic trading centre which lies on an island that today is connected to the mainland – the Malaya Peninsula - by a causeway. We had to travel about 600 kilometres from Singapore into the country – north by train and we had to change to a sideline to reach our destination. There were two of us on this journey, both of us former Reserve officers from home and we had run out of money. We got off the main train that was heading for Siam and looked for our train. But it was a Sunday. And there are no trains on the sideline on a Sunday! We managed to get hold of a car with an Indian driver and let him take us the 40 kilometres to our goal – the Danish estate that was situated not far from the west coast of the peninsula. We rolled up in style in front of the manager’s bungalow, a large elegant white painted house. The servants came running out to take our luggage. Then the manager appeared, he was a Swede, very stylish, very dignified and arrogant. We reported for duty as the new assistants he was expecting. He told us to pay our driver, and we had to admit that we had no money. He paid and explained that this was an advance of our pay. We should have put off our arrival until a weekday and taken the train that we had a ticket for. He then introduced us to the second in command on the estate, a Dane, who would show us our bungalows followed by a brief goodbye before we crossed the large lawn that was surrounded by the European bungalows. We had barely stepped out on the lawn before we heard a Danish-Swedish yell, “You may not walk on the grass!” It is obviously possible to transfer one’s ‘little world’ to foreign lands. Later on we were told that as assistants you do not refer yourself directly to the top boss, but you wait for the right moment to be correctly introduced to him in his office during office hours. That was something for a Danish lieutenant and taught us something. There were many Europeans on the estate and we began to learn about how things worked and soon discovered that you did not earn the big money they had impressed us with at home there and the route to become a manager, if you should ever get that farm, was extremely tough. Our second in command, who was extraordinarily kind, received us heartily and installed us in a nice little bungalow with a boy, a cook, furniture etc. Work already started the following morning. You got up at 5 in the morning – and this is how it went while you were an assistant in the East. Later on, when you became a manager, you could get up at 6 – with the sun. As an assistant you worked until 4 or 5 in the afternoon, but as a manager, if you wanted to reach the goal you had set often until late at night. Sundays were all but ignored as well as days off and holidays. When the Chinese had a religious festival, the Indians would work; and when the Indians had

a celebration, the Chinese would work. The Malays, however, worked when it suited them and as the natives were not Christian they did not celebrate Christmas, Easter or Whitsun. Only on New Year's day the Europeans could take a day off as they usually had celebrated their own New Year's Eve and simply could not work the next day.

Our contracts regarding wages, travel out and home every four years, had been drawn up in Copenhagen at a time when one had no idea about the increase in prices all over the world, resulting from WWI. In Copenhagen one had no reason to believe that things were any different than before. But changes had taken place in Malaya and we soon discovered that we were earning much less than planters in similar positions on English estates. We therefore mentioned it when we discovered that we simply could not exist on the salary we were given, but our manager who was not too keen on these two Danish self-assured ex officers, showed no interest in our problem. I think, when I recall the days when I was a manager, that I would have become quite agitated had my assistants been such arrogant army types as we were, but we did not like him much especially as he demanded amongst other things that we raised our hats to him when we met him and we logically answered "Europeans do not take their hats off to each other in the East" apart from the fact that English gentlemen do not take their hats off to each other – not in the East nor in England. And as we now were in an English colony we were sort of English. He demanded that we should call his wife 'The Baroness' as she was born a baroness, but as he was not a baron we thought it was ridiculous.

After much correspondence going back and forth between our manager and his superior in the firm we were given an offer which we did not think was sufficient although it was higher than the first we had been given and we announced that we did not want to remain on the estate but wished to be paid off, i.e. according to the rules - after a notice of three months. He did not want to keep us on and paid us three months salary in January 1920. My friend the lieutenant went to Siam and made his living there. I myself only had very little money left after having paid off my debts after only five months on the estate, went to the capital city of the Federal Malay States, Kuala Lumpur to look for a job there. Although I say it myself, I always managed to give an impression of being well off. I stayed at a decent hotel, was always well dressed in smart and clean white suits and friends told me later when I had obtained a job that I always looked 'flush'. I spent my days walking from one agency to another looking for a job on another estate but it was not easy and my money was running out. When I only had enough money to last me another 10 days and a train ticket to Singapore I applied for a job on any ship which would take me to Shanghai where my father had given me a letter of introduction to Danish friends in the Chinese Customs office. A few days later I was offered a job as reserve stoker on an English steamer. Not exactly a jolly prospect and somewhat of a bad start to the decision I had taken in the Suez Canal, but there seemed no way out. One evening when sitting in the lobby at the hotel with a drink to console myself, not an unusual occupation among Europeans in the East, an Englishman stopped up at my table and said "Gracious me, what are you doing here?" I looked up and after a moment I recognised him as one of the English officers I had received in Gedser and looked after in Copenhagen. He was my Bird! I told him that I was in town looking for a job on an estate. After having told him the whole story he said, that it was most strange. He worked in an agency, one of the few I had not yet visited, and they were looking for an assistant on a new estate in the jungle which was privately owned by a French man. It was, however, a new experiment in Malaya – oil palms, and oddly enough, the planter was also a Dane, who did not live on the estate, which was several miles from the manager's house situated on the opposite side of the Selangor river, surrounded by jungle. I immediately expressed my interest and the following day I was given the job with a suitable salary – which was higher than the one I had recently refused on the

Danish estate. The following day I met my new manager and two days later I was rowed across the river, walked the three kilometres to the new estate and was installed in my future bungalow – an excellent house with two rooms, built on stilts with walls made of rough planks, no ceiling but covered with palm leaves in Malay fashion.

The estate, which then was 7-800 acres large, was laid out in the jungle north of the Selangor River with a thick belt of dense jungle of about 2½ kilometres width down to the river between the southern edge and the river. To the west there was nothing but jungle for at least 20 kilometres until you reached the next estate near a town called Kuala Selangor at the mouth of the river. It was a small government town with a historical background as you still found old fortifications from the time of the Portuguese and the Dutch in Malaya. To the north there was several hundred kilometres of virgin jungle and to the west there was another belt of jungle about 15 kilometres wide before you reached the next estate. Our estate, as mentioned before, was the first oil palm estate in Malaya and had only been started in 1917, just a few years before my arrival in January 1920 and was not yet yielding. Some Frenchmen who had arrived in the country some years before WWI to become rubber planters had started the estate. They were Henri Fauconnier, Fesq and Posth. They had come, connected to a Belgian firm of bankers Hallet's Banquier in Brussels, as Henri Fauconnier's sister had married a nephew of Mr Hallet. In 1914 they had started planting rubber on the estate that they called Rantau Panjang in the area of jungle which was situated 15-20 kilometres to the east of this estate I am describing here. Rantau Panjang became the 'mother estate' of the entire large French firm in Malaya which developed later on and for which I worked: Socfin Company Ltd. WWI curtailed the development somewhat, but Henri Fauconnier had already then discovered a type of palm otherwise unknown in the East on a small island, Bali, not to be confused with the island Bali east of Java, but by the east coast of Sumatra near Medan. The Belgian estate Cie. Hallet had its headquarters there. The oil palm originated on the west coast of Africa where it grows wild in the jungle. Experimentally it was brought to Sumatra and from there Henri Fauconnier took it to the estate where I had landed, Tennamaram Estate. Henri Fauconnier was one of my bird friends! Due to the position of the estate in the jungle a manager's bungalow was constructed on the southern bank of the river near the road which led to Rantau Panjang. Therefore it made sense that the assistant should stay on the estate in the jungle to be near his workers and because one had to be rowed across the river and trek through the jungle to reach the estate. It was not far from my hut to another small one that was the office and a third small hut for the Indian supervisor of the workers. They were all Indian and came from the district around Madras, Tamils. They had their barracks some distance away, almost in the middle of the estate. My manager was Danish. Unfortunately, I did not like him much and he did not like me either. Our acquaintance only lasted about a year before he fortunately went home on leave and died in the Straits of Biscay. I am sure he was very good at his job, but he was extremely domineering and very tough. In those years right after the war it was very important to keep the workforce on the estate. If they did not like the place they would simply wander off. The position of the estate was unfortunately very unhealthy as it was heavily infected with malaria, which in those days was the worst enemy of the planters in Malaya, as one did not have adequate means to fight this dreadful illness. Therefore one of the major jobs management had was to see to it that the estate did not become known to be infected with malaria as that would mean that we could not keep our workforce and would not be able to recruit new people either. Six months hence I also contracted malaria, fortunately only in the tertiary degree, which only attacks once every three days, but exactly at the same time of day with fever of about 40° and an incredible headache followed by a relaxation which can barely be described. All you wanted to do was to die. When I had had malaria like this for a while, and did not dare mention it to my manager, I secretly sent for the nearest

doctor at Rantau Panjang. He arrived and was in no doubt; he gave me quinine and naturally went and talked to the manager about it. Next day my manager came to my hut and told me that if I had malaria, I would be given the sack. I was deeply depressed, still had no money – and therefore no malaria. I established a network of ‘spies’ so that I always knew when the manager crossed the river in order to let me go out into the estate, even if it were on a tertiary day, and did all I could to avoid meeting him and therefore had to receive written orders. Once I had a violent attack in the field and had to hide when my manager came and my coolies covered me with palm leaves to prevent him from finding me. As mentioned before, I did not like him and I was not in the least bit sorry when he died, I admit with shame. However, I had chronic malaria for the next three years before ridding myself of it – in the latter years also primary and secondary i.e. fever every single day. Strangely enough I managed to beat it on my holiday in Copenhagen in 1923 where I had my last attack at Hotel d’Angleterre and went to the ‘Svaneapotek’ (chemist), got a whole box of quinine tablets, which to the horror of the chemist I swallowed in one go, returned to the hotel where I had a whisky soda after which I went home to my parents in Lyngby where I lay sweating it out for two day – I never had another attack!

However, it was a very lonely life I led out there in my hut, as I in fact never mixed with other people. But I hired a piano from the nearest big city, Kuala Lumpur and had it taken the 110 kilometres to the river, carried on to the boat and sailed across and carried by my coolies through the jungle up to my house. But I had forgotten to think that the floor of the hut naturally was not strong enough to take the weight of the piano so I had a new underframe constructed to support the floor with posts dug into the earth – and it worked. The hut had a certain charm as when I was forced to lie in my bed during the violent attacks of fever I could look down between the floorboards and see my chicken underneath – and when the fever had subsided and I had changed out of my sopping wet pyjamas I could sit down at the piano and play Mozart and Beethoven or Iversen inspired improvisations.

I had in fact never learnt anything theoretical about work on an estate, so I spent my free time studying tropical agriculture, drainage and the treatment of the oil palm. I always concentrated on bookkeeping even tried to understand double entries which I discovered by buying a textbook on the subject. I took the account books back home at night from the office and found various items of expenditure which I gradually learnt to trace via the cash book, the bank book, the main ledger, journals etc. I gained so much knowledge that I could not be cheated by my future Indian office staff. It was a very educational period, but the loneliness made me slightly odd I was told much later. Soon the other planters in the area - and it was a huge area with several Europeans, mainly Englishmen – started talking about the weird Dane who lived on his own in the jungle and played his piano. They were kind enough to invite me for dinner from time to time. But it was not so easy to accept these invitations. For the first one does not dine until late, the sun always sets at about 6 o’clock and is followed by pitch darkness as there is no dusk. Then I had to dress nicely in clean white clothes, organise my torchbearer to be able to walk down the jungle track to the river, an ordinary field path that was only used by oxcarts. Then the ferryman, a wonderful old Malay called Dolar had to be told in plenty time so that he would be there at the right time. In the morning I would have to send a message to hire a car from a distance of 7-8 kilometres to wait for me at the bank of the river where Dolar had rowed me over and I finally had to drive about 15 kilometres either to the Planters’ Club, the Kuala Selangor Club or the house I was visiting – probably in Kuala Selangor. Well, the jungleman arrived at the party and to start with I thought it was wonderful. You were served with drinks and talked, you went in for dinner and might even have a lady next to you with whom you had to converse, but suddenly I might feel that all this

talk and politeness seemed total nonsense and most confusing. It occurred, that I felt so desperate, that I politely excused myself to the host and hostess saying that I felt unwell and left and drove all the way home again. Safely at the river, although I was much too early Dolar rowed me across, but there were no torchbearers and I had to plod all the way back through the jungle on my own in the darkness to my hut. The occasions I had to walk alone through the jungle were more than unpleasant. There were so many strange noises, the little you could see of the trees and branches in the dark night would take on the weirdest shapes, fireflies flew about and I was sure that I could smell tigers and panthers near me. You suddenly were attacked by what I call 'jungle fear', the frightening feeling that you are not alone, that eyes are staring at you from the dark – and you fear that you might have taken the wrong turn and would have to walk and walk in the endless jungle where all sorts of monsters lay in wait for you. It was as if the spirits of the jungle wanted to take revenge on the presumptuous man who disturbed the peace of the night. Suddenly there was a small clearing, the boundary of the estate, and up there on the hillock a single flickering light in the dark, my Chinese boy's lamp where he sat waiting up until Master came home. And master did come home and was looked after, practically undressed and put to bed and given a good drink – in those days I only drank tea when I was alone.

In spite of the natural sacrifices which were felt by a fairly spoilt young man from Denmark, there was a certain charm in the existence on such an estate. Amongst other things, the fact that you had a responsibility as it was your duty to supervise the 6-700 souls, the estate workers, and see that they led a tolerable existence. It was your responsibility to think sufficiently ahead that the organisation was there in the daily work, so that what was done was maintained as cheaply as possible and that you continued to establish new things, new workers that would be a benefit in future, all in preparation so that the estate could produce as much and as cheaply as possible. The work did not only consist of getting the workers to turn up in the morning and be distributed without any fuss into groups but you also had to think of where you might have to improve the drainage system, all with cheap production in mind. You had to observe that the understanding between the workers and yourself became such that they trusted the leader and the leader trusted that the workers carried out whichever job he was given to the best of his ability. A fairly strict regime was necessary to make everything run smoothly as the Indian naturally had his own idea of how to live and what he wanted to do, as they like all people wanted to see that whatever had to be done was done with as little effort as possible.

In the beginning it was quite difficult for a European to understand their way of thinking but at the same time it was very necessary for him to penetrate their thoughts and not force the Indian to understand the European way of thinking but to understand that he should do his job in such a way as he was told in order to get the best result with the slightest possible strain according to his point of view. Simply you had to make him understand that the energy we Europeans have would be beneficial to him to obtain if possible. It is a fact that we who have grown up in a cold climate where it is much more comfortable to be able to live without being cold, forces you to be energetic – much more energetic than when people who have lived for generations in warm climates, sometimes even exceedingly hot where you do not freeze even doing nothing. To exist there you only have to worry about how to still your hunger, whereas we other poor people must have warm clothing, warm housing, fuel in the winter and have to use more energy to achieve it all. Therefore in one's demands one had to consider what the coolie is used to, but at the same time – for purely financial reasons – you must get him to work far harder than he really would want – but not through force. You have to understand how to appeal to his feelings to make him see that it was his decision to live on this estate

with his wife and his children and most often with his old parents or his wife's parents, that if he settled for the ordinary rules that prevailed but demanded more work from him than he had been used to. On the other hand he realised that he would get his wages regularly, that he could buy rice at the estate's wholesale price, that if any of his family fell ill they would be looked after, that he, if in trouble, could always appeal to his master, the man whose golden rule was never to let him down but always be fair in his judgement. He should feel that no one would interfere in his inherited special rules of life outside working hours, that no-one would interfere with his religious beliefs and that he knew that there was a human interest in him. Therefore it was important to know one's workers, to be able to understand each family's special problems, so that the trust remained, but simultaneously the worker had to understand that all this could only be achieved if he adapted himself spontaneously and voluntarily to the discipline which must exist when a community of 6-700 souls are to live together in harmony. There are naturally bad hats everywhere and many of them behaved like children who tried to get away with tricks and many strange excuses which often bordered on what we call a circumvention of the truth. Therefore one had to learn to speak their language and not teach them ours, you had to speak to them in a manner and with such understanding that you could read the truth in their faces and eyes and not least, what he actually wanted to say but naturally expressed in a way different from what we are used to. In short, you had to try to learn to understand their conception of morals and not teach them ours. A European therefore often had to cut short what might turn into a long discussion about how to do a job, or how quickly it should be done, with a short and sharp order "No more nonsense. Do your job – and if you do it that way your work will be over for today and ready at the time I have decided". A day's work naturally always fell within the time the governmental Ministry of Work had decreed were the hours for work on an estate, i.e. from 6 am to 2 pm with half an hour off for lunch, followed by free time to look after yourself and your family, your small garden, your goats and hobbies.

But all this had to be organised and demanded constant study and it naturally took quite some years before you learnt to create an organisation you could say was totally satisfactory for all parties. I still remember how incredibly important it was to make the coolie feel he was not being forced, but had the right with suitable notice to find work elsewhere if he did not feel happy where he was. So many people in Europe have the wrong understanding of this relationship between the white employer on the estates and his coloured workers and many are under the impression, that they were some kind of slaves. It is a total misconception. You have to think before judging in ignorance about the conditions – how could a single European control 700 Indians all on his own and without forcible means in the jungle if the relationship between the master and the worker had not been based on mutual trust. In this connection and to illustrate of the attitude of the workers, I must add that the Indian worker came from Madras and had emigrated to Malaya due to the frequent famine in his country and that he found security and plenty of work here in Malaya so that he could hope to have saved sufficiently some day and possibly return to India – something that only happened very occasionally. At the same time, Malaya was short of workers of his sort, as the Malay usually works for no one but himself. He is in his own country; he has his own little farm and his very special understanding of life which makes him a very independent character with many artistic talents which he practises.

Injustices could naturally occur but there was a certain control with matters from the government and it was absolutely not tolerated. Any injustice from the Europeans resulted in expulsion from the country. I have seen one example of this. Therefore it grates somewhat to hear what seems to be fashionable at present, that the ugly white man has exploited and

subjugated the poor native. And I say that it is fashionable, because I do not recall having ever heard any mention nor read about all the exceptionally wonderful situations which really have existed and still exist where the initiative and energy of the white man combined with the local labour has created values, not only for both parties on the spot but for the development of the country and for countries all over the world, having produced values and created a development in these countries when the white man arrived which otherwise would not have been produced – all for the good of the development of the world. Now one has to condemn the colonies. Where would we be today without rubber, oil, tin etc?

A new phase occurred in my life. My director Henri Fauconnier wanted his younger brother to join in life on an estate. Henri F knew that I enjoyed playing the piano, that I was well read and thought that it would be beneficial for his younger brother Charles, a few years my senior, to come and share my bungalow. Charles was extremely musical, painted beautifully, was very interested in literature and had been a soldier in WWI – he refused to become an officer – and had therefore experienced it all as an ordinary private and had been in the front line at the Battle of Verdun. He told me later on that he was not too bothered about what happened to him as long as his fingers were not wounded so that he could no longer play, and he was delighted in spite of other wounds to have got away with a very superficial injury in the tip of his thumb which did not prevent him from playing the piano. After the experiences he had had, it was not good for him to be on his own and he therefore came to live with me. A proper bungalow was built for us in the middle of the estate, as always on stilts, with a lovely wide veranda in front with a wide staircase leading down to the garden and connected to the veranda at the back a large dining room which led into the pantry etc. At the sides we had our bedrooms and a magnificent large room, mosquito proofed, where we had our piano, our books, his painting equipment etc. What a good time we had together.

It was completed in time for us to celebrate Christmas 1920 there. I always had five or six dogs around me, smooth-haired foxterriers, five or six cats and a monkey that went around quite freely and caused trouble. It loved tasting ink and touching colours. My new friend Charles was to experience a real Danish Christmas, a proper Christmas with goose and all the trimmings. We sat expectantly down at table and the cook boy had been ordered to bring in the goose and march it around the table. My dogs had been trained to get a small meal each out of their own bowl in the dining room where the bowls were lined up against one wall and the dogs knew how to sit in front of their bowls and wait for master's order to eat, before they attacked the food. There they were sitting in a row. The cook entered with the goose on a dish and it must have smelt wonderful when he walked around the table past the dogs and put the goose on the table in front of us. I was going to carve and put the fork in the back of the beast. The fork slipped, the goose slipped down onto the floor and before we knew what had happened, the dogs 'flew' up to the goose and the biggest ran off, out through the door with the goose in his mouth, followed by the other five dogs helter skelter – down the veranda steps and out into the darkness of the estate. We ran after them, the cook too and the water carrier who had been aroused by the noise, while we shouted and called the dogs. It was easy to follow them as they were barking like mad. Amazingly the thief obeyed his name and we found him sitting by a tree stump still with the goose in this mouth awaiting what would happen next. The goose was saved, the dog was patted in spite of all and we all marched back to the bungalow led by the cook with the goose. He had to clean and wash it and we decided that he had better carve the part of the goose, the dogs had not bitten. That was quite a Christmas meal!

After dinner and coffee Charles and I played fourhanded. We played Haydn and it was wonderful. All in all we shared the work, i.e. I had to supervise some drainage work and ditch digging and in the mean time Charles had to keep an eye on the weeders as a place like this has to be weeded constantly for unwanted growth, not least at the edge of the jungle to avoid it encroaching on the estate. Sometimes he would say “Werner could you supervise the weeders today, I have just noticed the beautiful light over the edge of the jungle and I simply have to paint it!” His paintings of the treetops with the rounded silhouettes were like a tapestry. There might be something else he wanted to paint sitting at the bungalow and he liked me to play for him while he worked. At that time it would often be Wagner that inspired him. We were both engrossed by his music, but not on Sundays, when we preferred to play sonatas by Mozart or he would play Cesar Franck and we felt that we had attended church. It was a wonderful life and we became firm friends and still are friends today although he lives in the south of France and I in Lyngby in Denmark.

While I was still on my own and known amongst my acquaintances to be fond of dogs, an Australian couple on an estate who were going on leave for Australia got the bright idea to ask me to look after their two Australian terriers, a most sophisticated couple – and the bitch was expecting. I good-naturedly said yes and the dogs were delivered to me with all their equipment. Each had a basket, they had their own towels with embroidered names and each had a comb and hairbrush and they had a very beautiful Chinese, colourful bowl for their food. I still have it and enjoy serving salad in it at home in Lyngby which gives me a good excuse to tell my guests the sad ending of the dogs’ guest appearance in my home. As mentioned earlier, one had to walk quite a distance to get out from the estate, and then walk along a path through the jungle until you reached the river where you summoned the ferryman Dolar who would row you across to civilisation. One morning I had to go on some errand and walked happily down to the river, called Dolar and stood waiting for him to arrive, when to my horror I heard a well known sound behind me, turned around and saw my two Australian terriers, who to my horror had followed me without my knowing. The boy had forgotten to shut them in, as he should have done when I left the house. I shooed them away and ordered them to return home and it looked as if they obeyed. I got in the sampan and Dolar pushed out to cross the river. When we were quite a distance from the bank I was horrified when I saw the two small animals dive into the water and swim out to the sampan. We were almost halfway across and I asked Dolar to stop so that we could pick them up in the boat. Suddenly I saw a ripple on the surface of the water; a huge jaw appeared, grabbed one of them and disappeared under the surface with it. Soon after another ripple, another gruesome jaw, a long head with round eyes and ugly pointed teeth in its mouth, a quick flick of the tail and the little bitch disappeared. They were crocodiles. Not too good! I did not enjoy it much when my Australian friends returned and I could only hand over the puppies my boy and I had managed to keep alive by force bottle feeding them and the baskets, the towels with the names, the combs and brushes. I could keep the bowl the lady said somewhat bitterly. I felt, I had not done my duty.

Charles and my life together was not to last too long, the directors had decided to sell the estate and Charles went to Rantau Panjang estate. The nice people did not let me down, they sent me to one of the French company’s estates Sungei Ular in the state of Kedah in the northern part of Malay peninsula not far from Penang. I was sad, as I had hoped to become manager of this oil palm estate where I was and work on an estate with the new palms in Malaya appealed to me. But Sungei Ular was a rubber estate. And very hilly. I found the work on a rubber estate extremely boring as you as an assistant had to walk from tree to tree to supervise how the coolies were tapping them, that they did not jump some, that they did not



cut too deeply and damage the bark – and as the area was so hilly it was extraordinarily tiring in the heat. For that very reason my new manager had been wise enough to get himself a little Borneo pony that he raced about on, up and down hill which certainly made it easier. One good thing about being there was that it was not an unhealthy place, the bungalow was civilised, and the estate lay on the main road and was not too far from what I consider the most beautiful place on earth, the city of Penang with its magnificent luxury hotels. While I was an assistant here, I married. My wife was English, the daughter of the Selangor state engineer. She died toward the end of WWII in London.

It was interesting as a very young planter to visit the new firm's stronghold in Malaya, the Rantau Panjang bungalow, which now after having been modernised the firm has named 'Maison des Palmes'. The oldest of us all lived here, Henri Fauconnier. He kept Rantau Panjang bungalow in a pure Malay style with palm covered roof supported by poles, simple jungle trunks that soared from the ground up to the roof through the floor which was raised a couple of metres above ground level and plain wooden planks covering the walls. The two supporting poles that carried the roof in the centre went straight up through the largest room in the bungalow, the sitting room where among other items stood the piano and looking most decorative. There was no ceiling so you looked straight up at the roof construction and the very beautiful and incredibly finely woven palm leaf roof. When we had our after dinner coffee in this room someone would always play the piano. The Fauconnier family were most artistic, they painted and played the piano and were very interested in literature – so much so that one of my good friends, the brother-in-law van den Berg, who was an assistant on the rubber estate never went out in the field without having a copy of the Indian Tagore's poems in his pocket. Our friend Camus, also an assistant, even took his artistic interest so far that one morning he totally forgot to appear at the workers' roll call. On the way there he had encountered a fully grown tiger and was so impressed with it that he immediately sat down and drew the tiger that obviously was totally unconcerned by his presence. We still have this drawing of the tiger – after 43 years – on the cover of the Socfin Bulletin that we all receive once a month – even I in Denmark. While sitting here drinking coffee and listening to the music it might occur that something moved in the palm roof above and a saucer with milk was put out on the floor near one of the jungle trunks and a magnificent python would come slithering along the wooden construction of the roof, down the trunk, stick out its tongue and drink the milk. It was about 4 metres in length, a beautiful snake and totally harmless to man. You were not to shoo it off, nor chase it, as it was extremely important as a rat catcher in the bungalow.

It was so interesting to visit this place many years later when 'Maison de Palmes' had been created. The construction of the old bungalow had more or less been kept but larger rooms had been added, for instance a gigantic dining room where one wall was covered in mosquito netting so that you could sit there and look over the tree covered slope of the hill down to the Selangor river and further across the other bank and the tall jungle trees. The room was about 20 metres long and in the middle stood the long dining table. It was made from one single jungle trunk cut through lengthways with a width of a couple of metres and a length of 7-metres – it was a sort of wood, possibly Kaju Rengas, which when properly treated gave its cut surface the appearance of the most wonderful red mahogany. The tabletop was about 20 centimetres thick and the edges had retained the tree's bark – and it stood on thick legs carved from jungle trunks. The chairs were made of the same wood, tree trunks that had been cut through so that they formed circular seats, with the bark on them, without a back rest – a sort of stool.

On the opposite wall stood some fine old French display cabinets with the prettiest old French porcelain. Along the mosquito net wall there were divans with small tables in front where you sat after dinner. One day while around 20 people were sitting here, French, English, Scots, Belgians, a White Russian and a Dane we met a Belgian painter Le Mayeur from Bali, the island west of Java who had come to Malaya with his Balinese wife to exhibit and sell some of his lovely paintings. He painted and lived à la Gauguin. There was a Balinese musician with him who played a special stringed instrument. After dinner we sat down on the divans with a cup of coffee with 'avec' (a gorgeous French cognac) and the Balinese lady stood up on the table that had been cleared, the Balinese in the corner started playing his instrument and she danced barefooted on the polished jungle trunk in her beautiful costume, the loveliest dance I ever have seen. She was a professional Balinese dancer and her control of her body and movements connected with the most graceful and expressive hand movements, that told much more about the meaning of the dance than her mime, and the movement of the body was completely unique. I can only say, sitting here remembering back to then, that she was divine. And in those surrounding, with such a view through the mosquito net across the jungle and the river where the rays of the moon played in the gently moving water. My wife became so taken by it all that she immediately insisted on buying on of Le Meyeur's painting, where the dancer was depicted with her back towards the audience sitting with two other young women at the edge of the Balinese jungle, where they are resting in the shade of an umbrella through which the tropical sun throws its reflection, after recently having finished a temple dance in honour of the gods. The painter was so pleased with the sale and our enthusiasm that he added the picture frame that was carved from jungle wood by Balinese craftsmen and richly decorated with flowers and fruits. It is still hanging in my home and is admired each and every day. My wife was so delighted with it that she went and sat in front of the bungalow the next morning shaded by a palm and painted a picture in oils of 'Maison des Palmes'.

After the end of the war in 1945 and after she had died, I gave it to my good old friend, Robert Michaux – our firm's Big Boss. When in 1960 my present wife and I were invited to a Jubilee Dinner in Champs Elysée in Paris where he lived, I asked him if he still had that painting and I had the pleasure of him taking my arm and almost running, pulled me through his flat to his bedroom where he showed me that the painting was hanging here so that, when lying in his magnificent four-poster bed, he could look straight at 'Maison de Palmes' the place loved by us all.

Old Henri Fauconnier had not always lived at Rantau Panjang, but had lived in a bungalow on an estate not far away with Fesq. They had kept a young elephant, but when it grew it became dangerous for the bungalow, when it walked about rubbing itself up against the stilts and made the house shake they decided to get rid of it and gave it to a travelling circus. As far as I remember it was simply called Jumbo. One afternoon Charles Fauconnier, van den Berg and I decided to go to Kuala Lumpur to do some shopping followed by a visit to the circus, which was in town. As it should be, we sat in the front row right up to the ringside. Among other acts, there was one with elephants and all of a sudden during the animals' performance van den Berg shouted "hello, there is Jumbo". And he shouted "Jumbo, Jumbo". The act was totally ruined when Jumbo had a quick look round and walked in a straight line toward van den Berg, flung his trunk round his neck and expressed great joy at seeing him again

The evening ended and we had to go home. The drive from Kuala Lumpur to the estate was about 50 kilometres and took almost an hour. We drove out of the city through beautifully lit Chinese streets and darkened ones where the Indians lived. You only saw a single light

burning here and there, not many and then dark rice fields suddenly surrounded us before the road started going up hill and we had reached the jungle. The road was cut through cliffs and started winding up hill, following a gorge, a very deep gorge on the one side. On the other was the wall of rock above which the jungle towered endlessly. With the gorge on our right the rocks fell steeply and formed all sorts of amazing shapes and deep deep down we could just make out the running water of the small river which sometimes fell in small cascades into small lakes with stagnant water, almost like lagoons looking like black dots in the otherwise white and moving water. From time to time where there would be a sudden loop in the road, tree trunks had been laid to protect you from the gorge. The moon was bright – we planters preferred to go on our excursions on nights with a bright moon when knowing that we had to drive through the jungle, as the weather in the tropics is such that you always know in advance what the weather will be like the following day or the following night. Well, we three lads were being driven home, naturally by our driver as always out there, full of the joys of life, talking and looking at the landscape and actually enjoying the feeling of being in a car on a well laid out English road with a sheer cliff covered an impassable jungle on the one side and the deep gorge with the river at the bottom on the other. All of a sudden after having turned a corner our driver braked so hard that we nearly flew out of the car. In front of us in the bright headlights and the rays of the moon we saw an amphibian crossing the road, a beast you would think belonged to a distant time. It was a dragon, a real dragon. Its tail lay up against the rock wall on our right, its body was across the road, its head stuck out looking over the edge of the gorge. I seem to recall that it was pink in colour. Two tongues flicked out of its mouth, perhaps it was only one, but if so it was forked. The head was flat and wide and it had spines down its back – just like a real dragon has. Its stomach was on the ground, its four feet were spilled out to all sides, its tail flicked up in the air and I am sure I recall that it was spiny too. Of course we had stopped and the creature moved sedately and slowly with its stomach on the ground and slid gently down the slope to the river. We were all spellbound and when the beast had vanished our driver turned round to us and quietly said “Hantu” which means a ghost! The three of us felt that we really had seen something from the past from a time when we humans were not even thought of.

When I recall this, I cannot but remember one morning when I sat on the veranda of my bungalow on my mountain drinking morning tea as usual a little before 6 am and was watching the sun rise over the mountains in the far distance. I looked down on the jungle that had remained standing around my mountain and all of a sudden I noticed that there was life. Something moved in the branches of the tall jungle trees. I grabbed my binoculars which I always had with me on the veranda and saw a colony of monkeys in the tops of the jungle trees. I did not know how many there were, but they were gibbons and had no tails. They sat close to each other up there looking towards the same chain of hills to the east where I was looking. Suddenly the top edge of the rising sun appeared over the hilltops. The colour was a shade of violet, the sun rose quickly and the rays turned golden. When I looked at my monkeys again, I saw that they were all staring at the rising sun, their throats were moving, their heads stretched out but I could not hear what they were saying. From the distance I heard an amazing scream – or what resembled a scream and I am in no doubt, they were singing to the rising sun with their heads held high. Exactly as they would have sung in the distance past, long before man existed.

Charles left the oil palm estate in the autumn of 1921 and I stayed behind on my own, until I was transferred to rubber in January 1922. I had to celebrate Christmas 1921 alone on the estate. I recall I was not at all well but wanted to make a nice Christmas Eve for myself. I knew that a malaria attack was going to strike, but I thought I could suppress it, and did

manage and sat down at table although I was also suffering from an upset tummy. I do not remember getting up from table and I was most surprised when I woke up on Christmas day in the afternoon in the hospital in Kuala Lumpur. I was told that I had fainted at table and my cook boy had sent for the doctor who in spite of the lateness of the evening immediately summoned an ambulance to collect me at the river. They wrapped me carefully in blankets and my excellent cook boy even saw when he packed my suitcase, that I had my writing material, cheque book and money with me; all in all he had looked after me as well as anyone could have done and I knew nothing about having been carried to the river by the coolies, rowed across and driven to the European hospital 40 kilometres away. Here they soon diagnosed that not only did I have a very bad attack of malaria that had caused my unconsciousness, but also suffered from dysentery. When the fever had left me and I lay in bed enjoying being looked after, I was upset at the thought that as I was going to be alone this week of Christmas I had been invited to more Christmas and New Year's parties in the district than ever before – and now I had to miss them all. But the Europeans in the district were most kind to me when they learnt that I was in hospital and I had many visits and letters which all helped my mood and a caring English family opened up their home to me so that I could enjoy my convalescence in their lovely home. I had been extremely ill and was very, very weak. I packed up my house and immediately after my holiday I went straight to the above mentioned rubber estate Sungei Ular. In spite of living on a much healthier estate I still suffered bouts of malaria and although I was newly married and was well looked after the company thought it best to send us home on leave in Europe, although it was about a year before my contract had stated it, in the spring of 1923. I was still very ill when we went home with the East Asiatic ship from Penang, so ill that I needed constant attention on board when I had fever as it was so bad at times that all I wanted to do was to jump over board. Malaria is an illness of the blood and might attack the brain and make the patient momentarily confused. It cannot have been much fun for a young wife to travel home with a half mad person. We naturally enjoyed returning home to a Danish summer and I had the great joy of being able to tell the old man how I had fared and enjoy the wonderful reception my wife received from my parents and my brothers and sister, and the walks I made with my father around Kikhavn where our summer house was. He was very interested in hearing my tales about conditions out there, the work on the estate and small episodes, which I am sure, were sometimes slightly dramatised. I had to prove to him that I was worth something. When the holidays came to an end and we had to return to Malaya in the autumn of 1923, Father walked us down to the mail coach – in those days an open horsedrawn wagon that was to take us from Kikhavn to the train at Frederiksværk. Father said an earnest farewell, so earnest that I understood that it was the last time I would see him alive. And so it was. He died in March 1926.

As mentioned earlier, I had the impression that I had managed to get rid of my malaria while I was in Copenhagen and although everyone helped me looking for a job at home so that I did not have to return to the country that had made me so ill, which my wife in fact was not too keen on, I wrote in all secret to my firm in Paris and told them that I was sure that I was cured and whether in spite of all my bad health they thought they might still use me as I actually could not think of doing anything but the work out there as a planter in beautiful Malaya. To my great delight I had an immediate reply from Paris, saying they had never for one minute thought of anything but my returning to take on the job they had already decided for me – and enclosed in the letter I found a lovely cheque to pay for my wife's and my return via England to Singapore. I was delighted to show this letter to my father.

And we went back on a wonderful East Asiatic ship, this time one of the 'white' ships, i.e. a ship that had comfortable passenger areas and also sailed with freight. To my great delight

there was for instance a wonderful lounge with a magnificent grand piano and as the ship called at Rotterdam, Southampton, Philipville in Algeria, Port Said, Djibouti opposite Aden in the Red Sea and Colombo we had a wonderful journey. In Singapore I received orders to go to Sungei Tinggi Estate, next to and north of Rantau Panjang Estate another of the company's rubber estates and we were back in Selangor. It was a typical estate assistant's job, a good house, friendly colleagues; my old French friends, a Swiss and my very good French friend Robert Michaux whom I had just met and become friends with before going home on leave. I mention him especially as he later on played a very important part in our firm as it turned out – and therefore for me. But in spite of all this, it was still rubber and not oil palms.

At this time the company was buying smaller estates and selling some soon after. They had bought a smallish rubber estate, Sungei Arak, north of the town of Taiping, the old capital of Perak where the English had a garrison. One day I was promoted to manager of the estate that was about 500 acres plus a small rubber estate of about 200 acres but the two estates were 30 kilometres apart which meant I had to do a lot of driving. After a while the firm wanted to sell these two small estates and we laughed a lot over the clause in the contract regarding Sungei Arak which was to be sold to some Chinese. It said that all stored rubber, in whichever condition it might be, was part of the deal at a certain price a pound. I had the thought of letting my coolies go from tree to tree and collect all the rubber that had dripped on to the ground after tapping, it is called scrap rubber, and store it carefully, ready for sale. Whether it was quite honest I am not sure, but the firm thought it a great idea.

In our bungalow here we had an amusing experience. We had a cocktail party for our nearest friends who all came from quite far away. On the way an Australian had happened to meet a tiny tiger cub not far from our bungalow and without thinking what might happen he picked it up, put it in his car and showed it proudly to the party. We quickly persuaded him to leave the party and put the cub back where he had found it. He set off with the cub but unfortunately he kept on driving and we heard that the tiger cub ended up in a zoo in Australia. Not long after his departure those still there saw one of the watchmen grey in the face from fear come up to us and announce that a huge she tiger with another cub was roaming around by the bungalow, without doubt looking for its lost baby which she had traced here. Soon after we heard the most terrifying tiger roar from the darkness out there, furious and wild and as the guests wanted to leave but did not dare so we found a solution. It turned out to be an extremely expensive cocktail party. Endless amounts of liquor were consumed. As host, I had to remain clear headed, but I had to pretend to drink as much as my guests and poured not inconsiderable amounts into various flower vases or other places where it would not be detected.

We eventually managed to arrange for a group of Chinese workers armed with torches to clear the road, along which the cars had to go – until they reached the paddy fields where the chance of the tiger attacking was minimal. They succeeded in chasing off the tiger and the guests could go home. Our night was disturbed and scary and we thought we heard constant roars from the tiger that turned out to be pure imagination. The animal had disappeared far away from us in its search of its young.

I have now reached the end of 1925 and the sale of the estate had more or less gone through. One day I was summoned to go to Kuala Lumpur, a journey by car through half of Perak via Ipoh, where you cross the Perak river and later also the Selangor river on the way to the capital of Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, which today is the capital of Malaya.

In the years I had spent up north, the company had merged 'under one hat' the various French Limited companies that owned estates in the country and had formed the large head office Socfin Company Ltd, which consisted of among others the firm Fauconnier & Pohst which had acquired a jungle concession of 3.000 acres in the southern part of Perak near two small towns Slim River and Trolak. Here they had started opening what later was to be known as Klapa Bali Estate – which means 'Palm from Bali' – an oil palm estate. At the beginning a Frenchman and my friend Charles as his assistant lived in a Chinese shop house in Trolak and started opening up the estate from there. They had laid a main path from Trolak into the jungle which had been felled by Chinese and cleared several hundred acres – and helped by a few Indian workers they had made beds for the plants and had planted oil palm and rubber nuts.

I was driven from Kuala Lumpur to Trolak where they told me that Garnier and Charles Fauconnier were being moved elsewhere, but they had a rather large concession in this jungle that they wanted to turn into an estate and the possibilities for further expansion were there. I was asked if I wanted the job which obviously was the one they had chosen me for earlier when they reemployed me after my illness. I thought for a while, although I naturally was keen on the idea, as it was a matter of oil palms. I knew my company and knew by intuition that if we were too many involved in the creating of this new estate, problems might arise. Therefore I said: Yes please, if you will trust me. But I want to be my own boss, as far as possible and I want to do the work for the first couple of years on my own as I think it is right, according to what I have learnt about the ideals of the company. If you agree to this, I want you to understand that if you think I am no good, I will accept that you fire me without any demands from my side. They chewed it over for a while – and said Yes. And that is how my huge job started in the East: the layout and the administration of what was to be The Perak Group of Socfin Company Ltd. The group that was to develop into a group of estates of about 10.000 acres of which 9,000 were oil palms and 1,000 rubber trees. The group consisted of three limited companies: Fauconnier & Posth Ltd, Equatorial Produce Co. Ltd of Africa Tilau Estate and Company Terre Rouge, Lima Blas Estate. In 1923 I constructed our company's large oil palm factory and the area was entirely planted, that is the 15<sup>th</sup> estate in Malaya, within 6 years.

To have somewhere to live my wife and I rented a bungalow on an English estate near Trolak – and the work started. At the edge of the concession a small temporary office and barracks for the workers were erected. It is amusing to think back to the fact that it actually all started with the clearing of about 200 acres of jungle, some Chinese contractors and about 30 Indian coolies and a rough plan of the layout of the first thousand acres. When I left in December 1939 there was an area of 10,000 acres that had been planted, 15 kilometres from the one end to the other, an oil palm factory that could produce 12,000 tonnes of palm oil a year, a small rubber factory with a capacity of about 400,000 pounds of rubber a year, 120 kilometres of roads, 40 kilometres of railwaylines for the transportation of the oil palm products, 3,000 Indian and Chinese workers in three villages which in the thirties were some of the first garden towns that were built in Malaya for the Indian workers, a hospital with room for 100 patients, schools in each village for the children with Indian teachers, a smaller central school for the Chinese children, a large Hindu temple, sports areas for the workers, a small European club with tennis courts, five beautiful modern bungalows for the manager and his five European assistants with the manager's bungalow in the middle of the whole concession and naturally about 20 bungalows, well designed and beautiful, for the Asian senior staff and latterly a small airport for the company's own aeroplanes. Shortly before writing this I have

been told that they have also built a club for the Asian staff which they have honoured me in calling it The Iversen Club.

Naturally, I could not have done all this without help and I had several experts to assist me, engineers, doctors, graduates in agriculture etc. who did the actual work, but I planned the development of the estate, where the roads were to be, where the villages were to be built and the most logical place for the factory and all the rules of the administration of the estates, the production, the discipline etc. I learnt one thing – that I did not know anything about how to carry out the details, but when I got an idea I knew exactly which of my experts to contact to explain what I wanted them to do for me and gave them the jobs so that they could give me several solutions and I could choose the one I wanted in order to carry out my idea in the way it was best for the future. It was the principle of my firm that the European staff was there as administrators with experts to help them.

To be given a task like this which was to result in what I have just explained, gives a young man a very special feeling of responsibility and makes him look upon it as belonging to him – his own small kingdom. To create an estate, I have discovered, is a question of imagination when you consider this gigantic jungle having disappeared and in its stead you have large open areas without trees, with paths, roads, ditches, buildings and then planted with exactly what we want to grow where nature spontaneously has grown something quite different. How do you start such a project? I shall not go into too much depth, but you acquire a kind of map which the surveyor has made by measuring enormous areas of jungle and indicated on the map that here is a river, here a gorge, here it is hilly and here is a swamp in relation to the riverbed. All of this is just indicated as they have only sketched these huge areas without going into great detail. These maps usually cover about 50-100,000 acres of land covered in jungle.

To use a phrase from ‘Madam Mangor’ (Danish Mrs Beeton) “take a” map and sit down at your desk, have a good look at the map and find a spot you know well, consider the limitations i.e. the limitations of the concession and let your imagination run riot. Here within your limitations an estate has to be created and according to the orders you have received from the directors and owners in Paris, it has to be planted within two or three years with so many thousand acres of rubber or oil palms according to what the terrain will accept gradually as you get to know what will be most productive, where the oil palms will grow best in undulating areas, but not as well on really hilly parts whereas the hilly land is all right for planting rubber.

As head of such a concern it is important to get a personal knowledge of the area and as the map you have in front of you does not give a great understanding of whether it is hilly or flat it is naturally necessary to research the area yourself. To start with I had to get to know the interior of the first 3.000 acres of jungle. There was therefore only one solution: with the help of the map and a compass, lines have to be drawn that are cut through the jungle as paths in order to enable you to walk through the jungle and get an impression, a real impression – not just a superficial one, how the actual land lies. You sit at your desk, you draw in paths, you get the directions of the compass and you give your orders to a group of Malays to cut out the paths through the jungle following the correct directions of the compass. The Malays are amazingly good at this job. You give them a starting point and the Malays work out the rest. You create a plan about how you want it to be when the jungle has been felled and the trees planted and for me that meant that the day the estate was ready, it should look like a chess board with equally large squares surrounded by roads for motor vehicles and within the

square the planted area of 250 acres. When making these paths it had to be envisaged that some would be expanded to roads for cars at a later stage. When a small area had been cleared you had to go out yourself on foot and size up of everything you saw; hills, valleys, swampy areas, rivers and not least the nature of the jungle trees, what sort, how tall and thick in order to gauge the quality of the soil. You then made a map based on all these notes after having hiked through the jungle for months on end, you planned the drainage system, you thought about where bridges were to be built, where the higher areas had to be terraced to avoid erosion when the jungle had been felled, in short: you planned the look of the estate. When that was done, Chinese tree-felling contractors were brought in and they employed the right number of coolies to start the clearing - first the undergrowth followed by the large trees that could be quite enormous and later on when the felled trees had dried out after 2-3 months, they would burn them after they had been cut into smaller pieces, finishing off by clearing the area of all the unburned matter which had not been consumed by the flames. These were huge areas, seldom less than 500 acres at one time. All this work had to be done under constant supervision which meant that I was always on the go in the jungle walking along the paths to check that the contractors did the work properly and within the right boundaries. As I was still living outside the future estate in a rented bungalow, I had a long journey each day by car to the edge of the jungle followed by many miles by foot along the paths. I therefore had the bright idea, that later proved to be wise, to get hold of some horses and rode along the rough junglepaths. I managed to get hold of ex racing horses. Racing is a very popular sport in Malaya, and the horses were Australian, a weird mixture of English thoroughbred and other sorts. When they no longer did well on the Malay racecourses in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh, they were sold off cheaply and I paid next to nothing for mine. I must add that it was rather unusual for planters to ride large European horses on the estate roads and certainly through the trees but after my attempt my company agreed that it saved so much time for the manager of the estate to ride, that they even paid for the horses and their stabling. Times have changed; nowadays helicopters are used for the same work. But I spared my feet.

The making of the estate began and the first job was to clear an area where I could build a bungalow for my wife, my son on me. Our son was just a very small boy who had recently arrived from Denmark but when he was two years old we enjoyed seeing him running around in the garden having fun escaping from his amah, a sweet Chinese nanny by the name of Shisha. She belonged to the no-longer existing type of Chinese women who had tiny bound feet, only a few inches long that she had from her childhood. She therefore could not keep up with him when he ran in the garden and it was fun hearing him shout: Amah, you can't catch me. She loved him very much and he was very fond of her.

It was wonderful moving to the estate, it was lovely living in our own house, it was fabulous looking out from the bungalow and seeing how the jungle to the south gradually was felled and lay and dried within the marked out boundaries. It was great seeing an area of jungle go up in flames and seeing how often it occurred that the enormous fire from 500 acres that rose into the tropical hot air, could cause rain that fell back over the still warm ashes and thereby created fertility of a special sort. When the soil had cooled down sufficiently and the coolies could walk on it they were sent out all over the area to sow a sort of bindweed which would spread rapidly in the warm soil and create an undergrowth to prevent the burning tropical sun from killing the bacterium that lived in the soil which is necessary for creating the vital necessities for the palms we were to plant. The jungle plants maintain the bacterium in the soil and when these are removed the soil becomes infertile when the rays of the sun kill all life if it is not sufficiently protected with a vegetable cover.



Such was the daily life of an estate manager who apart from preparing the felled areas for planting also had to prepare his ideas on the further development according to the plans he had made at his desk - but gradually more and more according to the actual conditions which appeared when the jungle had disappeared. Every day I would ride across the young areas to see what else needed doing, whether a bridge should be built over a gorge to avoid a long detour. On such an occasion I had an interesting experience. I had gone out through a burnt area and along the path in the jungle where I reached a gorge. I got down from my horse and tethered it somewhere where it could find food. I sat by the edge of the gorge thinking and calculating what it might cost to build a bridge. It might be cheaper to turn the road slightly to the east and cross the gorge where it was less wide. While sitting there meditating – without doubt smoking a cigarette – I suddenly had the feeling that something alive was standing behind me, something that was not my horse. I looked behind me and saw a group of people, not many, but I had not heard them approaching. They were totally naked and had long rod like things in their hands that later I discovered were blowpipes. A string round their waists held a quiver for their darts. They were rather dark, not very tall and of a race I had not seen before. I recall they had strange flat nose and that their hair unlike the normal long Malay manes was fuzzy and woolly. We smiled politely at each other, I tried to say something in Malay and they answered me in a language I did not understand at all, we gesticulated, we smiled and we were friendly. They were Sakais, the Malay aborigine.

Among them there was a chap who knew a little Malay but what I found so odd was that these jungle dwellers had come up behind me without my having heard a sound indicating that 10-12 people had come so close.

They usually live in the mountains but due to all this activity in the lowlands they had come down from their mountains to see what was going on. They were extremely primitive people and their common hunting weapon was what they had in their hands, the blowpipe and the quiver with poisoned darts with which they could kill any animal in the jungle with great accuracy. I noticed the many inflamed wounds on their bodies, arms and legs and later on when I had built the hospital it was not unusual to see a group of these Sakais sitting outside the hospital at dawn, waiting for our Indian or Chinese doctor's arrival. He would give them the necessary ointment for the eczema they contracted at night when it grew cold in the mountains and they lay in the dying ashes from their bonfires. This dried out the skin and caused a form of eczema. They discovered that we had means to cure it and they were very grateful and expressed their gratitude by smiling kindly and walking off.

Some of them had the habit, that when they occasionally walked down to the nearest village to shop in the Chinese stores they would dress nicely and decently and as soon as they left the village again they would undress on the way home, roll up their clothes and continue back to the mountains in the nude. Especially the women. As Malaya developed tourists started arriving, Americans too who would drive on the newly laid roads up in to the hills to look at the original inhabitants, the Sakais, in their original clothing, i.e. naked with a blowpipe, quiver and minute hankie where we Europeans think it should be – not least for the men. These Sakais were not at all stupid, they learnt quickly when they saw American tourists and stood still for the camera reaching out their hand and the Americans would give them a dollar before taking their picture. After that, when they had gathered enough money, the pilgrimage to our simple little village would take place and they bought things – dressed decently.

They showed their gratitude for our treatment of the eczema by being available when I needed workers in the jungle to make a small primitive palmhut or a temporary dam in a small river

and they would help quickly and efficiently. I inconvenienced them quite a bit when the estate was being developed and we ate our way into the jungle, deeper and deeper in and we came across small clearings where the Sakais had been and had planted rice and other vegetables they could not grow in the hills. In these areas at the edge of the jungle we often found a dead Sakai in a tree which meant that the clearing had been evacuated. One of their members had died and they did not bury them but put the corpse in the branches of a tree until it gradually disappeared – and then they left the place. Had we not arrived they would return to their clearing when the corpse or skeleton had vanished. The animals of the jungle and the ants make short work of a dead body like that.

While the work was done in the jungle, planting beds were made so that as soon as the area was ready the young plants could be planted out, in exact holes decided for them so that they stand in rows with a certain amount of plants per acre, ditches have been dug, so that the area is drained where it is necessary, terraces have been constructed to protect each little plant on the hilly areas from erosion, paths have been laid out so that the staff can supervise the large area by motorbike and roads have been made so that cars can move easily.

Simultaneously houses for the future work force have to be built with schools and nurseries. That is how an estate is created. Then the question arises about how many workers and how quickly the laying out of the estate has to happen. It is wonderful for a man to see his ideas put into practice in nature and soil, so that the place that previously was impenetrable jungle suddenly becomes a productive area that gives the interested investors hope for a future return. Apart from the fact that the man who has been allowed to execute it is as happy as a child by seeing that he has succeeded.

It had taken about a year to plant these first 20,000 acres, a very educational year and I was pleased to learn that the company had extended the concession with 2,000 more acres of jungle just to the south and adjoining the recently planted areas – which was to be opened as soon as possible. A new firm had been founded: Equatorial Produce Co and as a small tributary of the main river the Bernam River, the Tilau, traversed the area the new estate was called Tilau River. This was the start of my being nominated to Administrateur de Group of the firm's Perak group.

One day in March 1926 while planting the first areas I had the great sorrow of receiving a telegram telling me that my father had died. Six months before I had pleased him by sending him a photograph of my wife and me in our manager's bungalow. In his reply he told me that he had been to see his doctor and was told that he suffered from Angina Pectoris and could expect only to live another year. I was very proud when he started his letter with the words 'My dear eldest son and heir' and that he felt at rest knowing that when he had died I would look after the family. It was quite a burden for a young man who had just begun and I would advise other fathers in similar situations to avoid laying such a responsibility on their children. When Father died the result was that in order to free my mother for further worry, I bought the parental home from her so that she could continue living in her home as before. Father was a senior master and had no money and living as a widow on his pension in her own home with a young son who had not finished his studies would have been extremely difficult. From then on she called herself 'the rich widow' and it was a great pleasure for a son. This proved my belief: you must live to please your forebears and thereby you make yourself happy and can also please others.

My six months leave arrived in 1928 after having worked for the firm for the four years. We had a wonderful trip home via Italy, France and England where we visited my wife's parents before going home to Mother in the house in Denmark. By the way – it is the same house where I am sitting to day writing these memories. We had a lovely holiday and a great reunion with my mother, my sister and my youngest brother. He had just finished his training as an architect at the Academy in Copenhagen and I came home and told him all about the wonderful things out there. One evening we happened to talk about his future and what he wanted to do. It is strange how fate happens to play a part in one's future and while we sat talking and discussing his future I quite impulsively said: "What about coming with me to Malaya? If we cannot find work for you as an architect at once we'll find something else." With hardly any time for thought he answered that he would like to. And he was to go back with me. Suddenly it struck me that although I had a job in Malaya and although I might give the impression of being wealthy – I was living on my holiday money – I actually did not have enough money to pay for his journey. But I had a good idea and my wife was in full agreement that when our joint holiday was over she went home to her parents in England and extended her holiday another 2-3 months so that my brother could travel with me on her return ticket which would leave me time to save the money to pay for a ticket for her. No sooner said than done. My brother soon got a job as an architect in Malaya and today as Architect B M Iversen in Ipoh, he is one of Malaya's best known architects. He married out there and is still there as I am writing this with his children and grandchildren. His daughter is there, recently married to a Scottish planter and his son and daughter-in-law – both architects, trained in Denmark, work for him in his office. The result of my journey in 1919 is such, that the family was drawn to beautiful Malaya.

Before my leave we had opened the jungle all the way down to the Bernam River, the boundary with Perak and Selangor. By the same river, but far to the west where it flows into the Straits of Sumatra, lie the very beautiful huge Danish Westenholz estates, today known by the company name as United Plantations Ltd. The first of these was the rubber estate Jendarata, where I had my first experience of being a planter. In the mean time the company had developed with a large coconut estate and later on with the large oil palm estate, Ulu Bernam, beautifully laid out, very modern and extremely well administered.

My firm was greedy for more land, and I had already contacted the district officer before going on leave, to expand the concession on the southern side of the river in the state of Selangor to start up yet another estate. The district officer was a friend of mine and I recall when I arrived at his office and asked him what possibilities there were for obtaining land in Selangor, he put his hand on a map on the wall covering about 100,000 acres of jungle saying "Is this what you want or can you make do with a bit less?" I answered "No, not quite that much but we had thought of building a bridge across the river from Tilau Estate to the new area and we feel that 6-7,000 acres would be quite adequate." We got it and while completing Tilau Estate I prospected the new area and planned the new estate. Tilau Estate was to be completed first by the acting manager in my absence, but I had already got an idea of what the new area was like. I had had Malays in there carving out the necessary paths as mentioned before, but as the distance from my house on the first estate to the Bernam River, the outer boundary of the other estate, was 7 kilometres and before reaching the new area you had to cross the river, the distance had become so great that to really be able to enter the new area it would have been impossible to return to the bungalow at night. I spent many a night in the jungle together with my Malay compass group who cut out the paths in advance. We lit a fire when it grew dark and like them I made a sort of bed surrounded by a mosquito net elevated from the ground to protect from snakes and other creepy crawlies. It was wonderful to be

totally distanced from civilisation with these lovely Malays. They sat telling old Malay legends, stories about ghost tigers and other weird animals, they sang and gave me a fabulous impression of the life of this strangely artistic human race. They taught me a lot, i.e. how we when in the jungle, where we walked very quietly, should avoid scaring wild animals. Our paths sometimes crossed elephant paths, where groups of elephants pass with certain intervals throughout the year; almost to the date of a certain month the elephants would return on this very path. They showed me how the elephants stuck to the same route through the jungle. They taught me to look up to keep an eye on the small poisonous snakes that lived in the low hanging branches of the undergrowth. At night by the bonfire they taught me to burn off the leeches that stuck to your body – just with a match making sure that the heads got out and did not stay under the skin where they would cause irritation. There were many leeches and they had the ability, without you knowing it, to get under your clothing and settle in the strangest parts of the body to suck blood. These trips in the jungle were very exhausting and we walked many kilometres each day, but before going to Europe I knew what had to be done on my return.

On my return to the estate in 1928 my first job was to build a bridge across the Bernam River and to lay the first part of a road into the new concession so that we could transport our tools, rice etc. which were needed by the Chinese coolies who were felling the jungle. The chosen spot for the new bridge was not the easiest. The river was more than 20 metres wide with a fast running current and was deep. The bridge had to be constructed so high above the normal water table of the river as to be navigable even during the heaviest floods which could cause the water to rise 8-10 metres after the great downpours over the hills which occurred every so often and always caused the river to rise. At the same time it had to be sufficiently strong to withstand the many bumps from all sorts of strange things, which were carried by the fast flowing water. It might be jungle trees, drowned oxen and even once a small Malay hut that had dislodged from its stilts; the family had gathered on the floor of the hut and was saved. All went well for a while but one day after having started work on the new concession, when I lived in a temporary house on the new area with my wife and son, the bridge disappeared. There we were feeling very cut off from the outside world together with 5-600 Chinese, cut off from the most important thing – food.

My house was to be there as this spot was the centre of the three concessions as the new area which was being opened up was as large as the two other estates combined. We managed by rowing across the river but it was most impractical regarding transportation and illness. A new temporary bridge was quickly erected as soon as it was possible which soon after was replaced by a real steel bridge built by a firm of engineers. The bridge and its foundations measured more than 30 metres. It could carry motorcars and the diesel train. I remember that it was rather difficult getting the bridge built on the Perak side within our boundary so we had to get permission to turn the road past a small Malay village which was next to our estate. The village did not mind in the slightest getting the new estates with their many coolies near them as the small shops which mainly were owned by Chinese saw a chance to increase their business. It was in the same village in the thirties, after the estates were operating fully, the bridge had been built, roads laid and the traffic rather busy, that I suddenly one day discovered that a new shop had been opened. It was a photographer and the owner was Japanese. This was just about the time of the Tientsien incident which was regular war and people in Malaya had become aware of it and did not want Japanese on our estates. It was noticed that Japanese photographers opened up shops near strategic crossings, such as bridges and at main roads. As there were not many people in the area where these shops were it seemed most weird and one wondered why a Japanese photographer started up here. As far as

I knew the workers on the estate had not taken up photography, nor had the inhabitants of the Malay villages, so I asked the government and requested to have the photographer removed. That was not difficult, but I am in no doubt that he had already managed to get some excellent pictures of what he wanted. For example I know that later on at the retreat of the English during the Japanese attack of Malaya from the north, they also used some of my roads in the estate to attack behind the retreating English lines and ambush them.

Due to the great distances, I had to live there while they built my final home, a house high up on the top of a hill as tall as 'Himmelbjerget'. It was a strange hill and actually considered by the Malays in the area as a holy place as it was said that some holy men had been buried at the foot of the hill in the jungle. There were still traces of the graves and the natives were not too keen to come to this hill which they said was the home of a white tiger and a white peacock. I have seen neither. On the other hand I have seen a black panther there and sometimes had charming visits from elephants who peacefully walk up the road to the house. At the foot of the hill there were wild boar and quite a few dwarf hens in the area around. I have since heard that they were the original chickens as known by us to day. They were very beautiful, especially the males in their gorgeous colourful plumes.

We felled the jungle from the top of the hill and down the sides, so far down that the jungle we left from the foot of the hill and up did not disturb the view from the top of the hill. But I had to lay a road that was not too steep to get to the top in order to be able to drive up and it was partially dug, partially blasted out of the hill which was rocky. The final road was one and a half kilometres long.

The annual rain had been worked out exactly in order to calculate how much rainwater the tiled roof would gather, and large cisterns were built underground at the back of the house so that we never lacked water on the hilltop. We could even install toilets in all bathrooms, running water for every bathroom as the water from the large cisterns was pumped up by an engine into large containers raised sufficiently above the bathrooms to give the water the necessary pressure. In the garage we installed our own generator and had several batteries to give us sufficient electric light, and a telephone net was established on all three estates, so that each bungalow, office, factory, hospital was connected to each other and the surrounding world. My firm never quibbled about the cost of these practical installations.

We had an exceptionally wonderful home up there on our hilltop. My brother had designed the house which had a central wing for the necessary living rooms, a side wing for our bedrooms, the nursery, bathrooms etc., and on the other side a similar side wing as a guest wing with a lounge and two guest rooms with their own private bathrooms. Behind the house, down from the stairs in order not to disturb the view, were the kitchens and the servants quarters – and further back the garage and the stables for my horses. The house was painted white and had a red tiled roof and we considered it to be beautifully furnished. My firm did not spare us anything and they wanted this manager's house for this group of estates, the first in the country, to be really representative.

It was common habit in the East from purely economical reasons to build the Europeans' houses on the flat where they could easily be reached from the roads that had already been constructed, but therefore also surrounded by the growth of the estate which deprived you of any view. If you wanted a view you would have to sacrifice an area around the house where producing plants could grow – so you did not do it. Everything connected to my house – naturally accepted by my head office in Kuala Lumpur, also the long and very expensive road

up the hill, the cost for the group administrator's bungalow became much higher than usual. When some of our directors came out from Paris to see how far we had got spending their invested capital, they were keen to discover why my house had become so expensive. They arrived in the afternoon at teatime and I could see on their faces as they got out of the car that they had already thrown up their hands in horror on the way up. "So, Mr Iversen, this is where you live. It is wonderful, but somewhat expensive" We had arranged to drink tea in the garden where the hill falls steeply ahead of us, so that you did not only look across the jungle left at the foot of the hill which I had left standing, but also over the huge planted area of 4-5,000 acres. If you went to the other side of the house to the other edge you looked north across the two first estates of 4,000 acres. They said nothing, but they looked. All of a sudden one of the said: "You are quite right. A man who manages an area like this must have a horizon. He must sit up here and look over it all and get ideas apart from the fact that he is not smothered by sour air from the surrounding trees. It is quite right, Mr Iversen". And the great thing was that all future European bungalows in our firm where it was possible were built on hilltops with a clear view all round.

We had a wonderful life in our home on the top of 'Himmelbjerget' and gradually created a very beautiful garden around the bungalow on the top of the hill, but we needed a considerable amount of servants who had to live close by, in fact just down behind the house where the kitchen, the garage and the stables were. We had a Chinese amah for my little son, an elderly lady who had her own set-up as the only Chinese among the servants who otherwise were Indian. The most important person was naturally the cook with his wife and his 3-4 children. Then there was the No 1 boy, also married with a couple of children, then the unmarried No 2 boy and a young boy, a Podian, which means a boy. Finally there was the water carrier who did the heavier work i.e. washing the dishes and the gardener who looked after the garden. The driver lived near the garage. He was our Indian Sikh, Sadu Singh, who also looked after my four horses. He too was married and had a beautiful little son who from a very young age wore the Sikh's characteristic head-dress – a turban wound around his hair knotted on top of his head. He was only waiting to be big enough to be able to grow a beard that already starts growing at the age of 13 or 14. Sadu Singh had a helper, who washed the cars and mucked out the stables and took care of all the rough work that Sadu Singh would not do. It seems amazing that we three people needed so much help. But it was not our fault. They had their own system. A man like Ponu Sami, the cook, could not stoop to do anything but shop in the nearest village following the orders of the mistress of the house, and cook. No 1 boy took care of serving at table and looking after us, i.e. he supervised the master's clothes, as the amah looked after my wife's. No 2 boy and the young boy did the cleaning of the house according to No 1 boy's instructions and the water carrier and these boys were ordered to do the rougher work. The cook and the houseboys and the amah were under my wife's command, whereas Sadu Singh preferred receiving his orders from me, although he naturally also obeyed 'Mem'.

This pecking order amongst the servants was somewhat exhausting as my wife and I could never sit having a quiet meal on our own. The table always had to be laid just so, we had to be served to avoid them thinking they did not do their job well enough, that they were not really needed and even though it was very hot we always had to change and wear smart clothes for dinner. When we returned to England where we had to look after ourselves during the war we often agreed that in spite of the lack of servants our English life was so much easier.

They took great care amongst themselves to see to it that no one did a job that rightly should have been done by the next in the hierarchy. My wife sometimes had trouble keeping order in

the hierarchy and at times she might give an order to No 1 boy which should have been given to No 2 boy who in turn would order the young boy to do such and such. They were all very loyal and we had them for a considerable amount of years. Sadu Singh stayed with us for 16 years, Ponu Sami, the cook for 14, No 1 boy for 13 and the younger ones naturally were changed out as they grew up. We only had the amah for six years until our son was old enough to be sent to Europe to attend boarding school in England. We had hoped to keep him with us longer but one day my wife and I heard an enormous palaver from the back of the house and there on the top of the stairs that led down to the kitchen stood my young hopeful son with his hands in his pockets of his small blue shorts giving a speech – or giving orders to the assembled servants who stood in line at the bottom of the steps awaiting orders. He spoke to his amah in Chinese, to the older servants in Malay and the younger in Tamil. We decided that this could not go on – he had to return to Europe in order not to get the wrong ideas.

Before this episode we had already noticed that there was something in his manner, slightly commanding. For example, he was used to ride his little Borneo pony on the large lawn in front of the house in the morning while we drank our morning tea, and we had seen that he sometimes would ride up to the gardener who might be weeding a flowerbed, stop his horse, put on the airs of Master and point to various weeds in the bed with his riding crop which he meant the gardener had overlooked. But they were so kind and sweet to him, all of them, and really laughed at the little aspiring master, but my wife and I were slightly worried.

I was amused when I heard my wife, sitting at her desk, getting the weekly accounts from the cook and then I would hear her say to Ponu Sami “No, my friend, I can accept your taking a personal commission of 10% for your purchases, but I notice that you have charged 15-20%. That is not good enough Ponu Sami” He wriggled his toes and look worried and started to explain, and she raised her hand from the table and repeated “No, Ponu Sami, it is not good enough”. He would smile broadly and answer “Well then, I better ask Mem for forgiveness”. He had made a mistake when calculating his expenses and would then present the correct account. No more was said about it and they were not really dishonest. They never stole. We could leave everything lying around the house. They would protect our belongings as if they were their own, but to add a small commission when dealing on behalf of the master, was moral to them and happened all over the East in different ways. You just had to realise the circumstances and make sure that they did not cheat you too much. There were naturally also problems when they argued amongst themselves and once again it was my wife who with her tact had to sort out the matter and be the fair judge.

Sadu Singh was a totally different type and had a personality of a different calibre. As an example I can describe the night when he, after a business meeting I had attended in Kuala Lumpur, drove me the long way home on a quite difficult road in the pitch dark. I was tired and probably quite grouchy and sitting behind him in the car I sometimes told him – the extremely competent driver, “be careful at this bend”, “do not drive so fast”, “drive properly”. He never answered when I spoke to him and I could see the back of his neck where not one muscle twitched; he just drove on, as he liked. Finally and undoubtedly unfairly I got angry with him and his total lack of reaction and exclaimed in a fury “Don’t just sit there looking so stuck up”. He gave a start, but there was no other reaction and he continued driving home. Exhausted I got out of the car and went into the house while he drove the car to the garage without saying a word. Early next morning when I was drinking my morning tea Sadu Singh appeared dressed to kill and asked to talk to me. At this time he had been with us 12-13 years. I looked at him and asked myself “what now?” I asked him what was up as he was dressed so smartly. He looked so sad, stood straight as a soldier and announced that he was giving his

notice and wanted to leave immediately. Quite surprised I asked him, as I stood up and walked over to him “But Sadu Singh, what has happened?” He replied “Last night Tuan Besar told me I was arrogant and stuck up and therefore I cannot stay here any longer.” As lightning it struck me that I had committed a great mistake which I should have avoided. I knew so well that I could scold him for all sorts of things but to tell a Sikh that he was arrogant was not permitted. I immediately said “My dear Sadu Singh, I am in the wrong. I should never have said that and you must forgive me.” Tears appeared in his eyes and mine too and we embraced each other and everything was back to normal and Sadu Singh stayed with us until we left the country.

When we were going to leave we wanted to please our old faithful servants and I offered Sadu Singh the old open Ford car I had used to drive about the estate when I was inspecting it. But he did not want it. He got something else which pleased him. So I gave the car to the cook and it was a sight for sore eyes when Ponu Sami shortly before our departure loaded his wife and children into the newly acquired vehicle to take them on a drive. The road from my bungalow was winding and rather steep and he had only reached halfway down the hill when he drove too close to the edge by the gorge. He could not brake in time and the car ended up a little way down the slope in the dense jungle while his wife and children screamed for help. It was a very amusing sight and they were totally unharmed, the car too which had landed softly. We got them pulled back up and he drove on as if nothing had happened.

The new area on the Selangor side of the river was financed by Co. Terre Rouge, the French estate company in Indochina which expanded into Malaya, and this third estate was called Lima Blas. As the northern part of this concession was the central point for the three joint estates, the main activities, the group manager’s bungalow, the group’s main office and the large oil palm factory were to be here. We had to get a move on as the first oil palms, which were planted on the first estate already, were producing and in 1932 the factory was operating and the estates completely planted. The small rubber factory in the most northern part of the area had already started production in 1930-31. I was able to move into my lovely house in 1929 – designed by my brother (he was never paid for it) and as mentioned built on the top of the tall mountain which I did not deem profitable for planting oil palms on.

It was a wonderful place to live and I was able to stay there for 11 years until I had to leave the firm although it was always said in Malaya that the man who created an estate and built his house there was hardly ever allowed to live there. He was usually transferred before being able to enjoy it. When driving up the road from the foot of the hill, the jungle spread out on one side with steep rocks. The estate was on the other side until you reached half way up the hill where it became too steep, as you went along a deep gorge of about 60 metres depth where I let the jungle remain whereas the jungle had been felled on the other side – not to ruin the view from the house. I planted bamboo on both sides of the road on this last stretch and we ended up with the most wonderful bamboo avenue you could imagine and finally the road led up to the open hilltop, past my tennis court to the house and its garden. On this road I had an amusing experience one afternoon when driving up from the office and reaching a bend half way up, I suddenly had to brake hard. A huge elephant was standing there not even 5 metres away from me. The road was not wide enough for two cars to pass and we had had to install traffic lights to avoid two cars meeting on the way. The elephant did not budge. On my left I had the steep rock wall and on my right the deep gorge. The elephant stared at me with his small red eyes. They were not pretty and I was rather scared. It started moving its head and swinging its trunk and swaying its ears. I carefully edged the door open up against the rock wall so that I could escape if necessary and put my hand on the horn and pressed hard;



the elephant took a step or two towards me and I told myself “this is it”. It then suddenly turned its enormous body and lay flat down on its stomach, stuck its front legs out over the edge of the slope, and it was as if the air escaped from a large balloon, it slid softly down the slope into the jungle at the bottom of the gorge and disappeared. I put the car in gear and drove on up to the house and I must admit that I was worried that it might still be in the area. My wife and I soon agreed to telephone the friends in the district where we were going for dinner that we unfortunately could not make it. We simply dared not leave our house that night, but even called in some of the estate watchmen to patrol around the house during the night in case the elephant should return. It has been known that elephants who stray and arrive at isolated estates have approached houses and playfully rubbed themselves against these, so that the houses became crooked or looked as if they had been exposed to an earthquake. We never saw our elephant again, but our hunters followed its tracks the following day and the elephant had crossed the river and gone far into the adjoining jungle. I was amazed to realise how this gigantic animal could move so gently and quietly and next day when I checked, there was hardly any sign on the slope of where it had slid down.

Gradually we made many good friends, mainly amongst the other planters in the surrounding area and we were often together in fact as often as possible in spite of the large distances in the district. A co-operation of the estate folk in the district – all in all managing about 80-180,000 acres was absolutely essential and for years there was a Badang Padang District Planters’ Association which had meetings at the Sunkai Club about 20 kilometres from my home. As I by now represented the largest group of estates in the district I was – after some years – chosen to be the chairman for the Planters’ Association of the district and Patron for the Asiatic Staff Association. The chairmanship meant that I became the representative for the district on the committee for the Planters’ Association of Malaya which represented all the estate interests on the Malay Peninsula not least for the then British government in Malaya which had its headquarters in Singapore where the British High Commissioner resided. Through all this one naturally met not so few of the British government’s officials, who were district officers, judges etc. It suited my firm fine, that I was Danish and in fact the only Dane with a European staff of 60-70 people consisting of French, English, Scots and our chief engineer was a White Russian. But this Dane represented a French company in an English colony and as he came from a small country which politically was totally harmless it was very neutral to have me there and suited them well as it also suited the English. In connection with this I became a member of one of the labour committees that the English government had formed as one of the four estate representatives the government wanted on this committee. I became very involved with the British colonial conceptions of how the Chinese, Indian, Javanese and Malay workers were to be treated and learnt how the English many years before I had understood the conditions, had built up their schooling system on the estates and in the towns and even had founded schools for higher education so that they systematically trained the countries own inhabitants to be able to take over the administration in all stages and thereby made themselves redundant in years to come. The main emphasis was naturally mostly laid on the Malays, as it was their country. As an example I can mention that when I arrived in Malaya in 1919 all district officers in the country were English and when I left in 1940 all these jobs were filled by Malays, who in most cases had had their final education at English universities. In my opinion this is one of the reasons that the development in Malaya after WWII between the Europeans and the others went so smoothly. Today, Malaya is a kingdom, where the Malay sultans have chosen one of them to be king and Malaya is still a member of the British Commonwealth and is still a wonderful country for Europeans although many things have changed in an old planter’s opinion. I am not so sure that an old

planter who felt like a king sitting on top of his hill would feel at home there today. But I have not tried.

It was as chairman of the Badang Padang Planters' Association that my wife and I were invited by the court of the Sultan of Perak at the conclusion of a combined meeting between the British High Commissioner for Malaya and the various sultans of the country. Not only the officials but also the leading personalities in the various states were invited, whether Malay, Indian, Chinese or European. The party was held in grand style at the Perak Istana the Sultan's palace by the Perak River in Kuala Kangsar, his official residential city. The dress was gala, i.e. for Europeans who did not wear uniforms, tails and their ladies in grand toilette with long gloves according to the etiquette of the court. The Chinese appeared in their wonderful silk garments, very colourful and the Chinese women wore the most beautiful silk costumes with sparkling jewellery in their hair, wonderful bracelets, necklaces and rings on their fingers. I have seldom seen so much wealth in one place as displayed by these Chinese ladies. The Indian gentlemen made a very elegant appearance in their black long coats with narrow trousers and turbans in various elaborate materials and their ladies were in gorgeous saris that they wore with incredible elegance. The Malay men were dressed in silk bajus and multicoloured sarongs worn round their waists like a sort of skirt which went down below the knees. Underneath they had light coloured trousers, all made of silk, and naturally a black sort of fez (songkol) and the Malay women wore sarongs of Malay batik right down to their feet with three quarter length silk tops in all possible shades. These ladies also wore magnificent jewellery. I was most impressed of all with the Sultan of Perak's members of court who wore black sarongs and dark purple bajus and instead of the fez, they had a kind of turban of very stiff black silk and many of them had a kris, the characteristic Malay knife tucked in their sarong.

We arrived in our finest car, driven by our Sikh driver, who in honour of the event was in his wildest finery; a turban and broad belt round the waist of his uniform of material woven with gold thread. He was very proud of himself and not least when we drove up under the main porch of the Istana where he saw the assembled guard of honour, Sikh lancers on horses that stood stock-still in spite of the heavy traffic of arriving cars. The horses did not move a muscle although the lancers respectfully lowered their lances in greeting for each car with guests. Our driver Sadu Singh was proud because he had previously been one of these lancers. The car stopped at the entrance where we were met by the Sultan's chamberlain, an English officer in gala and we were escorted up the wide staircase into the large hall where we were shown a seat so that we could look up at a low dais where the royal chairs stood for the various sultans and the English High Commissioner. The Sultan of Perak was with his first wife who sat a bit to the side and you saw no other women in his retinue. It was fun to see a balcony behind the dais covered with the most beautifully carved wooden latticework through which you could just glimpse many shining black eyes that sparkled in the light, but you did not see the people. This was the Sultan's harem; i.e. the many people attached to the palace. This did not necessarily mean that he had many wives. The rooms in the palace were often furnished in English style, others were Indian, which definitely suited them better. The Istana was built in a three winged Moorish style with towers like minarets and from a terrace you could look down into a beautiful grassed yard. On the fourth side the yard opened up to the Perak River's fast flowing current. There were spotlights on the roof, which lit up the garden and the area down to the river gave you the feeling that you were in the middle of a film in an Aladdin's palace. You felt you were looking at multicoloured flowerbeds when you saw the many beautifully dressed ladies of the harem sitting on the grass. Down by the river stood the Sultan's ceremonial elephants with their wonderful coloured coverings and their Malay

mahouts sitting astride their necks behind their huge ears. And if you looked more around you would see the Sultan of Perak's wonderful polo horses, there must have been 12-14 of them, being exercised gently in a circle by their small Malay stable boys who looked most charming in their purple livery. After the official ceremony we guests were introduced to our host, but unfortunately not many Europeans could address him in his own lovely high Malay language. We had to make do with very simple Malay, which you in fact could not use when talking to him, but it was the language we used every day; or with an apology for a lacking education we would address him in English, which he would answer in the most wonderful Oxford English. The top officials of the English government such as the Residents of the States, would speak high Malay a language they had to master to be able to take on the job, as each Malay state, had his own English Resident to assist the sultan. The language spoken between the Europeans and the Chinese and the Indians was usually Malay. If not among European planters, when they came across Indians from the Madras area usually could speak to them in their own tongue i.e. the Indian dialect: Tamil. Most of the Indian workers came from this area and we planters simply had to learn to speak this language. We spoke English to the Chinese or Malays. Later in the evening we were given refreshments at a standing buffet just like European cocktail parties, but with the slight difference that alcohol was not normally served at this Muslim palace. A European bar had, however, been placed in a side room serving anything you might want, set up for the special occasion; and there was another room, where the Chinese could get what they liked. Here I must add that when seeing the Indians, the Chinese and the Malays present here and the cars they arrived in, you could not get anything but the impression of how extraordinarily wealthy these leading people were, not least compared to the Europeans. It also struck me, when you stood comparing the representatives of the different races with us Europeans; we came out for the worse. How they understood to move gracefully, elegantly and with dignity – not least the women.

Through the work on the labour committee one also started thinking about improving the accommodation for the workers on the estate. In the first ten years I was a planter there, the Indian worker usually lived with his wife and his children in a room in barracks, built of wood on stilts which raised the floor of the room about 2½ metres above the ground with a wooden staircase leading up to it. There was no ceiling and the roof that was raised in a pointed angle was covered in attap, dried palm leaves. A small fireplace had been built under each room on the ground and the back wall of each room served as the back wall for another family's room, with access from the other side of the barrack. Each barrack contained 10 rooms in its length on either side so that each barrack housed 20 families, on average about 100 people. After a while this was considered not good enough, but it was all mainly a question of finances to improve it. A firm as mine was very aware of all improvements and very human in thought and therefore became one of the first who introduced the new living quarters for the workers on the estate. When my newly started estate had reached such a stage of development that all buildings had to be permanent and not as to start with only temporary I had the pleasure of developing the first garden towns on the estates. I built three villages in which each family got a small house with two rooms and a wide veranda, which in the East serves as an extra room; they each had a garden that was fenced in with a gate leading to a kind of main street and at the back of the garden another gate to a smaller road, where each house had its dustbin that would be emptied every day without disturbing the family while sitting on their front veranda. We installed a water works and had sufficient running water for each house and adequate toilet facilities. The houses lay in rows as small villas with their gardens and the necessary road system and there were certain rules about law and order which must exist in small communities which each consisted of 8-900 people which were given by the boss of the estates. In each village the workers themselves chose a village council and I was keen on

explaining to these workers that the meaning with it all was that they should look after the discipline in the village according to the rules. I told them that it was not the intention that the European or the senior Asian staff, because of their positions, had the right to enter their homes whenever it suited them, but only could enter if there was trouble and cause for alarm and advance notice was given by the manager of the estate. It was up to them to live a free and undisturbed life in their own homes. I had the pleasure that I never once had an experience in any of the villages where I was forced to order an intervention from the senior staff. They showed a remarkable discipline. After giving them notice we naturally had to inspect the houses for possible repairs and normal maintenance every 6 months or so, and the senior staff walked along the roads every quarter to inspect the gardens when the best kept garden would win a prize. The villages became very pretty. Close to the villages an area was set aside for their domestic animals which they all looked after. They were allowed to keep their chicken inside their own small gardens, which meant under the houses, which like all houses out there are raised above ground by cement pillars. Each village had a nursery, run by the old women who could no longer work in the field, but looked after the children whose mothers worked on the estate. There was also a school in each village with teachers whose education was controlled by the government. All education for the Indian children was only in Indian – not in English.

In the largest of the three villages built at Lima Blas it gave me great pleasure when the company agreed to build a real large temple for the Indians, built by Indian temple builders imported from India. It was very beautiful and had an enormous effect on the workers. Only the poor manager suffered at times when certain constellations of stars appeared in the sky which demanded a special temple ceremony from four o'clock in the morning and accordingly demanded the poor man's presence. He was sat in a suitable chair in the temple at a suitable distance from the idols, a caste mark on his forehead and garlanded with flowers in the Indian manner. But it was interesting to attend these ceremonies and it has often struck me when thinking back of the boys who swung the incense bowls in front of the idols, and the lights that were lit by their feet and the intonations of the priest, how much it all resembled a Catholic ceremony or rather how much the Catholic ceremonies have learnt from the East. But the most wonderful thing was to see the expression in the faces of the praying Indians when they held their hands, palm against palm up to their faces and looked at their idol. As far as I recall there were no women in the temple.

Apart from seeing to it that the large workforce had tolerable living conditions and were happy, it was important that the living conditions of the senior Asian staff was attractive, so much so, that they really could perform a senior position. The Indian that were used in the field were trained in agriculture at home in India. Most of the office staff was Indians and many of them Christians, mainly Catholics and a few Protestants and they were usually from institutions of higher education in India and several of them were university graduates. I was amused to discover that one of my senior Indians clerks who was a Protestant could tell me that in the Protestant church in Calcutta where he came from you could see the Danish King Christian IV's name and weapon and the same Indian therefore knew much about Denmark. My secretary was a Christian, a Catholic and a university graduate Malayalam from the west coast of India and he always impressed me with his incredible memory. We had an extremely large correspondence that was filed by number. His brain seemed most strange to me. For instance when we had a problem we had to write about, I might say to him "I seem to recall, Mr Fernandez, that about six months ago we had the same query and wrote to someone about it." He sat and thought for a while and soon answered "Yes, Sir, you are quite right, it was letter No 346 of 10 April 1933". I then asked him for it and a few minutes later I had it and he

was never wrong. The office was very big and divided into many departments, each of them run by a head clerk with the necessary assistants. I remember, there was one thing that amused the Asian staff very much. I hated anything put away in drawers. When the day's work was done, all desks had to be cleared and all papers filed. We employed some young chaps for this job, all they had to do was to collect the letters from the registry and return them after they had been used. I sometimes inspected my office to see if the rules were being observed. We are all human. If I opened drawers and found papers that should have been filed, I pulled the drawer all the way out and emptied the contents onto the floor. They did not get angry, but thought it quite funny. They were wonderful people to work with and at Christmas I do sometimes still receive cards with greetings from some of them and especially notice the greetings from their wives and children so that I can keep up with how many children and grandchildren they have. They were all married, as we did not like bachelors in these senior jobs, simply to avoid difficulties with the female labourers.

At the large oil palm factory with its repair shop and spare parts store for the large fleet of lorries and railway material we employed Chinese. They were excellent mechanics and were very skilled. They lived in their own little village near the factory and kept to themselves. As drivers and engine drivers we employed Malays who loved driving, not least did they love putting the pedal down and drive fast which could be dangerous when driving with a load of several tonnes on their lorries with trailers. They also had their own small community but preferred living in their own small villages outside but close to the estate.

Each village had small offices for the Indian doctors who could see to the ambulant treatment that was needed and be in charge of the distribution of medicine. First thing in the morning the doctors would take care of the workers who called in sick and secondly they would check on the children to keep an eye on their health and see to it that they received their cod liver oil. Later on when the estates were producing the children got palm oil instead. It was so charming seeing the kids lick their mouths when they had received their dose, but it was an important problem to see to it that the inhabitants got the right amount of vitamins and resistance to all the strange diseases they could contract if not careful. All around there were mapped out areas where all still standing water was sprayed with oil according to certain theories with an interval of some days to kill off the mosquito grubs before they developed into full grown mosquitoes, the malaria carrying mosquitoes. An attack of malaria in a member of a worker's family or a member of staff, either Asian or European was carefully accounted for and controlled so that you could track down to the spot where the malaria had come from. In the last 5-6 years I was on the estate we almost succeeded in eliminating malaria totally on the estate. If a case should occur, we examined the case and traced back and found that the person with malaria had contracted it while visiting someone outside our domain.

Apart from these doctors, we built a large hospital in the middle of the estate, which was run by a Chinese consultant with some Indian doctors to help him and nurses. We also had a small maternity wing. As the one who was responsible and in charge of this medical department there naturally was an English doctor, who lived outside the estate and also attended the other estates by frequent visits at certain intervals. The responsibility for health for the firm and the government was ultimately mine and I kept a constant check on the statistics and rappers so that I could fingerpoint the weak points and say to my English doctor "the statistics show that there is something wrong here which we have to sort out". And it was sorted. Quite considerable amounts were spent on this but it was worth it. To start with we were slightly worried about the large mortality rate amongst newly born children. This was not so strange

that the mortality was high. Not least among the girls as the habit had been in India for many hundreds of years that the women had their children at home, i.e. in the barracks. And they had many children. The doctors in the villages kept an eye on when the women should stop working before the births, when the babies were due, and it was the custom that the men were given a very small dose of Cognac to help the mothers during birth. The doctor naturally had to keep a check on the small doses of cognac and they had to correspond with the amount of children born. But a few years later we discovered that the mortality of children between 1 and 2 days was rather high and especially among the girls, which according to Indian thinking are not as valuable as boys. The excuse was always that the poor child had died during the night, but no one really knew how, the mother might have rolled on top of it by mistake. I spoke to my doctor, the Englishman Dr Symes and we agreed that we had better build a maternity ward at the hospital so that all children could be born there. This did not suit the workers at all and I almost had a strike on my hands on the estate. We then agreed to discuss the matter before the new rules became law. The doctor and I then decided that we should get an ambulance – like the ones we know here. It was sprayed white and had a large red cross on it, the driver and helpers wore uniforms and were to fetch the mothers to be in good time before the birth. The women looked at the elegant vehicle with interest and were very impressed and thought it was grand to be driven in this very fine vehicle to the hospital. Suddenly she became a person of importance. Trouble broke out and the men complained. Now there was no longer a reason to hand out the cognac which the poor father-to-be without any doubt had enjoyed. We eventually succeeded and the statistics of infant mortality gradually showed a suitable and low cure. It was an interesting exercise.

To make it nicer for the workers and in connection with this, to replace the dose of cognac, we opened a small shop in each village where toddy was sold, fermented coconut juice, which is very potent. We also had to have a control system here, as this palm wine may only be served in small doses and consumed at the shop – and the doses are carefully rationed. A drunken orgy among the Indian is not very funny and very difficult to stop when they first have got gong. You have to be especially careful when they become really angry - when they get together in gangs.

It was in my job as chairman of the Planters' Association of the district and I was seconded to the Planters' Association of Malaya that I as one of four planters for the state of Perak was asked to join the English Labour Committee which was chaired by what you can say is equivalent to the Ministry of Labour – out there Control of Labour. The committee mainly dealt with the conditions of the workers on the estates. Conditions concerning the Chinese, Indian and Javanese workers' entry into the country, settlement and placement where they were needed. Fixed rules were made for the length of working hours, salaries including overtime payment, holidays, certain conditions which can be compared with a kind of forced saving for the workers regarding their future to which the estate also had to make a contribution. They dealt with the conditions of the labourers when sick and hospitalisation etc. was free for them and the estate covered expenses. Conditions about the children's education at schools on the estates and nursery schools as the mother most often had to go out to work. Finally, the matter of the housing for the workers was of the greatest importance as one gradually had reached the idea that as far as possible each family should have its own little house as we already had introduced on our estate. Gradually it also became more essential that conditions between the labourers and their employers became tighter and were contained within specified limits and with the permission of my company I was permitted to experiment with the first 'panchayts' i.e. nominate a representative amongst the workers who would form smaller committees who would have meetings from time to time directly with the

head of the estate, not with the subordinate staff, so that the head could get a direct and personal idea about what the labourers wanted, which naturally was complied with as far as it was possible. This board of representatives worked very efficiently and I must admit that although I have never had problems with my labourers, the introduction of these 'panchayts' gave a further stability and peace in the conditions on the estate. I have always been amused when thinking that we introduced these boards of representatives in the early thirties, i.e. I do believe, long before such a thing was introduced as the norm at home. I must add, that it is always easier to establish something like this in a pioneer country, where old prejudices need not be broken down first – than it would be in a country where the labourer and employer have already experienced many crises

Here I recall an episode that partly describes the herd mentality, some months before moving up to my new house when I was still living at the foot of the hill in a temporary house. I had two young French assistants and we were busy constructing a new main road. Apart from the Indians the workforce consisted of a considerable amount of Chinese coolies who continued their work felling the jungle. These Chinese lived in attap huts not far from the Indian barracks. I was ill with flu and lay in bed and heard a dreadful shouting and yelling on the road – not far from my house. It was drizzling with rain so I was not too keen to get out of bed and go out to see what was wrong. But the noise intensified and I eventually had to get up, put on my shoes, a raincoat on top of my pyjamas and an umbrella. On the road I saw a group of Indians with opened umbrellas. On a pile of stones at the side of the road stood my two young assistants, looking mildly disorientated and on a closer look I saw at a distance a smaller group of Chinese seeking shelter from the rain of stones thrown by the Indians. The Chinese had taken water from the well the Indians considered theirs and it became a matter of caste – which was deemed a crime by the Indians. The Indians gathered in a large group and picked up stones from the pile – we were macadamising the new road – and bombarded the Chinese with them. My young assistants' orders to the Indians to remain calm were not heard at all. Their knowledge of the language was not great as they were very new and they had no idea, that the very worst place to stand was the pile of stones. Fortunately it was all stopped early and before the flock also started venting their anger at the Europeans. But I plodded on down the road, entered the group of Indians and started scolding them; for the first because they did not stop when I turned up, for the second that they did not give me sufficient room to walk and for the third because they disturbed me when I was ill, and for the fourth and not least, that they dared stand their with opened umbrellas when Master appeared. In the East it was a privilege to have an umbrella or parasol carried above one's head and it was a sign of lacking respect when you did not lower it immediately when the highest arrives. This was the only way I could try to stop them as they were quite beside themselves with rage, but I knew that the Indians knew nothing worse than getting their heads wet from the rain. They simply hated it. The nearest already shown signs that I had got to them and that they still had respect, so they lowered their umbrellas and gradually it sank in: here is Master. And I kept on scolding them and more and more umbrellas were lowered. Finally there were only few opened umbrellas left in the attacking mob. I gave them a truly personal volley of abuse mentioning them by name, the last umbrellas were lowered and their heads got wet and I noticed that those who had lowered their umbrellas first now started to disappear. The wetter they grew, the more of them disappeared and finally only the Chinese and we three Europeans remained. The Chinese wore their large woven hats and were not upset by the rain but felt somewhat sheepish from the situation they had caused and apologised profusely. My French assistants had to learn more about the Indian herd mentality and stones and not least that when a mob of Indians gets angry they do not know what they are doing in their anger. Well, the matter about

the water was soon solved and a team of workers started digging a new well for the Indians only, master went home to his house with his umbrella over his head and returned to his bed.

As the workforce, as described earlier, lived their own private lives on their own and did not mix with the senior Asian staff, who lived their lives, naturally in a different milieu, so did we Europeans have our own private social life without mixing with the others. Within the senior Asiatic staff there were also limitations between them, mainly due to the caste system and religion and I naturally did not interfere with it at all. There would be some joint amusing meetings at the sports centre where we could sit cosily together and see the workers play football or run the sack race. The estate gave out prizes for the winners. We all liked it and these sports events usually took place on the large Indian celebrations. The Chinese never took part and the Malays had their own parties in their villages. But the relationship of these two races to the estates was totally different from the Indian. An Indian worker in the thirties had the standard expression when describing his estate manager "He is my father, he is my mother, he is the one who gives me my rice". The Chinese had their own sort of trade union, his own private life which had absolutely nothing to do with the estate. He had his contract and he stuck to it and he had his own medicine and looked after his own health; all in all – he was much more independent. As said, the Malay had his village, he had a certain amount of artistic talent, he took life more 'dolce far niente' and when you gave a group of Malays a contract – he feels that he is the free man in his own country – you could never be sure if he fulfilled it. One of the most characteristic traits of the Malay are the typical words 'tida apa' which means 'never mind' – what is not done today can be done tomorrow or the day after or some time in the future. If he enjoys the work, he will stick to it, at least until he has earned enough to feel that he can ask for an advance, which is naturally given to him, but you cannot be sure that you'll see him again before he needs more money. But he is an exceptionally likeable human. I asked my old Malay friend who was quite well off and had his own little rubber plot and a delightful bungalow type hut not far from the river and children who had been educated well at good English schools and aspired to become civil servants with white collar and tie if he did not think it was about time that he got himself a small car or a radio which was the latest craze in Malaya then. Instead of answering me he took me by the arm and led me down to the river, pointed at the jungle on the other side of the river, pointed back to his property and said: "when I have all this beauty and can sit down here in peace and row and fish, what should I do with all that rubbish?"

Apart from all the many people I have described there was also my European staff; my second in command, who was a graduate in agriculture. I have had several, a Scot, an Englishman and a Frenchman. The estate was divided into four divisions, one with rubber of about 1,000 acres and three with oil palms of about 2,500 acres each. The assistants lived in extraordinarily beautiful bungalows and we had a club, lying centrally for the Europeans with tennis courts, billiard and bridge tables and of course - a bar. Most of them had already spent their first four years with the firm and were now permitted to marry. They had their own separate offices on their divisions, their own office staff and their senior Asian staff and I taught them that they were totally responsible to the manager for their work and could run their divisions with the rules that had been set by the boss, exactly as they liked – freedom with responsibility. I did not ask them what time they got up in the morning, but they knew the distribution of the work etc. If they made a slip up one morning, which was but human, they only had to phone the office and say they had not been there that day. I would say nothing to them if the work was done. I told them that if they could stay in bed all day and run their division perfectly, I would have no objections but I would say they were extremely and unusually clever, if they really could do it. The only thing I could not tolerate was, if they lied



to me or told me that something was done, which had not been done, but I did not mind at all if they wrote to me in their weekly report, that they did not think that such or such a part was in order and that they felt it needed such and such. I would then always offer that I or the second in command should come and help.

But I did have an assistant once whom I questioned about whether he was happy with his division and who swore that everything was in perfect order. For some reason I instinctively got the impression that it was not true and immediately rode out to the section of his division that I knew was difficult. As expected I also found it in a bad state of neglect. I spoke to my second in command about it, who in turn told me that he had recently pointed out this area to the assistant. I picked up my telephone at once and rang head office in Kuala Lumpur and explained that I did not want the guy on my estate and told them the reason. It was the way of the firm that the manager was also right and I summoned the young assistant and explained the situation. That it was not because the area was not in order that I did not want him, but because he had cheated me and he would now be paid off legally and had to leave the estate not tomorrow or the day after but now. I have only experienced one other assistant like this; apart from that all the others I have had have liked the atmosphere that reigned. They liked the fact that if they for example needed some days local leave – a young man does need to get away for a while and mix with other people – they need only say to me “ I feel I need to get away a few days and my division is in total order and I have prepared my helper to see that all goes as it has to”, and he was allowed his leave. But if he came and asked me for leave he had to guarantee that it was in order before going away or he would put the responsibility on my shoulders while he was gallivanting and he knew himself if he could take some days leave now with a clear conscience. They understood and accepted this system totally and they learnt that it was their division, their responsibility. It was necessary that they had to look upon their domain as their property. In that way we managers had our responsibility to our firm. The estates that we managed we considered our own property as long as we were there.

This was proved in an amusing episode, I think. We older estate managers took it in turns to visit other estates belonging to the firm and had to report to head office in Kuala Lumpur what we had seen and what we thought we saw and what we possibly could suggest as an improvement. It was the spirit of co-operation as the few of us old men and my friend Robert Michaux in head office were pioneers in the development of the firm and we were a team. One of my good friends, now deceased, an Englishman S T Rhodes, who managed a similar estate, even slightly bigger than mine, once visited me. We drove around on the estate and among other things he asked me why I had laid the road along the edge of the jungle, the boundary of the estate, he did not think it was a good idea as we only had the advantage of looking to one side. I explained that I had my strong reasons as it made it easier to see if the jungle started encroaching on to the estate and the jungle grows quickly. He said he found it too expensive to keep the jungle away in this way and I answered that that was the way I did it and that is the way I want it done. Rhodes said:”Please, Iversen, just tell me who you are, Jesus Christ or the King of Denmark?” I answered “Not at all, I am the manager of Klapa Bali Lima Blas Estate”. He said, “I beg your pardon” and reported back that I could neither be led nor driven. When he saw my Hindu temple he immediately told head office “How come that Iversen can build such a large Hindu temple? Now I want to build a Catholic church on my estate” and he did so on the estates in Johore where he had many Christian labourers. I kept my roads as they were and Rhodes got his church. That was the spirit of our company.

It must occur that when you have had such luck in life and have caught your Birds in such a way that you end up in a circle of human beings who really are large and do not look at small

things, but psychologically understand how to make use of the co-workers in the right fashion, who understand to spend big sums of money at the right time and in such a way that they always end up with a bonus, also in the human sense, that you might get a somewhat strange concept of life, as you might even totally unconsciously get an impression of your own value which might seem offensive to others. But you cannot sit and explain to all sorts of people what you have experienced and you must wait and not always judge too harshly and believe that an existence as the one I have just described and such luck in life must mean that you become arrogant and think that you are wonderful, just the opposite. One has learnt from such an existence and from such co-workers that it is not a matter of being submissive, you have to realise that you have taken on a responsibility which must be carried out to the bitter end without losing any of one's own spirit, one's own personality. If you do, you are not worth a thing in the eyes of the kind of people whose spirit I have tried to describe, you are then just a little nothing and not a part of a team whose motto is "You can because you think you can".

Among my Asiatic senior staff I had my factory engineer whom unlike my Indian and Chinese senior staff was a Singapore born man of mixed blood, a Eurasian. In those days they were in some ways the most unfortunate type of man. There were not many of them, they were usually very well educated but they belonged neither to one or the other society. They were neither white nor Asian and therefore kept themselves mostly to themselves. Mr Carrier, who was of English stock, probably with an Indian mother, was extremely clever, he had a shrewd mind and ran the large factory, supervised the railway material and the lorries in the best fashion, but he still lived his own life with his very beautiful life who also was Eurasian and his children and had nothing in common with the senior Indian staff. Invitations from the European staff to join in friendly relations he seemed to ignore, you almost felt that he was not interested. I myself have had many interesting conversations with him in my office, but although I could have rather intimate and personal conversations with my Indian staff and with my European staff, I never succeeded in getting to a personal stage with him. The Eurasians had some sort of complex, not because they seemed to be unhappy, but they obviously felt very strongly, that they belonged nowhere in a purely spiritual respect. They were therefore also not easy to understand, as normally neither the Indians, Chinese or Malays nor the Europeans liked the mixing of races, which caused them to become introvert. Mr Carrier was an exceptional refined person and as I have said we could discuss all sorts of things, but we could never broach the question. That is at least how it was in those days and I am sure that I am right in saying that much has changed since then as one can see and that the points of view of the European have changed greatly, although I believe still not from the Indian and Chinese. I mention this here as so much is said about racism nowadays and so much emphasis is laid on the fact that it is the white race who does not tolerate the mixing of races, but my personal experience has been such that the Chinese and the Indians were far less tolerant in such circumstances. In my opinion racism is not as much a question of colour of skin as of the spiritual milieu and attitude to life, dictated by climatic conditions, religion and customs derived from this, which is very difficult to mix together to create the necessary harmony amongst people. But I do not think that any of us who have lived in the tropics and have worked with people of different races, have forgotten for one minute, that we are all humans and can encounter human problems that demands consideration from all sides and in working together it was most necessary that we could but respect each other. It was this respect, this mutual trust that was so very important if one should have any possibility to administer an estate like this with the slightest success.

It is not unnatural that you personally feel an extreme attachment to these estates and I am happy to admit that today, as I am writing this, I am suffering from the strongest 'homesickness' and want to see how it has developed further since I left 23 years ago. I have also often desired, if I should be up to such a journey, to see it all again, not least now that I have been told that I would be considered the guest of my company when I am in Malaya, but there is this little haunting superstition I got out there that I have difficulty in ignoring

Down by the river in the southern part of the group's No 2 estate, when we had reached so far that we had to start planting, I came across a very steep hill, about 100 metres high, the top of which was too tall and steep to practically plant, although the jungle had been felled on it and it stood bare. Up on top I found a strange rock formation, covered with creepers that actually resembled something like a passage grave, as we know them here. Whether it had been made artificially or produced by nature I do not know and sadly I never managed to get archaeologists to have a look. When the order came from me that this top was not to be planted, rumours went all over the estate, taken quite humorously by the Asiatic staff but absolutely more seriously by my labourers that this place was to remain untouched, because Tuan Besar (the big boss) – was to be buried when he died out here.

An old Indian woman was the supervisor of one of the nurseries. She was very old and was said to be very wise and considered a clairvoyant and she loved telling fortunes. One day she caught my hand with her old gnarled fingers looked at it and said "You will never leave us". It might well be crazy that I involuntarily took it seriously, not least because I loved the place and not least when I got to hear the rumours of Tuan Besar's burial place, and I could not help thinking from time to time that there might be some truth in it. I have always felt that the people out there had a special spiritual connection to the occult that we barbaric Europeans do not have. When to top of it all the Malays in the neighbourhood talked about that I had defied the spirits by having my beautiful house built on the top of a holy mountain there definitely were moments when I told myself: "God only knows if the old wife proves to be right". When the time approached for me to leave the estate for good never to return I was, while desperately sad, deep down occupied by the thought whether I really would manage to get away in time. Therefore it was strange on that day when I drove out of the estate for the last time together with my now deceased wife along the road where the labourers were lined up on both sides waving to us, that I drew a deep sigh of relief when we turned out from the estate road on to the main road Kuala Lumpur – Ipoh in safety.

We drove to Ipoh where my brother, the architect and his wife had arranged a beautiful reception and greeted us in lovely ice cold champagne. While sitting there enjoying ourselves, he announced that they had a surprise up their sleeves which without doubt would thrill us. At Ipoh airport he had hired an open sports plane which could carry the pilot and two passengers and he had arranged that we were to go there in a minute and the aeroplane would then fly us back over the estates, so that I could have a last look at them from above. I was scared of saying anything to him, telling him about my thoughts and my wife looked at me and said nothing either – not even when I said "how lovely". We arrived at the airport and there was a small plane, in my opinion even an extraordinarily tiny plane which almost looked as if it was made of sticks covered with canvas and tied together with string. We crawled up in to the plane that started and we waved goodbye. We looked out of the sides as we took off and held each other's hands hard during the whole trip. We flew south over the wonderful landscape, endless areas of untouched jungle, over villages with paddy fields around them and suddenly got to the northern edge of the estates that I knew so well, and from high up I actually enjoyed the beautiful sight of the roads, the railway tracks and the housing between the green palms.

Our pilot was so kind to fly without knowing it across the famous hill, which I am sure I looked at with my heart in my throat, We crossed the Bernam river and flew over the factory area, the last village and the large Hindu temple and my brother had arranged with my successor by phone that all the labourers had taken time off and stood in groups, by the factory, by the main office, by their gardens with their wives and children and around the temple waving to us. And we waved back. To my horror it had also been arranged that he was to fly over the top of my bungalow hill and he flew so low that the plane was on a level with the bungalow and there in the garden stood my successor, the European staff and my old servants, all waving madly. When he had circled the bungalow two or three times to let us see it all a bit longer from above he fortunately turned north back to Ipoh. When I saw the last glimpse of the estate below and behind me, I once again sighed with relief as I now was outside the boundary of the estate and safe and sound, although still in the air and I said to myself “ Now we have managed that too”. But as we approached Ipoh which is surrounded by very steep jungle clad rocks made of limestone, as so often in the tropics one of the sudden thunderstorms suddenly appeared with lightning and heavy rain. Everything turned black and you can hardly see where you are and we said “We are sure the pilot is going to fly into one of these rocks – and that will be it”. My wife and I were so terrified, but the pilot landed beautifully on the airstrip where my brother and sister-in-law received us, fortunately with very worried expressions in their faces, as they had been frightened when they saw the tiny plane appear out of the thunderclouds and were not happy about the situation. When I told them later about my superstition and the fear we had experienced they nearly died from laughter, but took great care in letting us know that they had done it all with love. I have not seen the estates since then, but now I am so old, I doubt that I would be frightened to return.

We spent some lovely days with my brother and sister-in-law and drove on by car from Ipoh up north through Malaya to Penang where we were to board an Imperial Airways flying boat which flew from Sydney to Singapore in those days via the route I shall now describe to London. I must admit, that we were slightly worried at the thought of a long flight home, not least because the war was raging in Europe and we had never flown before (apart from the little experience over the estate). Socfin Co. had been so polite to allow two friends from the firm out there bid us farewell with a drink at an hotel. It was very kind of them to travel the distance from Kuala Lumpur to Penang to wave us goodbye as they had already given us a farewell party in Kuala Lumpur some days before when we were given beautiful presents and received many praising words. We boarded our flying boat that then seemed quite enormous, which soon took off heading for Bangkok. It did not take long to reach an altitude when we saw nothing but clouds. What seemed most strange to me was that when we reach 3,000 metres it became so cold in the cabin that we had to sit with blankets on our knees. I wrote some impressions from the trip while in the plane, i.e. that it was quite bumpy. Compared to today where all flights are by jet planes it did not proceed with the speed of light and it took us four hours to reach Bangkok, a distance of about 1,000 kilometres. At three o'clock we approached the Siamese coast, the sea below us was azure blue – and we were met by rain and arrived in Bangkok at 4. Bangkok seemed rather grubby although we saw wonderful palaces and temples ahead of us. Later on we also discovered that there was a huge amount of mosquitoes. At the landing strip my cousin, Commander Willy Salicath and his wife met us and took us home for dinner in their beautiful home – an old palace in town.

They had visited the estate earlier. It was only about 10 kilometres from the nearest station on the Singapore-Bangkok line and as the estate used the nearest local station as a transportation point for our products I as chief on the spot had the privilege that I could with due notice arrange for the international Malay-express to stop at our little local station when we had

guests. My car could wait at the station in front of the carriage where the guests were and they could step straight from their train into the car. This had amused my cousin and his wife a lot. This privilege could of course not be misused but that is how it was in those days. I am sure it would not work today.

Of course we did not get a thorough knowledge of Bangkok by this one afternoon and evening's stay – but we did see some wonderful temples.

Early next morning at 9 we left by flying boat for Rangoon. We flew over the Siamese paddy fields with their wonderful green colour, climbed over the heavy jungle clad mountains and headed for the Burmese coast across the blue water of the Bay of Bengal. It was still very cold in the cabin when we flew so high. We landed at Rangoon without leaving the plane that was to pick up some passengers, amongst them the English Bishop of Burma. We had caught a glimpse of the wonderful pagodas in Rangoon from the air. We continued across Burma, crossing the sea again, once more part of the Bay of Bengal, toward the mouth of the River Ganges. From high up the delta of the Ganges looks like the crown of an enormous tree that has been felled. All the small tributaries are the branches and the sump growth in between are the leaves. An overwhelming and impressive sight from above that covered a gigantic area. All of a sudden we are flying over the crown and reach the trunk, the gray brown majestic River Ganges itself. We get a glimpse of Calcutta ahead of us and an enormous steel bridge. To our surprise the plane dips quickly down toward the river and the pilot lands on the water right between two vast bridge pillars and taxis calmly under the bridge to the landing place. It would have been 'funny' had one of the wings hit the pillar.

Now we were in India and were going ashore by our hotel and had to go through the customs. Still under the impression of the conditions I had had with my Indian office staff and workers I was somewhat shocked by the incredible arrogance and lack of efficiency these Indian customs officers displayed. We had naturally only taken a few items with us as hand luggage as it was only a matter of one night's stay, but when my wife's hand luggage had to be checked she opened the lid, whereupon the customs man reached down to the bottom of the bag and threw the whole contents out on the counter. He messed about with one hand for a while and left my wife with a shrug of his shoulders to gather it all up and put it back in her bag. We were wise enough to keep still. We drove to our hotel through some dirty streets and saw many Indian sitting on their haunches or lying chatting. The impression was rather sad.

At six the next morning we took off again for the 2.200 kilometres long journey across India to Karachi. The crossing in those days took 10 hours with just one stop on the way, on the Raj Sammand Lake, in the middle of one of the small independent Indian states. The lake was not large and from the air we could see that it was full of crocodiles. Several shining white palaces stood around the lake all with white marble steps leading down to the water. It is said, that when they made offerings to the gods, they led the poor offer down these marble steps and threw him into the river for the crocodiles.

Something had gone wrong with one of the engines and the passengers were allowed to go ashore, i.e. we were given permission to go up some steps to a long covered platform shaped building where all the entry – and exit doors were guarded by heavily armed warlike Indians all with large black beard, turbans, gold belts with a terrifying knife. We were not allowed to go out through any of the doors and had to stay in the platform for the two hours it took to repair the engine. I did get the chance, however, to buy a sort of knife from a guy similar to the ones the soldiers wore in their belts. It was a sort I had never seen before and when you

drew it out of the sheath and exposed its pointed and rather gruesome looking blade and pressed a button on top of the hilt, the blade opened as you open a pair of scissors. It was obviously a very effective weapon to put into the stomach of an enemy.

We eventually took off and could continue the journey which now crossed the colossal Sind desert. Everything was parched and grey and the land surrounding the lake we had just left had had no rain for four years. There was another two hours flight left over this dreary landscape and I asked the pilot, that as we were in a flying boat, what would he do if we had to make an emergency landing before we reached water which certainly would not be before we reached the Indus. He answered "That's easy enough; I would then land by gliding flight on the sand on our pontoons". That sounded easy enough. We reached Karachi on the eastern side of the Arabian Sea. We spent the night there in a not very nice and neither very clean hotel, but there was a certain charm in the city and by chance we happened to be there on the night of the Indian festival of light – Depawalli - when the Indians follow an old custom and burn fires of joy and candles overall, in and out the houses and they walked about with small oil lamps in their hands which turned the streets alive with constant movement in all the tiny flames. Next morning we were already on our way again heading for Basra in the Persian Gulf, a wonderful blue sea with Baluchistan's mountains as a backdrop and we flew over it and over the Arabian peninsular Oman, where we stopped briefly at Sharjah. From above the landscape was as if covered with white and red sand mixed with rock formations, as you might imagine a moon landscape with small rivulets that ran out into the sea. We were told that only four Europeans lived in Sharjah, they were stationed there for a year and a half at a time at the oil refineries and were in a country where the sultan was anything but friendly. It cannot have been much fun living there in those days. We continued along the Arabian coast. When we had reached quite a distance west of Bahrain it was the date and the exact time in London when the armistice of WWI on November 11<sup>th</sup> was observed with two minutes silence. The pilot was in radio contact with London and on the exact moment he had flown so high that he could switch off the engines and we all stood in silence in the total soundlessness for two minutes while the plane glided down. With a wild roar the engines were then turned back on. We all sat down deeply moved, not least at the thought that Europe now was at war once again. After a while we flew over Iraq – along the Shatt el Arab where the rivers Euphrates and Tigris converge and run into the sea. We landed elegantly on the river in front of the large staircase that leads up to Basra's elegant airport hotel. It was very modern then with wonderful rooms with air-conditioning and on the other side of the hotel we looked out over an enormous landing place and we were amazed to see one plane after the other land or take off. aeroplanes that arrived from Asia heading for Europe and vice versa. We had the chance to go for a short walk down to the town of Basra that was beautified by its many date palms that grew among the lovely buildings. Arabs rode their horses in the streets, veiled ladies – it all gave us a feeling of being in the middle of an adventure from 1001 nights.

Next morning we were on the move again and on our way to Baghdad that the government had decreed we had to circle a few times before flying on. This gave us a good chance to admire the many wonderful buildings and mosques with their green domes and slender minarets. On further towards the west – over the endless Arab sand desert. We landed very briefly to pick up a passenger on a lake not far from Baghdad and continued westwards. We flew low across this wide desert and we could see the caravans moving majestically along. We also saw a motor road. We crossed the large oil pipe plants that lay like a striped ribbon across the desert. At one of these points there was a sort of small fort. Seen from above the desert seemed endless. We now approached the border of Palestine and could just see the reddish mountains ahead of us. The pilot flew lower and lower and suddenly we were in a

gorge in the mountains and we felt as if the sides of the gorge grew taller and taller around the plane; all of a sudden – as if the plane was a cork that flies out of the neck of a bottle – we flew out into the light and over the bright blue Tiberias lake, which resembled a blue jewel. We flew across the lake to the old Roman town of Tiberias and landed as always gently and softly on the surface of the water, close to the edge. Small boats were on their way out to sail us ashore and the door of the plane stood open so that we could get out. A number of swimmers came up to us and hung on to the door. An Englishman asked us where we came from and when we answered “Malaya”, he asked us “do you know Dick in Singapore?” He obviously forgot that Malaya from south to north is 600 kilometres long and that more than 1 million people live in Singapore. As we lived 600 kilometres north of Singapore, we did not know Dick. We were rowed ashore and sat in a kind of garden at the edge of the lake and were served lunch. When we had finished eating in this wonderful spot from where we had a view across the whole lake the Bishop of Burma took the opportunity to tell his co-passengers a historical description of Jesus’ life in this area and pointed out the many places around the lake where Jesus had been and where he had spoken. It was moving to see and hear about all the things we once had learnt.

Back on board the flight continued across Palestine and the pilot was kind enough to circle over Nazareth so that we could look down into the town. Then over the Mediterranean towards Alexandria where we landed in the afternoon. It was very interesting here. Our stay was quite long so we had the opportunity to have a look at the town as we were going to change from our nice flying boat to an ordinary plane. It seemed ‘logical’ that we had been flying across the vast areas of land in a flying boat, and now were to board a Frobisher land plane which could not land on water.

Alexandria appeared to be most elegant and the hotel by the coast promenade was extremely luxurious. It was best to speak French there in those days. Next morning off again along the African north coast followed by a hop across the water to Valetta in Malta, where we saw the historical place where Admiral Nelson lived and the magnificent cathedral with its wonderful silver doors and the lovely mosaic floor which was as if covered in Danish flags – the old sign of the knights of St John.

Down south of Italy to Tunisia where we flew on to Marseilles after a short stop. On this part of the trip we managed to see submarines in the sea below us – looking just like huge whales. Another short stop in Marseilles and then to Bordeaux. Due to the war we had to wait for special permission from England before we could set off on the last stage across the Channel and in to London. We had reached the war zone and they had to make sure that we would not risk meeting enemy planes. We had good and delicious days in Bordeaux on the airlines account but this is where we got our first impression of war when we saw several wounded French soldiers who had returned from the front line after the first battles between France and Germany. Finally the last day of travelling came and we landed in the afternoon at dusk in London. The journey was over and we were to see London again after almost four years. But nobody knew for sure when we would arrive and we were very amazed when we drove in to London itself and found ourselves in the middle of what was so unknown to us – total black out. It was a frightening transition. We found ourselves a hotel and the first thing we did was naturally to telephone Brighton where our little son was at boarding school. The boy was 12 years old by now and I myself had not seen him since he was 8. It was lovely hearing his very boyish and enthusiastic voice.

And here my second life really started. Due to the wretched war it shaped itself quite differently from what I had planned since I travelled to the East in 1919 – and so differently from what I could ever have imagined.

It affected us deeply when the Great War broke out in the autumn of 1939 and I already knew then that Denmark had signed a Non-aggression pact with Germany, which had quite a large influence on my own position in the firm as a Danish subject. After the war I had a discussion with the French management in Kuala Lumpur who pointed out to me, this was in October 1939, that Denmark would – in spite of the Non-aggression pact – be attacked by the Germans but that we would not defend ourselves. These large global firms have undoubtedly knowledge of political situations and the political development that is not for the ears of normal mortals. I always wondered how they could know this in advance and I went strongly against their pronouncements and said among other things: "How do you know that France will actually fight?" I based my words on a small incident which had taken place a short while earlier on my estate in our own club where we had discussed a possible declaration of war. Among my assistants I had two young Frenchmen, who had been officers in the French army. There were also some Englishmen present and one of my good friends and a neighbour estate manager. The two Frenchmen said that they were almost convinced that France would not fight in a new possible war and the young Englishmen did not hide the fact that England at that time actually was not prepared for war. My friend Callard said in a typical English manner, that he was sure that was true but we English usually win at the end. In my discussion with the management of the firm it became obvious that although my twenty years duty actually was to expire in a few months, in February 1940 they really did not want to let me go at this moment, but in their opinion I as a Dane would be considered the enemy on a possible German occupation of Denmark without a fight and they suggested that I took out British nationality, they even had the papers ready for my signature for this very purpose. I, however, would not change my nationality, and explained that it was impossible, it was against my belief apart from the fact that perhaps quite naively it never had occurred to me that Denmark would not defend itself. As we could not progress on this matter, I asked them, as I was to leave that they would let me go home via England as the first step before the war in Europe had become too hot – and I was given permission to go home in December – about a month and a half before my time was up. I must admit that I was deeply hurt at their words about Denmark but sadly – they turned out to be right.

As I started these 'memoirs' it is my conviction that it is all about pleasing one's forefathers and thereby making yourself happy, which in turn can please others whether in the way you execute your duty among friends, for your country and for those closest to you. It gives a balance which in some strange way connects you with the divine, which makes you aware that you are actually just a small wretch, but a wretch that does not only breathe, but a wretch that in order to achieve that balance must follow its instinct, its intuition.

When you start writing an autobiography you naturally begin to think that the tale of the biography is as old as the oral language. Why have biographies been written? From man's need to remember the dead. It is a deed of commemoration that must confirm solidarity. Most people assume that biographies come in to existence because the writer wants to be remembered by his children, his successors. That is possibly so, but the origin is actually that biographies were written for the dead, for the forebears whom you wanted to please by telling them that the spirit of the family has been honoured. This is how the old family chronicles and the old sagas were written.



For the person who has lived his life in the East among Hindus and Chinese, for whom the worship of the ancestors is an old hereditary cult it must therefore be almost a regional destined tendency when working on the autobiography to think of one's own father whom you want to show that you have lived up to his dreams and hopes. To try to impress yourself is not very funny and to expect to be able to impress your contemporaries is but the hope of fools.

Postscript by Ruth:

Werner retired in 1941. He was only 45 years old but had to leave much against his wish. He loved his work and had created the two very large estates Kelapa Bali and Lima Blas from dense jungle. They were model estates, but SOCFIN had the rule tht you must retire at the age of 45.