



From the collections of
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Preface

THE invention of the picture postcard was a happy one, both for those who were its immediate beneficiaries and also for posterity. The picture postcards of Kuala Lumpur and its surroundings which were produced in the opening decades of this century were an undoubted boon in the days before television had developed to bring the world into our living-room. These pictures, taken by local or Japanese photographers, catered almost exclusively for a Western clientele who were thus enabled to send to the folks back home vivid images of the land in which they carried the white man's burden under the remorseless tropical sun. Their concern to reveal the exotic world in which they lived their lives accounts for the at times somewhat bizarre subject matter of the images which they sent; municipal slaughter-houses, the local fire-brigade station, workers' quarters – even the local gaol, together with portraits of street vendors, emaciated jinricksha pullers and professional beggars. However, we in the 1980s should be grateful for these off-beat predilections for we are presented with a unique visual record of Malayan society, at least from some aspects, as it appeared in the formative years of colonial rule, as well as being provided with an invaluable historical record of the evolution of our capital city. This record seems all the more important as vestiges of the Malaysian past are fast disappearing before the drive to progress and modernity.

Fortunately there are amongst us individuals and organizations who care about our heritage and who are concerned to preserve what they can of its more notable legacies. If this simple volume serves to increase interest in that heritage and in this way stimulate greater public support for the efforts of those engaged in its preservation, then it will have richly succeeded in its purpose.

January 1987

MAJOR DAVID NG (RTD)
STEVEN TAN

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