

8 Beyond the Boundaries of Expectation

The end of a long day, leaving Lahai Estate (see Chapter 1) in the soft, slanting late afternoon sunshine, we drive back down the bumpy, winding road through the rubber trees, back along the main road through Mundakayam, where my grandfather, Frank Hawkings, had worked before Lahai, past the Valanjankanam waterfalls, through Peermade at the top of the hill and the hospital where my mother was born, and where now schools (CPM Government Higher Secondary School, Mariagiri English Medium Higher Secondary School, Technical Higher Secondary School) jostle with other establishments (Mar Baselios Christian College of Engineering and Technology, St Joseph's Monastery, Sahiyadiri Ayurveda Factory) in the cool mountain air. Perhaps indeed in these new roads and facilities some of the requests to Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, Dewan of Travancore, from the 'public of Pathanamthitta' in 1941 (see Chapter 6) have been met. The road passes on through the undulating soft greenery of the hilltop tea estates, past Old Pampanar Tea Estate and the Chidamparan tea plantations and tea factory that sit around the imposing stone Pattumala Church and Pilgrim Centre. Finally, beyond Vandiperiyar, we turn off to Thekkady and arrive at our hotel in Periyar.

I still have the nutmeg from Lahai in my hand. My pocket rattles with the bright red manjari seeds from Kumbazha Estate. The manager of the hotel greets me in the lobby and starts up a conversation, asking after my family connections in the area. He has heard – such information ends up in unexpected places – that I have been visiting parts of the region where my family once lived. I nod. Are you therefore, he continues, a relative of Sir John Pennycuick? *Who? Sir John Pennycuick?* This throws me. My connections to this part of India go back through my mother's side (my grandfather's name was Hawkings), not the Scottish background of my father. Who on earth is Sir John Pennycuick? The manager explains that he had seen my name in the