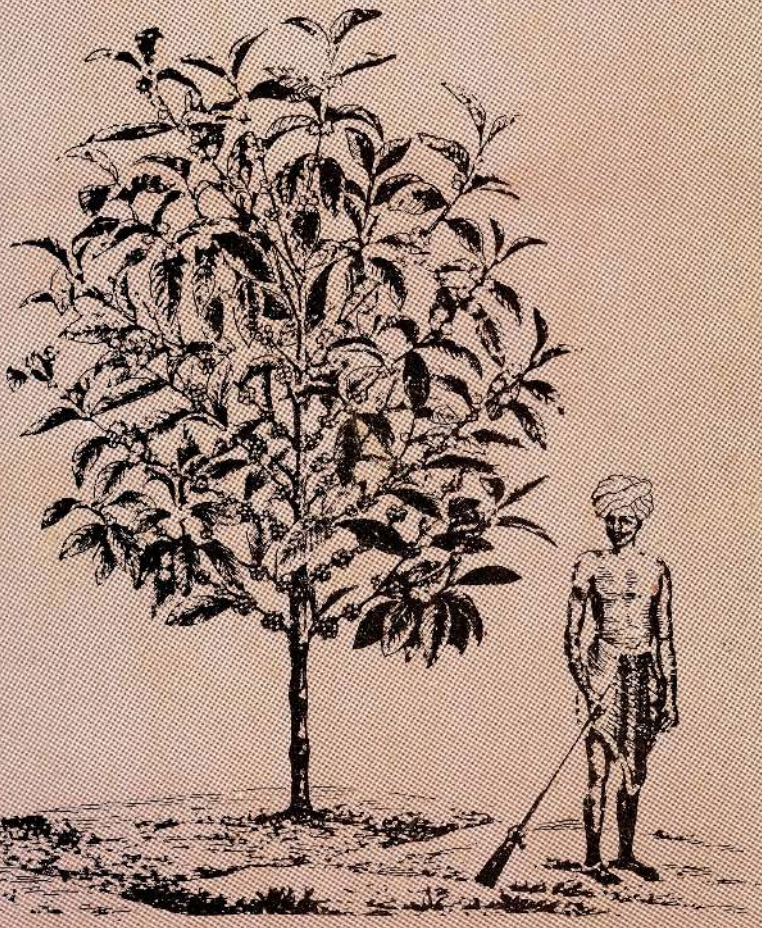
BITTER BERRY BONDAGE

The nineteenth century coffee workers of Sri Lanka



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INTRODUCTION

This is a story that needs to be told. Throughout the present century Ceylon has been renowned for its tea. On 22 May 1972 Ceylon was officially renamed Sri Lanka but as cash matters more than sentiment the country's main foreign exchange earner continues to be marketed as "Ceylon Tea." Until Independence on 4 February 1948, and in the decades that followed, Ceylon's image abroad has been that of "Tommy Lipton's tea garden." The legend nurtured by chauvinist British journalists and writers was that Tommy Lipton, the grocer's boy from Glasgow came to Ceylon in the last century and said "We could grow tea here" — and did so very successfully. The sun has now set both on the British Empire and on Lipton's empire within the Empire, but Ceylon and tea, remain synonymous.

That Sri Lanka was famous for spices, gems, and elephants in ancient times is fairly widely known. Sri Lanka's leaders speak with justifiable pride of the country's undoubtedly glorious ancient civilization but very little is known, or said, about its immediate past of which abysmal ignorance prevails. Even the bare fact that coffee was Ceylon's main foreign exchange earner in the last century is unknown to the majority of Sri Lankans today.

As Chapter 1 of this book shows, coffee was not the first or automatic choice of British entrepreneurs, but it was coffee monoculture that finally transformed the economy of the country from the medieval, to the modern. For reasons that are explained in Chapter 2, the indigenous people of the country were written off as being incorrigibly lazy and unsuitable for plantation labour. The attempts to import Chinese labour which were unsuccessful are examined in Chapter 3, and the succeeding chapters from 4 to 14 detail the saga of the Indian coffee workers in Ceylon.

While there have been no overall or general studies of the entire coffee period from the 1830's to the 1890's there have been studies in depth of particular aspects of the coffee industry encapsulated within limited time-frames. "Sri Lanka, whatever her political difficulties has produced (with the aid of the School of Oriental and Asiatic Studies at the University of London) a school of historians of international stature," wrote C.R. Boxer in 1972.[1]

The history of Ceylon in the last century is largely the history of the coffee industry and while there have been studies of British social and economic policy in respect of the industry, the role of the Indian workers in the fashioning of the modern economy of Ceylon, and in the emergence of the working class, has been neglected. When Hugh Tinker's **A New System of Slavery.The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830 to 1920** was published by the Oxford University Press in 1974 for the Institute of Race Relations, the publishers were able to claim that it was "the first comprehensive historical survey of a hitherto neglected and only partially known migration — the export of Indians to supply the labour needed in producing plantation crops such as sugar, coffee, tea, and rubber in Mauritius, South and East Africa, the Caribbean, Guyana, Ceylon, Malaya and Fiji".[2]

K.M. De Silva, the Sri Lankan historian, drew attention in 1961 to the fact that "while the movement of Indian immigrant labour to the West Indies and Mauritius has been the subject of several books and monographs, particularly by students seeking to show the development of the concept of Imperial Trusteeship, the movement to Ceylon has been curiously neglected".[3]

Two Sri Lankans, Kumari Jayawardena and Dharmapriya Wesamperuma, have published major studies of working class history but they do not focus on the coffee workers. Jayawardena's **The Rise of the Labour Movement in Ceylon** deals with the half century between the late 1880's when planters were switching from coffee to tea, or cinchona, to the 1930's which constituted the last full decade before Independence. Wesamperuma concentrates on immigrant labour but only between 1880 and 1910 which again is the time when tea replaced coffee.

There has been no lack of emotive statements by Indians on the subject of Indian labour overseas. Four years after India attained independence, N.V. Rajkumar, Foreign Secretary of the Indian National Congress wrote that the sufferings and hardships which Indian workers overseas had experienced "soiled the pages of human history".[4] In 1959, H.N.Kunzru, President of the Indian Council of World Affairs, wrote in a Foreword to Usha Mahjani's book on **The Role of Indian Minorities in Burma and Malaya** that "No Indian can read the story of Indian labour emigrating to different parts of the world without a deep sense of humiliation".[5] 1979, I.J. Bahadur Singh, who edited **The Other India: The Overseas Indians and their Relationship with India,** wrote that "The story of the fate and fortunes of Indians who went abroad, particularly in the pre-Independence days, is a fascinating and heroic one which has not yet been unfolded in its totality".[6]

The paucity of historical works on Indian workers overseas stands out in stark contrast to the abundance of books on comparable groups such as Africans transported across the Atlantic to work on plantations in America. When three books on Negro slavery were published simultaneously early in 1975, a British reviewer adapted Lincoln's phrase to remark that every drop of blood drawn by the lash, had been matched in ink, with another drawn by the pen.[7] The cotton slaves of America, wrote John A. Garraty, "were a mute race and seldom had a chance to express their mute thoughts" but the recitals of their experiences were recorded and edited by abolitionists.[8] In a thesis on **"The Slave Narrative; its place in American Literature"**, Marion Wilson Starling listed 112 authors of slave narratives which went into several issues and editions.[9]. Many of the books on cotton workers in America written in recent times belong to the category of the new "scientific" or "cliometric" history which William Fogel and G.R. Elton neatly describe as being "born of the marriage contracted between historical problems and advanced statistical analysis, with economic theory as the bridesmaid and the computer as the bestman".[10]

The under developed state of writings about Indian workers overseas in both the Old World, and the New, typifies the poverty of the Third World not only in the material sense but also historiographically. Both V.S. Naipaul and Eric Williams have been credited with the phrase "the Third World's Third World" to describe Indian workers overseas.[11] There may be doubts about the paternity of the phrase but there can be none

about its relevance to the malnourished state of writings about the Indian workers overseas.

The word "slavery" has been used rather loosely in many books about Indian workers overseas. The coffee workers were by no means slaves in a legal sense, and they were not even indentured workers bound by contract to particular employers, for specific periods, as Indians were in Mauritius and the West Indies. The Abolition Act enacted by the British Parliament in 1833 freed 770,000 slaves in the Empire but it did not extend to British India (or Ceylon) where the abolitionists assumed that enslavement which was of a domestic nature would be ended by the anti-slavery provisions of the East India Company Charter Bill.[12] It was purely coincidental that the last vestiges of slavery in Ceylon were abolished in 1844 when the demand for Indian labour was increasing. Slavery in Ceylon had been mild and had never had the severity that characterised it elsewhere. In the West Indies the demand for workers from overseas paralleled the progress made in the abolition of slavery[13] but there was no such co-relation in Ceylon. When the Commission of Eastern Enquiry consisting of Colonel William Colebrooke and Charles Hay Cameron arrived in Ceylon in the late 1820's considerable progress had been made in the abolition of slavery. The Commission did however recommend the abolition of **rajakariya**, or customary service to the State, which had existed from time immemorial. Although Colebrooke could not have visualised the large-scale influx of Indian workers in search of employment on the coffee estates he foresaw possible shortages of labour arising from the abolition of **rajakariya** and suggested that "advertisements should be published throughout the country and even on the neighbouring coasts of India." In support of his view that Indians were "not indisposed to emigrate" he cited the fact that large numbers came over for the pearl fisheries and the coasting trade. While **rajakariya** was repugnant to Colebrooke's humanitarian and evangelical ideas he also felt that the practice was detrimental to the development of agriculture, industry, and trade as it restricted the mobility of labour.[14]

The question of whether **rajakariya**, or compulsory service, could have been enforced on the plantations has been examined by Asoka Bandarage who states that **rajakariya** could not have been a substitute for the regular labour which the Indian workers provided. "The exaction of compulsory labour from the cultivator class had historically been under the authority of the native headmen. The use of compulsory labour on the plantations would have necessitated close co-operation between the native chiefs and the European planters and administrators," says Bandarage. She also points out that coffee production necessitated constant care and supervision which forced labour could not have provided. Compulsory labour was supervised by the aristocratic administrative class and "any attempt to make plantation work compulsory on the peasantry would have called for a complete revamping of the pre-colonial land tenure and authority arrangements."[15]

While the Indian coffee workers were not slaves, or indentured workers, and were ostensibly free to come and go as they wished, they were by no means entirely free agents. In 1872 a coffee planter writing under the pseudonym "Aberdonensis" stated that the workers were not entirely free to come to Ceylon or return to India, as their movements were controlled both by the **kanganis** (recruiters and/or overseers) and also by the sea, which, he said, greatly strengthened the hand of the planter in Ceylon compared with the

planter in Southern India.[16] R. B. Tytler, one of the pioneers of coffee planting in Ceylon, drew comparisons between coffee workers and slave labour but only to assert that the system by which coffee planters could draw from the pool of labour which the South Indians provided, as, and when, required, was more economical than slave labour that would have to be fed, clothed, and sheltered throughout the year. "The cultivation of coffee," he wrote, "must have labour and that of a peculiar character. Minor labour to cultivate, major labour to get in the crops. Slave labour, however plentiful, being fixed is fatal... India, adjoining our seaboard, has a population of migrating labour of some eight or ten millions, out of whom we can draw some 200,000 crop hands, whom we dismiss with their earnings — to our relief — and to their infinite benefit — to their homes when crop is over."[17] Tytler, who was a powerful orator and a prolific writer, was not always consistent in what he said, or wrote, but in 1879 when he published a pamphlet on **The position and prospects of coffee production as affecting the value of Ceylon coffee estates** he again referred to the Indian coffee workers returning home ""with their girdles well filled with rupees." The **Times of Ceylon** which was British-owned and British-edited from its inception in 1846 until 1946, reviewing Tytler's pamphlet stated that the prevailing free market in labour was beneficial both to the planters and "the humble poor of India." Ironically, the very issue which contained the review also carried a letter from a planter about destitution among coffee workers in the hill town of Badulla. "Anyone who walks in the streets of Badulla cannot avoid the spectacle of these human forms presenting utmost misery and want," the correspondent wrote.[18]

Among Ceylonese commentators, Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, perhaps the most distinguished politician the Ceylon Tamil community has produced, stated that although the estate workers came to Ceylon nominally as "free labour", in fact they suffered the same hardships and disadvantages as indentured Indian workers in other parts of the Empire. He said the remarks made by Lord Hardinge, Viceroy of India, announcing the abolition of the indentured system, which educated Indians justifiably regarded as "a badge of helotry", were also applicable to Indian estate workers in Ceylon[19] who, at that stage, were engaged in tea production.

"Ramasamy" (or "Ramaswamy") was the generic name applied to the Indian coffee workers (and later tea) by the coffee planters just as the cotton plucker in the southern States of America was known as "Sambo". In physical appearance the coffee worker was described by Dr. W. R. N. Kynsey, Principal Civil Medical Officer, as "a thin, wiry man, with slight muscular development and no superfluous fat; about five feet, six inches in height, and weighs an average of 105 to 110 pounds."[20] Dr. W. G. Vandort, a Ceylonese surgeon in charge of the hospital at the plantation town of Gampola, provided an even more descriptive account of the average coffee worker:

> As met with in Ceylon they are of middling stature and slender make, being more lithe and sinewy than robust or muscular. Their complexion varies from dusky brown to tawny black, but is rarely or never, light or brunette — a variety so common in other Indian races. Their features are moulded on the Caucasian type and though seldom perfectly regular are not usually ugly or repulsive. The skull shows great deficiency in the intellectual or moral regions but the seat of the animal passions is on the other hand abnormally developed. The eyes are dark but wanting in depth or animation, with small sluggish pupils. A rather narrow

forehead, wide and prominent cheekbones, a full and slightly hanging lower lip, and slightly receding small chin complete the **tout ensemble** of their features. The face is usually destitute of expression, or at most wears a dull, heavy, apathetic look.

About their general qualities and character Dr. Vandort wrote that they were "inoffensive, patient, docile, indisposed for exertion but with great powers of endurance, influenced in their conduct by fear or the love of gain rather than by motives of gratitude or a sense of duty." (21)

As Chapter 10 shows, women constituted only a small proportion of the work force in the early years of the coffee industry and it was only in the 1860's and 1870's that planters began to refer to the female worker as "Meenatchi" or "Meenachchi". William Boyd, a coffee planter, wrote that the women were "models of female beauty when in the first blush of their opening charms," but that they aged prematurely. "By the time they had reached the age when English women are at their best, their beauty has faded and they have become the veriest hags in the universe, disgusting objects to look at and repulsive beyond all imagination," wrote Boyd.(22)

R. W. Jenkins, another coffee pioneer, wrote that the men and women working in the fields were indistinguishable as they all looked "like a herd of black sheep", and that "no trace could be seen of the human form divine". During cold and wet days the coffee workers protected themselves with large shawls or blankets known as "cumblies" which Jenkins stated were the only protection "the poor things" had against colds and coughs.(23)

The recorded impressions of Ernst Haeckal, the German naturalist, make a strong contrast to those of Jenkins. Haeckal was impressed by "the beauty of their forms" and noted that "many specimens come remarkably near to the Greek ideal." The countenances and expressions of the coffee workers however gave Haeckal the impression of sadness. "I rarely saw a Tamil laugh and never so gaily as is quite common with the Sinhalese," he wrote.(24)

Charles Darwin did not visit Ceylon but he was impressed by the Indians he saw in Port Louis, Mauritius. "Before seeing these people I had no idea that the inhabitants of India were such noble looking men; their skin is extremely dark and many of the older men had large moustachios and beards of snow white colour; this together with the fire of their expressions gave to them an aspect quite imposing," wrote Darwin. The Indians Darwin saw at Port Louis could well have been convicts, and not indentured workers, as Indian convicts were transported to Mauritius at the time Darwin visited the island. Charles Kingsley, the Victorian novelist and social worker, was as impressed, as Darwin was, by the Indians he saw in Trinidad. "One saw in a moment that one was in the midst of gentlemen and ladies... Every attitude, gesture, tone, was full of grace; of ease, courtesy, self-restraint, dignity..." he wrote.(25) The views of Darwin and Kingsley and Anthony Trollope and the Rev. H. W. Cave (seen in Chapter 11) were in direct contrast to those of the famous British missionary, the Rev. C. F. Andrews, who was provoked by the cold, bureaucratic prose of a British official, (Mc Neil) into declaring - "I have seen these wretched, frightened, quivering, cowering Indian coolies with the hunted look in their eyes. I have heard their own stories from their own lips; Mc Neil evidently has

not. If he had, his pages would burn with fire, and he would understand the horror of statistical tables about convictions, suicide rates, proportion of men to women etc".[26]

The subjective nature of comments on the physical appearance of Indian workers was also reflected in the comments on their qualities as workers and their general characteristics. Governor Sir William Gregory (1872 to 1877) stated that no one who knew the estate workers could fail to like them despite their faults. "Their cheerfulness, their readiness to oblige, their attachment to a kind master covers a multitude of sins", he wrote.[27] Gregory's comment on the coffee workers was very similar to that of Stanley Elkins description of a typical "Sambo" as "docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy... his relationship with his master was one of utter dependence and childlike attachment".[28] Yet another similar assessment was made of the coffee worker by Governor Sir Hercules Robinson (1865 to 1872) who wrote that "The Tamil coolie is perhaps the simplest, as he is certainly the most capricious, of all Orientals with whom we have to deal in Ceylon. He is like a child requiring the sense of the strong arm of power. He must know that he is subject to parental authority."[29]

In contrast to the generally favourable opinions of Governors, William Sabonadiere, a coffee planter, regarded untruthfulness as a characteristic of the Indian Tamil worker. "Untruthfulness", he wrote, "comes as naturally to a Tamil as mother's milk. No dependence whatever can be placed upon the statements of the coolies as a class."[30] A number of contemporary writers commented on the illiteracy and gullibility of the coffee workers. "The Tamil coolie," ,wrote the Rev. H. W. Cave, who came to Ceylon as private secretary to the Bishop of Colombo, "may be a shocking barbarian in point of intellect and civilization as compared with his British master, but making allowance for his origin and opportunities he is by no means an unfortunate or contemptible character."[31] There were numerous instances of panic among the coffee workers over rumours. In 1861, the Assistant Government Agent at Mannar, a north-western coastal town where immigrants arrived, informed the Colonial Secretary in Colombo that there was alarm and concern among incoming workers that they would be kidnapped and sent as bearers to British troops about to be sent abroad to fight in a war.[32] In 1871, hundreds of workers fled from estates when there was a rumour that 1,000 lives would have to be sacrificed to the gods for the successful completion of the extension of the railway from Kandy to Matale. A planter, Gibbon of Udduwela, prosecuted a man for spreading this rumour. After the man had pleaded guilty, Gibbon said he would be satisfied if the culprit was warned and discharged.[33] Governor Robinson commented on the gullibility of the coffee workers in a despatch to the Colonial Office. "I have seen," he wrote, "coolies fleeing back in hot haste to their own country on an absurd rumour that war had broken out in China and that they were to be forced into the service of the Government as camp followers and soldiers." Robinson recalled that there had been a similar scare in 1861 when the rumour was that the workers were to be sent as bearers to soldiers who were to be sent to fight in Mauritius.[34]

Whatever the peccadillos the British discovered among the coffee workers they had no doubts about the loyalty of their labour force.

Sir Emerson Tennent, Colonial Secretary from 1845 to 1850, visualised the establishment of colonies of Indian workers among the Ceylonese. The idea of such

colonies was suggested to Tennent by Lieut.-General Herbert Maddock who had become a coffee planter in Matale after retiring from the British East India Company. Maddock's coffee store had been burnt in one of the very few incidents of violence in the so-called "Rebellion" of 1848 in the Central Province. K. M. de Silva describes Maddock as "the evil genius behind the whole policy of repression" followed in the aftermath of the "Rebellion" which ultimately led to the recall of Governor Torrington and Tennent.[35] Ferguson, the British journalist and newspaper proprietor, saw the coffee workers as a bulwark of the British rule in the event of any disturbances caused by the Sinhalese. In analysing the cost of the military and police he wrote: "We have (also) the further guarantee of 300,000 cooly immigrants occupying a position of peculiar attachment to the Europeans; 100,000 of them being ready, mammotie and pruning knife in hand, to follow their planting **Durais** (masters) into the field to suppress any low-country Sinhalese or Moor disturbance, as Abercomby Swan's "cooly sepoys" turned out in 1847-1848." [36] In a post-Independence survey, the Indian demographer, N. K. Sarkar, stated that the Indian workers were preferred to Sinhalese for employment on the plantations as the British planters found the Indians "politically preferable to the Sinhalese who still bore a grudge against the English for misappropriating their land." [37] As Chapter 1 shows the "misappropriation" of land still needs to be investigated in depth but it was obviously assumed that foreign workers temporarily resident in the country would prove more loyal to their masters than the permanent residents. The question of the attitude of the Sinhalese to the coffee workers also calls for further study but some work has been done in respect of the relationship between the Sinhalese and the tea workers.

While every chapter of this book details the exploitation of the Indian coffee workers by their British employers it is interesting to note that there was no lack of expressions of sympathy for the workers by planters and officials from the Governor downwards, and these expressions of concern may not have been hypocritical in every case. "Poor creatures" is a phrase one encounters very frequently in references to Indian workers in Ceylon and elsewhere. ""Poor wretches" was a variant. "Poor creatures," said Lord Brougham in the House of Lords in 1837 opposing an Order-in-Council that permitted the introduction of Indian workers in British Guinea at the request of John Gladstone, father of a future Prime Minister of Britain. Brougham deplored attempts to transfer "these poor creatures from the indolence of their native plains to the hard and unwholesome toil of Guinea." His opposition was in vain.[38] "It is no exaggeration to say that many hundreds of these poor creatures perish annually from want and disease," wrote Governor Sir Henry Ward of Ceylon, in a despatch to the Colonial Office in 1858.[39] "Many of the poor creatures who perish by the wayside might be saved," wrote the Ceylon Inspector General of Police, G. W. R. Campbell, in his **Administration Report** in 1867 when he urged that Village Headmen should be made to take a greater interest in the welfare of incoming migrant workers. Three years later Campbell again deplored the fact that Village Headmen were not doing anything to succour migrant workers and even those who were sick.[40] "Poor creatures," said George Wall, who served nine terms as Chairman of the Planters' Association of Ceylon, in a speech in 1877 in which he deplored the travails of the coffee workers on their journeys from India to Ceylon. He said "healthy, able-bodied men" who embarked at Tuticorin in South India

presented "a miserable and sickly appearance" when they finally arrived on the estates in Ceylon.[41]

The correspondence between Governors of Ceylon and Secretaries of State for the Colonies during the coffee period shows that while there was intervention from London on crucial matters such as labour relations, wages, and health, Governors in Ceylon were often left pretty much to their own devices. Many despatches that called for replies, or clarifications, were simply filed away and ignored. There was a joke in British official circles in the last century that the clerks in the Colonial Office did not drink coffee because they feared it would keep them awake.

At least one British Governor, Sir Arthur Gordon,(1883 to 1890) expressed exasperation over the lethargic attitude of officials in London and Colombo. "There never was a place," wrote Gordon in 1887, "not even Mauritius, where things are done so slowly, or where the art of how not to do it has been assiduously cultivated... and my feelings are those of weariness and disgust; weariness of the ineptitude of the Colonial Office which only seeks to shelve questions instead of answering them..."[42] Gordon had been Governor of Mauritius from 1871 to 1874. As far as Indian migrant labour was concerned there were fundamental differences between Ceylon on one hand, and Mauritius and the West Indies on the other. In those countries, as K. M. De Silva and others have shown, the introduction of immigrant labour had followed the abolition of slavery and the Colonial Office sponsored and even subsidised the supply of substitute labour,[43] while evangelical interests did their best to prevent what Hugh Tinker has called "A New System of Slavery" from developing. Ceylon had no background of slave labour on commercial plantations. It was the coffee planters who decided on the employment of South Indian labour in preference to local labour, and the Colonial Office felt that it was within their powers and resources to obtain the labour they needed. The Colonial Office also felt that the planters would treat their workers fairly and justly because ill-treatment would result in the drying-up of the sources of labour. The only occasion on which the Colonial Office agreed to a State-supervised scheme of immigration was when Sir Henry Ward was Governor but even his scheme did not last long. (Chapter 5)

The view that Colonial Office interest in Ceylon was minimal has been expressed by A. P. Newton who wrote that Ceylon was "another typical instance of the sanely held opportunism that made our colonial government so subtly adaptable to every case as it arose. Not even such a confirmed doctrinaire as Earl Grey when Colonial Secretary ventured to apply his cherished theories to Ceylon." [44] Anyone is search of any consistency or pattern in policy has first to answer the question whether there was any "policy", wrote Henry Littall who cited J. A. Williamson's remark that "in most departments of State activity it is difficult to prove that a policy was ever consciously formulated and acted upon." [45] The British Governor, wrote Paul Knaplund, "was not an official at the end of a wire. He was the man on the spot. The distance between him and Westminster often made it imperative to make important decisions without, or even in contravention of, orders from home." [46] There was a quickening in the pace of communications between London and Colombo in the late sixties and early seventies when a series of events almost coincided in ensuring quick contact. In the early seventies

successive Colonial Secretaries showed a much greater interest in the health of the coffee workers than their predecessors had, as will be seen in Chapter 14.

While the labour laws, and laws providing for minimum standards of health care, are examined in several chapters in this book, it needs to be noted that the overall legislative record during the coffee period was poor. The Master/Servant Ordinance of 1841 was a bright spot, as Chapter 7 shows, but the extent to which it could be implemented in a planter-dominated society was a different matter. The half century in which coffee was Ceylon's main crop was a period in which the star of British imperialism was in the ascendant. The coffee planters of Ceylon shared in the **frisson** and made no secret of their feelings that they could administer the country better than the Governors and officials. R. B. Tytler once spoke of what he would do (on the question of coffee thefts) if he was made "absolute ruler of Ceylon".[47]

S. K. Mehrothra has attributed the poor record of protective legislation for the Indian plantation workers until after the first world war to the fact that the Government of India could not negotiate directly with other Empire countries regarding her subjects in those countries, until her right to do so was recognised at the Imperial Conference in 1921. It was only under section 7 of the Indian Emigrants Act of 1922 that the Governor-in-Council could appoint Agents to safeguard, or watch the interests of Indians working in Empire countries and the first Agents were appointed for Ceylon and Malaya.[48] In the nineteenth century it had been the Colonial Office which was the custodian of the "rights" of the Indian workers abroad. As seen earlier, there were reasons why the Colonial Office took a keener interest in developments in the West Indies and Mauritius than in Ceylon. Against this background it is hardly surprising that the legislative record in Ceylon was, as Kumari Jayawardena says, "less liberal" than in the sugar colonies.[49]

Throughout the coffee period Indian workers were described as "Malabars" or "coolies" or "Malabar coolies". The misuse of the word "Malabar" has been traced to the Portuguese who used it to refer not only to the people of the Malabar region of India, and the language they spoke, but also to the Madras district and to those who spoke the Tamil language. The coffee workers were from the Madras province with just "a few stragglers from Bombay and a few Dhangurs from Bengal" according to I. M. Cumpston who adds that these categories were "superior in intelligence and activity to the Tamils."[50] In tracing the history of the word "Malabar", M. D. Raghavan, an ethnologist, states that the Portuguese misuse of the word to apply to the Tamils was continued by the Dutch who ousted the Portuguese from the maritime areas of Ceylon in the mid-seventeenth century. The Dutch found that the Tamils in Jaffna in the Northern province of Ceylon were similar in appearance to the Hindus of the Malabar coast of India and called them "the Malabar Inhabitants of the Province of Jaffna". The Dutch codified the customary laws of Jaffna, and after the British had conquered Ceylon from the Dutch, they promulgated (by Regulation 18 of 1806) that this Code of Customs known as the **Thesawalamai** would apply in all lawsuits in which "the Malabar inhabitants of the Province of Jaffna" were involved. The South Indian estate workers who spoke Tamil which was the language of the Northern Province also became known as Malabars.[51] In a further complication Col. Colebrooke not only described the Tamils of the Northern Province as Malabars but also described Ceylon as an island which was "originally a

Hindu province and from not having been subject to the inroads of the Mahomedans, it offers at this day the most perfect example to be met with of the ancient system of Hindu government." [52] There were no newspapers in Ceylon when the Colebrooke Commission visited the island in the late 1820's but in 1843 the **Observer** which had commenced publication on 4 February 1834 (and is still published) stated that not one of the so-called Malabar coffee workers was from Malabar and that they were actually from Tanjore, Madura, Tinnevelly, etc. on the Coramandel coast.[53] The word "Malabar" continued, however, to be applied not only to estate workers but also to the indigenous Tamils of the Northern Province much to their embarrassment. In a lecture at the Royal Asiatic Society in Colombo in the late 1880's Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, who represented the Ceylon Tamils in the Legislative Council from 1879 to 1891, said the word Malabar had been used to describe Ceylon Tamils "who knew not that word even in dreams".[54]

The words "cooly" and "native" acquired derogatory connotations as the winds of change swept across the world after the second world war but they were not used in a pejorative sense in the last century. **Hobson-Jobson** has a lengthy description of "cooly". It begins its definition with "A hired labourer or burden carrier and in modern days especially a labourer induced to emigrate from India or from China to labour in the plantations of Mauritius, Reunion, or the West Indies, sometimes under circumstances, especially in French colonies, very near to slavery...". The long description ends with "The familiar use of cooly has extended to the Straits Settlements, Java and China, as well as to all tropical and sub-tropical colonies, whether English or foreign." [55] Among the coffee planters and officials of the last century "cooly" was simply the word for a worker, or labourer, and there are even affectionate references to coolies in the proceedings of the Planters' Association which was the parliament of the coffee planters and later the tea planters. "The coolies (God bless them)...," said Alexander Brown in a speech in which he referred to the pre-railway days when the coolies were not only engaged in the growing, harvesting and processing of coffee but were also beasts of burden in carrying bags of coffee to roads several miles away.[56] It was around the period of the second world war that there was sensitivity over the use of the word "cooly". In 1942 when Mr. Justice (later Sir Francis) Soertsz, a Ceylonese Supreme Court judge, was presiding at a trial in which six estate workers were charged with the murder of a tea planter, C. A. G. Pope, he used the word "cooly" in his address to the jury but immediately apologised for its use and asked them to consider the use of the word as withdrawn. He thereafter referred to the six accused as estate labourers.[57] The use of such words however dies hard. As recently as in the late 1970's when the India International Centre organised a seminar on overseas Indians and their relationship with India, some of the speakers referred to their fellow countrymen abroad as "coolies".[58]

Some of the themes of chapters in this book do not call for any comment beyond the introductory remarks in the chapters themselves, and nothing could be more futile than to try to analyse the statistical data available for the coffee period. Even less than lynx-eyed readers will notice striking variations in statistics of every aspect of the history of the coffee period. Chapter 4, for instance, which deals with the numbers of incoming and outgoing workers, shows that very little reliance can be placed on the statistics worked out by officials and planters because of the difficulties they experienced in

making head counts. These statistics have to be treated with caution, but even in basic or verifiable matters such as the extent of land under coffee cultivation, some startling divergences emerge. E. F. C. Ludowyk has provided an example. In Chapter 5 of **The Modern History of Ceylon**, Ludowyk states that "By 1894 as much land as had ever been planted with coffee was producing tea - over 330,000 acres." In a footnote to this statement Ludowyk cites S. Rajaratnam on "The Growth of Plantation Agriculture in Ceylon, 1886-1931," in the **Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies** (Vol. 4 No. 1) as a source for acreages under tea and coffee cultivation. According to Rajaratnam the highest acreage ever cultivated with coffee was 322,337 in 1881. Rajaratnam gives the official Blue Books and Ferguson's **Directory and Handbook** as his sources. Ludowyk in his footnote also cites J. Ferguson's **Rise of the Planting Enterprise and Trade in Ceylon Tea** (New Zealand, n.d.) as a source. Ferguson makes the statement that "The maximum area ever under coffee was 272,000 acres in 1877...".[59] Some indication of the unreliability of Ceylon plantation statistics even in the tea period, is provided by the dilemma which faced Sir Hugh Clifford, Governor of Ceylon from 1925 to 1927, when he had to collect statistics for a lecture. Sir Hugh found that the official **Blue Books** gave the area under tea cultivation in 1910-1911 as 580,845 acres, but that Ferguson's **Directory** put the figure at 390,000 acres. With a difference of 190,000 acres in the two sets of figures Sir Hugh consulted L. J. B. Turner, Director of Statistics, who told him that "the latter figure may possibly be the more accurate of the two". It is of interest that in the course of this lecture Sir Hugh also referred to the coffee industry and said that the maximum area under cultivation was 361,838 acres in 1881 (exclusive of village holdings).[60]

Apart from statistical conundrums that can never be solved there are several aspects of the history of the coffee industry which deserve much deeper investigation than the cursory attention they have received so far. One of these is the question of when the coffee workers began to show signs of permanent settlement in Ceylon. It is common ground among historians of the industry that in the early years at least, the majority of the workers arrived for the plucking season which was from August to November and that these months by a fortunate coincidence were slack months in South India. The migrants were thus able to return to their homes and fields for the harvests of whichever grains they cultivated. Some workers whose services the planters were willing to retain may have stayed on for a year, or two, but at this stage the workers were essentially temporary hands. It was only in the latter stages of the industry that workers began to remain in the island for three years or more. There is some evidence that the planters themselves were unhappy about the frequent comings and goings in the earliest years. Lieut. De Butts in a book published in London in 1841 stated that "Nostalgia is (however) found to prevail among these imported tillers of the soil and the result is that the coffee planters have conceived a justly-grounded prejudice against the employment of individuals on whose permanent stay so little reliance can be placed." Butts stated that "if a certain period of servitude were fixed, during which the Indian labourers should be bound to remain in the employment of the Ceylon planters, the confidence of the latter would be restored without in any degree infringing on the liberty of their temporary bondsmen."[61]

Dr. W. G. Vandort provided evidence of extended stays in Ceylon by the coffee workers in the sixties. In a report on the health of the workers in 1869 Vandort stated that the workers arrived on a "term of service generally extending over a period of three or four years" before returning to South India.[62] The question of whether workers were staying on in Ceylon, and for how long, became of crucial importance in attempts to ascertain the rate of mortality. In the mid, or late sixties, A. M. Ferguson estimated that of about 1,250,000 workers who had come to Ceylon between 1839 and 1864, about one-third had become permanent settlers.[63] In 1874, there were 125,156 reported arrivals and 89,727 reported departures. William Digby, the journalist and author, attributed the disparity of slightly over 35,000 individuals to the fact the workers involved were becoming "comparatively permanently settled in the Island", and he cited the increasingly large percentage of women and children among arrivals as an indication of permanent settlement.[64] It was around this period that the planters began to assert that their workforces were of a permanent character. George Wall, Chairman of the Planters' Association, took exception to a remark by Governor Sir Arthur Hamilton Gordon (1883 to 1890) that the immigrant workers were largely temporary workers. In a speech in 1884 Wall said that estate workers were "as much a part of the population of the country now as any other part of the population". On the question of the trips made to India by the workers Wall said : "It is true that annually some 50,000 of them go to their country to visit their homes; but they return and frequently has it been the case hitherto that they return in greater numbers than they went, thus increasing the supply so long as a large supply was wanted." In the same year J. L. Shand, the planters' nominee in the Legislative Council, said that many of the workers on the estates were descendants of workers in the second or third generation who had no connection with India which they had not visited except in some cases "through curiosity". Shand said the use of the word "immigrant" was unjustifiable and suggested that it should not be used in quarterly returns. The Planters' Association at that stage was engaged in a campaign against efforts by the Government to enforce special regulations concerning the health of estate workers. The P. A. maintained that estate workers were "fixed residents in Ceylon, many of them born therein and a few only occasionally visiting the Coast." [65]

On the question of when the Indian plantation workers showed characteristics of permanent settlement, Kumari Jayawardena states that "by the 1920's these workers had become a permanent resident workforce whose ties with India were weakening".[66] Michael Roberts, disagreeing with Jayawardena, states that her conclusion "seems to have been derived from a process of circular reasoning rooted in the fact that labour agitation on the plantations commenced in the 1930's." Roberts states that "plantation labour was beginning to show some of the characteristics of emigrant settlers as early as the 1870's." [67] The evidence in this work indicates that some coffee workers became permanent settlers even before the 1870's.

Death is the thick black streak that darkens the pages of this book. The coffee workers came to Ceylon with their chattels in the hope of escaping the grinding poverty in which they lived in South India but for many of them — at times one in four — Ceylon became their charnel house.(Chapters 12 to 14)..

If history is delayed justice, then verdicts of "Guilty" have to be entered against most of the Governors of Ceylon in the coffee period; the kanganis, and the planters.

Even nature was cruel to the coffee workers. Death rode on the frail craft in which they faced the hazards of the "Black water". Death was only a step behind the workers on the weary 150-mile walk from the hot and arid plains of the North Western Province of Ceylon to the cold and wet hillsides of the coffee estates. Death struck in the shape of a slithering snake in the undergrowth, or through the claws and jaws of a man-eating leopard. The writings of William Knighton, C. R. Rigg, William Sabonadiere, P. D. Millie, John Capper, Edward Sullivan and others on the travails of the coffee workers make chilling reading today even after the passing of a century.

Whenever the awkward question of mortality surfaced, the planters blamed the Government for not providing better communications and facilities for food, drink and shelter. The Governors blamed the system of recruitment through kanganis. The kangani system certainly brought out the worst in human nature. The kanganis sent on recruiting missions to South India cynically engaged greater numbers than were required because they knew a percentage would perish on the way. And they spent the barest minimum to keep their human charges alive out of the advances the planters paid them as expenses. The kanganis fattened on the profits from their human cargo (Chapter 6). The Governors in Colombo knew of the iniquities of the kangani system but were unwilling or unable to change it. Sir Henry Ward, an able Governor, said the kangani system was based on "fraud and peculation", and tried to change it but failed. Sir William Gregory, another capable Governor, said the planters would change the system if they could, but it was based on custom, "and anyone acquainted with East knows what a barrier that word is to innovation however palpably beneficial." (Chapters 4 and 7) And so the system continued not only until the dying days of the coffee industry but also through the birth and growth of the tea industry.

While Chapters 12 to 14 focus on the main causes of mortality, Chapter 11 which deals with the social and sexual aspects of the lives of the coffee workers shows that there were many deaths due to abortion, infanticide, and venereal disease. Unlike in the sugar colonies deaths from suicide are not even mentioned in the reports of planters and officials, and it seems likely that some deaths from assaults by planters (Chapter 9) may have been hushed up with the connivance of the kanganis and/or police officers.

Cholera was the sickle of death that cut a wide swathe across the ranks of the coffee workers but there were also several other factors behind the horrendous mortality. The planters resented and resisted every regulation, and every law, framed by the Government in the interests of the workers. At times they carried their opposition all the way to Downing Street in London. They construed any action by the Government as interference with their "right" to look after the health of their workers, and in the eighties when Colombo acting under pressure from London went ahead with some amending legislation the planters in all seriousness spoke of an "oppressive inquisition" which they said was "incompatible with a Christian country in the nineteenth century." (Chapter 14)

Some exceptional planters such as James Taylor (pioneer of the tea industry) admitted that the lives of workers whom they had treated might have been saved with medical attention. Walter R. Tringham went further by saying that even the best the planters could provide was nothing but "mere veterinary treatment." (Chapter 12)

The other major cause of mortality was that kanganis and/or planters often turned out workers who became too ill, or too infirm to work. These men and women roamed the hillsides till they died of exposure and starvation. The seriously sick and infirm among coffee workers of the nineteenth century were more callously treated than eighteenth century slaves. In 1712 the Dutch Governor Becker issued an order that action would be taken against slave owners who turned out sick slaves who were later "found dead in the open air, or on the public roads, or in the streets, or any buildings and become a prey for animals."[68] In contrast "Found dead" was invariably the verdict on bodies found in the coffee country.

This book has been written both for the general reader and the specialist for whom the footnotes, references and bibliography are intended. Footnotes are the seeds of history. Like edelweiss, may a thousand blossoms bloom and grow forever.

Donovan Moldrich

88/1, Stork Place,
Colombo 10, Sri Lanka.
12 January 1988.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The genesis of this book goes back to 1950 when I became Labour reporter on the then lively, but now defunct, **Times of Ceylon.** At that stage the Ceylon Workers Congress which was the trade union wing of the Ceylon Indian Congress, represented practically all the plantation workers of Ceylon. The late Mr. K. Rajalingam, M.P. for Nawalapitiya, a gentle, good, and genial man, was the president of both organisations. In 1954 there was a split in the ranks of the Ceylon Workers Congress, and later a third group emerged as the National Union of Workers. While I cherish the friendships I formed in the early fifties with many who are still active in trade unionism, the two officials of the C.W.C. who encouraged me to take more than a purely professional interest in the plantation workers were the late Mr.C.V. Velupillai, then M.P. for Talawakelle, and the late Mr. V.K. Vellayan. They were the yogi and the commissar of the C.W.C. as I knew it, and both were later associated with the National Union of Workers.

Mr. Velupillai was anything but the popular concept of a politician. He was the poet of the plantations. His dark, deep, soulful, expressive eyes (and sighs) spoke more than a thousand words. His book **Born To Labour** moved me to tears — an experience I shared with a dear colleague, the late Fred De Silva, who was one of my predecessors in office at the **Sunday Times**. Fred wrote an elegant and eloquent Preface to **Born To Labour** in which he observed that Mr. Velupillai's prose-poems of estate life were suffused with a poet's feeling — "the kind of feeling that at the point of communication wets the eyes and tingles the blood."

Mr. Vellayan, or "Vells" as he was known, had been a Trinity College "Lion" and had captained Trinity at rugger, but he looked more like one of those terrible "W's" of the West Indies cricket team of the early fifties. "Vells" suggested that I should spend a few days of vacation at Crown Hotel, Hatton, near the regional office of the C.W.C. The Hatton office of the C.W.C. had a Bug Fiat station wagon and "Vells" and I visited some of the neighbouring tea estates in it. The chug of that Bug was well known on the estates and the way hundreds of men, women, and children came swarming down the hillsides to meet their beloved union leader was wondrous to behold. Here I came face-to-face with the very people I had so glibly described as "nearly a million estate workers" in my news stories in Colombo. This was at a time when the C.I.C. and C.W.C. were fighting a losing battle to gain citizenship rights for these people who had known no other home but Ceylon; whose ancestors had toiled and died in Ceylon; but who were still faced with the prospect of repatriation to India. That was when I decided that some day, I would write a book about these people who had been Born in Ceylon to Die in India. In the years that followed, as I delved into the roots of the tea workers, a small-made, slim, slight, shadowy figure emerged from the mists of time. He was the coffee worker. He had been Born in India to Die in Ceylon.

In 1954 I became desk-bound but Mr. Velupillai and Mr. Vellayan continued to nurture my interest in the plantation workers. Mr. Vellayan who killed himself through overwork died on 2 December 1971 at the age of 52. Mr. Velupillai died on 19 November

1984 at the age of 71. I hope this book, and its sequel on the tea workers, will help to perpetuate their lifelong and dedicated service to the working class movement.

Devotion to Clio makes strange bedfellows. I can think of no other explanation for the kindness, assistance, and encouragement I received in the writing of this, and other books, from the late Dr. G.C. Mendis, and the late Professor Justin La Brooy, two prominent Sri Lankan historians of my father's generation, and from two leading Sri Lankan authorities on the British period, Dr. K.M. De Silva, Professor of Sri Lanka History at the University of Peradeniya, and Dr. Michael Roberts, former Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Peradeniya, and now Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Adelaide.

Dr. Mendis was the father of modern history in Ceylon. Prof. La Brooy was the greatest teacher of history any university in Ceylon has produced. I was News Editor of the **Times of Ceylon** when I came to know them. My official preoccupations at that time were how many people had been killed in the latest riot; where the next trouble spot would be, and what the Cabinet of Ministers had decided that morning. If Dr. Mendis and Prof. La Brooy were amused by my form of escapism they did not show it. They made me feel free to call on them whenever I wished, and they even honoured me with visits to my home. To sit at their feet and talk about the past was to experience the ecstasy that is history.

As a newsman my "sabbaticals" were just one week, or ten days, but Kingsley De Silva and Michael Roberts helped me to make the most of my forays to Peradeniya by inviting me to stay with them. I count the days I spent with Kingsley, and his wife Chandra, and Michael, and his wife Shona, as among the happiest and most fruitful in my life.

Sri Lanka is desert country in library resources but Sri Lankan researchers have a secret weapon in H. A. I. Goonetileke who worked for 27 years in Peradeniya University Library — an oasis in the desert. I came to know Ian before his monumental five volumes, **A Bibliography of Ceylon (Sri Lanka)** were published. In his office of Librarian, Ian passed across his desk small slips of recycled paper with recommendations for my reading. All the tips were winners. In the concluding stages of my research on this book Ian underwent protracted eye surgery but with the help of his wife Roslin, he searched among mountains of books, journals and documents for photocopies of material which he knew were not available anywhere else in Sri Lanka. Our friendship began in a vale of scholarship, and has continued unscathed through thick and thin.

Before I specify the others who helped in the writing of this book I owe a special word of thanks to all the staff, present and past, of the following institutions and libraries in which this book was researched :

The Department of National Archives

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The People's Bank headquarters library

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The Indian High Commission

The American Center

The Marga Institute

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Among numerous friends who helped I wish to record my special thanks to Rev. Fr. Tissa Balasuriya, Dr. Tom Barron, Prof. Bertram Bastiampillai, Rev. Fr. Paul Caspersz, Rev. Fr. Pio Ciampa, Douglas de Silva, Harischandra De Silva, Vijita De Silva, P. Devaraj, R.F. (Tiny) Gooneratne, Victor Gunewardena, Prof. Kumari Jayawardena, L.N.T. Mendis, S.A.W. Mottau, Prof T. Nadaraja, Prof. Merlin Peris, Dr. James T. Rutnam, Winston I. Rodrigo, A. Senadheera, Dr. C.G. Uragoda, Leelangi Wanasundera, Suriya Wickremasinghe and Dr. K.D.G. Wimalaratne.

Only my wife, Shona, and my children, Dylan, Daphne, Odile, and Fidel know the trauma of living with a fool who has repeatedly rushed in where academic angels wisely decline to tread. My debt to them is inestimable.

Donovan Moldrich

Postscript

The agony and the heartbreaks I endured in my attempts to ensure publication of this book ended on a day early in October last year when Ian Goonetilleke urged Fr. Paul Caspersz to publish the book in circumstances set out in the **Foreword**. I am doubly indebted to Paul both for publishing the book and for his generous **Foreword** in which he reveals the crucial role played by Fr. Terry Williams of Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia. My gratitude to Ian, Fr. Paul and the Co-ordinating Secretariat for Plantation Areas, and Fr. Williams and his friends will not end in this world or the next.

D. M.

17 March, 1989.Sri Lanka.

FOREWORD

In the first line of his Introduction, the author avers that his story needed to be told. No one had ever before told it thus and so, nearly forty years ago, Donovan Moldrich, in the interstices of a busy journalistic career and, later, amidst the cares of a growing family, began drawing its threads together. Finally the manuscript was ready and Donovan was looking for a publisher.

It was then that I met the friend of us both, Ian Goonetileke, Sri Lanka's bibliographer *par excellence* and former Peradeniya Librarian in his tiny asbestos-roofed exile at the bottom of a pathway off a lane in Nawinna, Maharagama. Ian told me of Donovan's excellent manuscript and of his quest for someone to finance its adequate publication. It did not take me long to decide that I would do all I could to see his story of the coffee workers of Sri Lanka go to the printer with the least possible delay. The decision was not merely my good deed for the day; it was an act of my continuing homage to the plantation people.

Professional historians have written authoritatively of several aspects of the nineteenth century British plantation enterprise in Sri Lanka. But professional historians all too often see history as the interpretative chronicle of events and not at all sufficiently as the saga of the masses of the people behind them. It is the latter who began to write the history of the plantations on the hillsides of the central highlands with the ink of their sweat, their tears and their blood. Donovan Moldrich gives us this other story which, I submit, is not only more poignant but even more important.

Yet Donovan's is by no means phantasy or even uncritical hagiography of a whole people. A cursory glance at the several pages of his references and his bibliography establishes beyond all doubt his credentials to write most reliably on this subject. But what Jurgen Kuczynski, called the doyen of historians of the working class, says must be borne in mind by all, not least of all by the professionals : "... there is no work on the rise and condition of the working class which has not suffered intellectual shipwreck if the author has not been sympathetic towards this class... No one... who did not at least feel sympathetic towards the poor, or a deep religious responsibility for their situation has ever been able to present an analysis of the working class or a description of their condition of any intellectual merit."* Donovan Moldrich's work has great intellectual merit precisely because his vivid and engrossing story proceeds from his sense of deep religious responsibility grounded in his grateful and unrelenting commitment to the thousands who gave their labour and their lives to Sri Lanka.

The coffee plantation enterprise no doubt should have been conducted differently —with less ecological damage, and with imaginative integration of the immigrant Tamil coffee workers with the poor Sinhalese peasants of the plantation areas. But the leaders of the enterprise were the nineteenth century plantation owners and managers. To these, even when they considered themselves Christian gentlemen, what mattered was the profit, not the land; the enterprise, not the people. Donovan has sought — most successfully, in the gross and scope of mine opinion — to redress the balance and correct the emphasis.

One duty remains. It is to thank on behalf of the Co-ordinating Secretariat for Plantation Areas, Kandy, which is privileged to publish this book, those who made the funds available for printing it. These are Fr. Terry Williams and his friends in Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia. All of them held Bishop Leo Nanayakkara, O.S.B., in great esteem and affection. After Leo's premature death on 28 May 1982, they continued to maintain ties of friendship with Sri Lanka. Their support of this publication is testimony of this friendship and a further tribute to their memory of Leo, who, as Bishop of Kandy and later of Badulla and as co-founder of Satyodaya Centre, Kandy, had the plantation people high on his agenda and would himself have counted it a grace to read the story which Donovan Moldrich unfolds to us in the pages that follow.

Paul Caspersz, s.j.

Satyodaya Centre,
Kandy, Sri Lanka.
28 February 1989.

* **The Rise of the Working Class**, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, World University Library, 1967, p.232.

This book is offered in undying love to the cherished memory of my only brother

Francis Desmond Moldrich

(Born 1 December 1923. Died 10 December 1988)

My brother knew of the dedication of the book to him but did not live to see it in its present form. I now take the opportunity of also dedicating the book to Gladys, who was my brother's devoted wife for over 35 years, and to their children, Rodney and Deslyn.

Also by Donovan Moldrich.

HANGMAN - SPARE THAT NOOSE

(A historical and analytical survey of the death penalty with special reference to Sri Lanka).

SOMEWHERE A CHILD IS CRYING

(A plea for the abolition of corporal punishment of children and adults).

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CHAPTER ONE

WHEN KING COFFEE REIGNED IN KANDY.

The Rise And Fall Of The Coffee Industry.

The reign of "King Coffee" corresponded roughly with that of Queen Victoria but the demure young girl of 17 who ascended the British throne in 1837 outlived her mythical male counterpart. The Great White Queen had just reached the half-way mark of her 64-year reign, when "King Coffee" was afflicted by a slow and debilitating disease that proved fatal. The obsequies for "King Coffee" were over when the people of Ceylon excelled those of the other British colonies in outbursts of patriotic homage that marked Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 celebrated amidst whispers of immortality which she dispelled four years later.

Although the British conquest of Ceylon was determined by strategic considerations during the Napoleonic wars, there was a lucrative bonus in the island's cinnamon plantations for which the country had been renowned from the earliest times. The British maintained the system of collection and export monopoly which had been introduced by the Dutch when they ruled the maritime areas from 1656 to 1796. While there were other sources of revenue such as the pearl fisheries, arrack, gems, etc., cinnamon was the mainstay of the economy. With British ownership of Ceylon being confirmed in 1802 when the country became a Crown Colony, the British East India Co. ceased to have control over the production of cinnamon but it negotiated the right to purchase the Island's output and renewed these contracts until 1822, when the Government decided to take over the sales of cinnamon as well. Just as the Dutch had depressed prices by releasing stocks they held in Amsterdam, the East India Co. also released its own stocks. Ceylon cinnamon was reputedly the best in the world but it faced competition from a cheap variety marketed by the Dutch East India Company. The Colonial Agent in London had only begun to overcome these problems when the British Government acting on the recommendation of the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission of Inquiry abolished the cinnamon monopoly and sold Government plantations to the private sector. The Government monopoly of the export of cinnamon was also abolished and there were hopes the industry would revive but the reverse happened. An export duty of three shillings introduced with the abolition of the Government monopoly made the Ceylon product uncompetitive. The export duty was progressively reduced and finally abolished but Ceylon cinnamon was unable to compete with Javanese cassia even after exporters resorted to shipping coarse and inferior qualities which hastened the demise of the industry. As investors and entrepreneurs turned to coffee, the cinnamon industry slid to the position of a very minor export crop.[1] Today, Cinnamon Gardens, the most fashionable address in Colombo, is a reminder of the centuries when Ceylon and cinnamon were synonymous.

Although coffee displaced cinnamon as the country's main source of wealth and foreign exchange, it was not the first choice of British capitalists who invested in Ceylon.

There were experiments in the cultivation of sugar, cotton, and indigo, which met with varying degrees of success in the early decades of British rule and the process of experimentation went on into the forties and fifties even after coffee had established itself as the country's main product.

Sugar cultivation was fairly successfully carried out in the Southern and Northern provinces. In 1811, Anthony Bertolacci, a Corsican who had come to Ceylon with the first British Governor, Hon. Frederic North (1798 to 1805) wrote to his former employer about sugar cultivation at Kalutara on the western seaboard. "At last," he wrote, "the order for granting lands to Europeans has been received and a very fine plantation is begun at Caltura under the superintendence of Mooyart who you will recollect used to join our musical parties".[2] The Bird brothers who later became pioneer coffee planters cultivated sugar cane at Dumbara near Kandy, while George Winter, the first Editor of the **Observer** grew sugar cane at Baddegama in the Southern Province. He supplied raw sugar to the ships that called at Galle which was then the Island's main harbour. Sir William Reid who later became owner of Spring Valley coffee estate in the Badulla district, had 1,200 acres under sugar cultivation but abandoned the project on being advised that soil and climatic conditions were unfavourable.[3] Governor Sir Edward Barnes (1824 to 1831) tried the cultivation of sugar with Samuel Northway at Gangoruwa which later became famous for coffee.[4] Even in the early forties Governor Sir Colin Campbell (1841-1847) felt that the demand for land for sugar cultivation might exceed that for coffee, if only the duty in Britain was reduced. Such action, he felt, would result in Ceylon becoming one of the principal sugar colonies.[5]

A British civil servant, William Orr, cultivated cotton at Mannar on the north-western coast as early as 1802. He acquired some notoriety for giving his workers "18 to 20 stripes with a rattan" and faced charges of cruelty at an official inquiry. Although he was acquitted of the charges against him, he abandoned his cotton cultivation on the grounds that it was unremunerative.[6] A. M. Ferguson states in **All About Fibres** that cotton was grown in the Northern Province, the North Central Province, and in the Central Province where Robert Knox traded in cotton yarn when he was a prisoner of the King of Kandy in the seventeenth century.[7] The Whitehouse brothers had a cotton cultivation in the north and cotton was also grown in the Eastern Province. The Manchester Cotton Supply Association commented favourably on samples from Ceylon and the appointment of a Superintendent of Cotton Plantations was considered, but coffee was proving more popular at that stage, and cotton cultivation was neglected.[8]

Indigo had been grown in Ceylon in the time of the Dutch who exported the product from the eastern port of Trincomalee. In early British times Peter Cornleis Johannes Tranchell from Sweden found that indigo grew well at Tangalla in the south of Ceylon. As he lacked capital he approached Governor Barnes with a scheme to establish a factory that was to be financed by a joint stock company. Barnes approved Tranchell's plans and agreed to be patron of the company but Tranchell died before the company was established.[9] Indigo was also grown at Veyangoda in the Western Province and at Mannar but in the mid thirties cultivation was given up owing to inability to compete with producers in Bengal where labour was cheaper.[10]

By the eighteen forties coffee monoculture was firmly established. "Coffee," says K. M. De Silva, "was the catalyst of the modernisation of the economy; indeed it generated a momentum that made possible the process of modernisation. Since the main centre of coffee production was the Kandyan provinces, the expansion of coffee and the network of roads and railways broke the isolation of the old Kandyan Kingdom, and brought it into the modern sector of the economy."(11)

Coffee which had been a peasant crop before the British arrived was a very minor crop in the early years of British rule. Between 1801 and 1804, exports averaged only 1,116 cwts. Cultivation was carried out by peasants in home gardens and the collection and marketing of the output was handled by Muslim traders who often obtained the coffee through barter with cotton goods, trinkets, etc. Systematic cultivation by the British began in 1823, and between 1823 and 1825 exports averaged 10,246 cwts.(12)

The brothers Henry and George Bird, and Governor Barnes, were the pioneers of coffee cultivation on a plantation basis. Henry Bird who was Deputy Commissary General of H.M.Forces in Ceylon died at Kandy in 1829 of cholera, but his son Henry C.Bird, who also became a Colonel like his father, managed the plantation at Sinnapitiya near Gampola. There had been a quarrel between Henry and his brother George, and Henry Bird (jnr) reverted to an earlier spelling of Byrde.(13)

A.M. Ferguson describes George Bird as "the real pioneer of coffee planting on a large scale," and says he established the first coffee estate at Gampola in 1824. George was a coffee planter for 33 years but does not seem to have reaped much benefit from his pioneering endeavours. In **Ceylon in 1837-1846** Ferguson writes of George Bird's "singular want of success..... having been the measure of conferring singular advantages on others, by the energy of his character, while to himself the pioneer of coffee cultivation, his best efforts served only to prolong his disappointment". Meanwhile Henry Bird's son, Henry Byrde, became an important figure in the Planters' Association in which he served as Chairman for four terms and as Secretary for seven terms.(14)

Barnes had a coffee plantation at Gangoruwa which later became part of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Peradeniya, near Kandy. In order to get the best possible scientific advice, Barnes transferred the Botanical Gardens from Slave Island in Colombo to Peradeniya, and officials of the Gardens were told about Barnes interest in the coffee industry.(15) Barnes personal example in cultivating coffee was less important than the measures he took to establish the industry on a firm foundation by providing land for estates; in opening up a network of roads, and abolishing the export duty of five per cent. Bird and Barnes were the first to import Indian labour. They got down 150 Indian Tamil workers whose wages ranged from 12 to 15 shillings per month but their experiment was a failure as all the workers returned to India within a year.(16)

One of Barnes greatest achievements was the linking of Colombo and Kandy by road. Colvin R. De Silva calls the Colombo - Kandy road "a permanent monument to the memory of Sir Edward Barnes". Until the construction of this road Kandy could only be reached in the words of Thomas Skinner, an engineer, by "narrow jungle paths, so deep and rugged as to be quite impassable for any description of vehicle and often as dangerous as a bridle path".(17) H. A. J. Hulugalle in his biographical sketches of the British Governors of Ceylon says "There was no aspect of the administration in which his

energizing influence was not felt. Indeed his contribution to the prosperity of Ceylon is not surpassed by that of any other Governor of the Colony".[18]

The fortunes of the coffee industry began to be regularly chronicled with the commencement of the **Ceylon Observer** on 4 February 1834. The **Observer** which is Ceylon's oldest newspaper was known in its early years as **The Colombo Observer.** There are also accounts of the early years of the industry in retrospective writings and in the issues of the short-lived **Colombo Journal** published in 1832 and 1833. In one of the earliest contemporary accounts of the coffee industry the **Colombo Journal** stated;

> The quantity of coffee produced in this Island for exportation has increased considerably within the last three years, not only from the stimulus of better prices being given to natives engaged in collecting it from their own gardens, where it may be said to grow wild as no care whatever is taken in its cultivation, but likewise from its being more extensively produced in the several plantations in the neighbourhood of Kandy under European management... The improvement which has lately been effected by European skill and capital in this article of produce, proceeds not only from a proper mode of culture but from allowing the fruit to arrive at maturity before it is gathered (which is not done by the natives) and lastly from the careful process observed in drying and preparing it for the market.[19]

Barnes himself was less optimistic than the **Colombo Journal.** In one of his answers to a questionnaire circulated by Colebrooke, Barnes stated that there was only one European agriculturist settled in the Island (he probably had Bird in mind) and that there were one or two others who were experimenting. In reply to another question Barnes stated the Colebrooke would have been sufficiently acquainted with the Island "to know that there are no capitalists capable of undertaking any expensive works for bringing land into cultivation upon a large scale".[20] Barnes died in London in 1838, and did not live to see the phenomenal growth of the coffee industry. In the years which Colebrooke spent in Ceylon there were just nine firms; two at Galle; four at Colombo, and three in Trincomalee.[21]

The growth of the coffee industry was due largely to the fact that it was not capital or labour intensive. Coffee required no sophisticated machinery. A pulper was used to remove the outer covering of the berry which was then fed into a mill for the removal of the inner covering of the seed known as parchment. For the greater part of the year a small resident labour force sufficed to keep the estate free from weeds; to run a cattle establishment which provided manure for the plants, and to carry out routine work. It was only during the plucking season that planters required a large labour force.

The coffee "mania" as it was called, took place in the late thirties and early forties. Recalling those heady days Sir Emerson-Tennent, the Colonial Secretary, wrote that "so dazzling was the prospect that expenditure was unlimited; and its profusion was only equalled by the ignorance and inexperience of those to whom it was entrusted".[22]

Barnes gave free grants of lands to would-be coffee planters but in 1836 a charge of five shillings per acre was introduced. Officials from the Governor downwards, top ranking military officers, and religious dignitaries were among the earliest beneficiaries of this nominal levy.

The Crown Lands Encroachment Ordinance No. 12 of 1840 vested ownership of all uncultivated and unoccupied lands, to which there were no claimants who could prove ownership by means of deeds or tax receipts, in the Government. It was these lands that were made available to prospective coffee planters at five shillings per acre and later at one pound per acre. A British Parliamentary Paper of 1850 revealed that on one single day in 1840, 13,275 acres were given to top ranking officials as follows:

Hon. W. O. Carr (judge) and Capt. Skinner, Commissioner of Roads	.826	acres
Rt. Hon. the Governor, Stewart Mackenzie	.1,120	acres
F. B. Norris, Surveyor-General	.762	acres
Hon. G. Turnour,(Govt. Agent Kandy and Acting Colonial Secretary)	.2,217	acres
H. Wright (District Judge, Kandy) and G. Bird	.1,751	acres
Sir R. Arbuthnot (Commander of the Forces) and Capt. Winslow, A.D.C.	.855	acres
T. Oswin (District Judge)	.545	acres
C. R, Buller (Government Agent)	.764	acres
Capt. Layard and associates	.2,264	acres
P. E. Wodehouse (Government Agent and Asst. Colonial Secretary)	.2,135	acres

According to the Parliamentary Paper much of the land which was allocated in a day's work was in an area for which a road had been surveyed and many of those who received land at five shillings per acre sold these lands at £ 2 per acre.[23]

There is a popular belief, endorsed by chauvinist historians and politicians, that the Crown Lands Encroachment Ordinance led to large scale appropriation of land and displacement of Kandyan peasants, but insufficient research has still been done into the precise implications of the grant of Crown lands, or lands claimed by the Crown, to coffee prospectors. "For an issue of (such) great complexity, this evidence is inadequate. A long, hard road of probing in depth is called for, and greatly overdue," wrote Michael Roberts in 1975. On this, and many other aspects of the period of British rule, Roberts wrote "The historiography on British Ceylon... has only been scratching the surface of a vast area calling for investigation".[24]

What is less controversial, and indeed hardly disputed, is that many of the British beneficiaries of the system of land grants enriched themselves. When Philip Anstruther, a former Colonial Secretary, came to Ceylon in 1848 on holiday, even the then Governor, Lord Torrington (1847 to 1850), could not resist the temptation to describe him as "a great land jobber". In a private letter to Earl Grey, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Torrington stated that Anstruther who had come to inspect his properties in Ceylon "had bought large tracts of land and recommended the price to be raised to £ 1 per acre system, he having purchased at five shillings".[25]

After the ownership of land and management of plantations had become a scandal, Lord Stanley, Secretary of State for the Colonies, ordered that civil servants should be prohibited from owning land. There had been no consistency of policy earlier on the questions of civil servants owning land or engaging in trade or agriculture. Initially Governor North had allowed civil servants to engage in trade because he felt their salaries were very low. Governor Sir Thomas Maitland (1805-1811) however felt that civil servants who were allowed to engage in business activities would experience a conflict of interests and, in May 1813, a Proclamation was issued prohibiting persons who held "positions of trust" from engaging in trade.[26] In practice the ban was not always

enforced. Barnes himself employed James Steuart, who was Master Attendant at Colombo, to attend to a number of his business affairs but after Barnes' departure from Ceylon some businessmen questioned the propriety and legality of a Government official engaging in trade and Steuart had to give up his business activities.[27] Governor Campbell succeeded in persuading the Colonial Office to soften the ban by allowing civil servants to retain land they had already acquired before 1 February 1845, provided they did not themselves superintend the cultivations, and also provided ownership of land in no way interfered with their official duties. At the same time it was made clear that where promotions were involved preference would be given to those who did not own land. Salaries and pensions were increased with the ban on engaging in agriculture or trade.[28]

There were two phases in coffee cultivation in Ceylon. The first was from the beginning in the mid-twenties to the mid-forties when the industry experienced a severe recession owing to the abolition of preferential duties in the United Kingdom, and then from the early fifties when cultivation was undertaken on a far more scientific basis than earlier, until the eclipse of the industry by the tea trade towards the end of the last century.

The first phase was a period of great optimism. In 1841 Governor Campbell told the Colonial Office that there was every likelihood that the export of coffee from Ceylon would become "quite equal to the consumption of Great Britain."[29] The growth of the industry in its first phase is reflected in the following table of exports:

1837	43,164	cwts
1838	49,541	"
1839	41,863	"
1840	63,162	"
1841	80,584	"
1842	119,805	"
1843	94,847	"
1844	133,957	"
1845	178,603	"
1846	173,892	"
1847	292,220	" [30]

There were no banks in Ceylon in the early years of the coffee industry but from 1829 the firm of Acland, Boyd and Co. acted as both shippers and bankers. The firm was founded by George Acland who became a member of the Legislative Council in 1838, and George Hay Boyd. Ceylon's first bank was the Bank of Ceylon which commenced business on a Royal Charter in June 1841 but it crashed during the crisis the coffee industry underwent in the mid-1840's. The Oriental Bank which began operations in 1845 collapsed in 1884 with the decline of the coffee industry in which it had invested most of its assets.[31] The recession of the mid-1840's was due to the abolition of preferential duties in the U.K. and an economic depression in Europe. The preferential duties had favoured colonial coffee paying a duty of four pence a pound against eight pence a pound on foreign coffee. In 1844 the duty on foreign coffee was reduced to six pence per pound, and from 1851 both colonial coffee and foreign coffee paid three pence per pound[32] With the abolition of the preferential duties the price of Ceylon coffee dropped from 130 shillings in the early forties to 68 shillings in 1844 and even further to 43 shillings in 1847.

The romantic and amateur period of the first phase was over, and Governor Torrington in a despatch to Earl Grey depicted what had happened in an interesting and vivid despatch;

> Soldiers whose discharges were purchased from the ranks were sent up to the interior to manage plantations on salaries of £ 300 to £ 400 per annum; houses for their use were purchased by the agents at excessive prices, and their style of living, wines, and their expenditure of every description were on a scale of the most absurd proportions while the proprietors were mortgaging every security and raising money at 9 or 10 per cent to support this expenditure buoyed up by the confident expectation that the first golden harvest would reimburse every outlay and leave them in possession of a splendid and permanent income. (33)

In another post-mortem written in a series of articles in 1852, C.R. Rigg, a coffee planter, estimated that 90 per cent of those who invested in coffee in the early forties had lost. He said that as a body the planters had only themselves to blame. "An infatuation appears to have possessed them, and they slumbered on like the narcotized opium smoker who having filled his lungs with the fumes of the pernicious drug throws himself back on a couch ..." (34)

The coffee industry emerged stronger from the recession of the mid-forties. The amateur enthusiasts seeking quick fortunes were replaced by professional planters who used the latest agricultural skills and know-how. The fifties and sixties also saw the emergence of agency houses which not only took over the problems of sales and export, but also assisted in the management of estates by providing Visiting Agents who were able to advise the planters in the field, and the managers and owners in Colombo, or London, on the adoption of more efficient techniques and new methods of administration. Prices rose in the fifties and sixties and so did the acreage under cultivation.

In 1847 there had been about 50,000 acres under cultivation. In 1871 there were 196,000 acres under cultivation. Exports including village coffee rose from an average of 90,000 cwts in the forties to an average of 939,000 cwts in the late sixties. (35)

Meanwhile the planters had formed themselves into a professional organisation known as The Planters' Association on 17 February 1854, at Kandy. The first Chairman was Capt. Keith Jolly who had served with the British East India Co. until he retired in 1843, when he acquired and settled on Faricland Estate in the Kandy district. He also worked in the firm of George Wall. Jolly was described by a contemporary as "the soul of honour, ever generous and kind hearted." After two years Jolly was succeeded by R.B. Tytler, who was one of the most forceful personalities of the coffee era. (36)

The authorities in Colombo and London were quick to recognise the need to maintain the goodwill of the planters who often proclaimed the fact that it was they who were producing the wealth of the country from which all officials from the Governor downwards were paid their salaries. The Association became a powerful lobby which was given the right to nominate a member to represent planting interests in the Legislative Council in 1857 "King Coffee" seemed set for a long and prosperous reign when what Frederick Lewis, a veteran planter, called "a speck on the horizon", appeared.

The coffee disease was first spotted on Galloola Estate in the Madulsima district. Donald Reid, the planter in charge of the estate sent some of the diseased leaves to Dr.

G.H.K. Thwaites, who was Director of the Royal Botanical Gardens, and Thwaites warned planters that the disease would spread unless all leaves showing signs of the disease were gathered and burnt. Thwaites sent diseased leaves to the Rev. M.J. Berkeley, an authority on fungus in the U.K. who after consultations with a mycologist gave the fungus the name of **Hemileia Vastatrix** (Hemi — half; leia — smooth; vastatrix — destroyer) [37]

The disease showed itself as an orange and red blot which appeared on the underside of the coffee leaf and was powdery to the touch. The odd spot became a talking point, but not much more. Coffee planters and proprietors, officials, and legislators in Colombo, were confident that any loss in crops would be minimal and temporary. With prices booming more land was brought under cultivation and the industry seemed to be regenerating itself when it was really dying of a cancerous affliction. The increases in acreage and prices in the seventies were as follows

1871	195,627 acres	55 s	per cwt.
1872	206,000 "	55 s	"
1873	219,974 "	88 s	"
1874	237,345 "	90 s	"
1875	249,604 "	100 s	"
1876	260,000 "	106 s	"
1877	272,243 "	106 s	"
1878	272,738 "	106 s	" (38)

Coffee was enjoying "an Indian summer," and the mood of the seventies was captured by R.W. Jenkins when he wrote that "All the time the leaf disease got worse and worse, and men got madder and madder, and prices got higher and higher, and crops got smaller and smaller," [39] What was most significant was that although the acreage under cultivation increased from 195,627 acres in 1871 to 272,243 acres in 1877, output in the same period dropped from 945,857 cwts in 1871 to 631,609 cwts in 1877.[40]

Thwaites had warned the planters and the Government of the potential dangers of the disease but the boom in prices induced a false sense of security. It was only in 1874, that the Committee stated that when the disease first appeared it was expected that only particular areas would be affected but "experience has shown that it is general wherever coffee is grown; that it attacks trees in all stages of growth, and that its cause is unknown while its effects are only too apparent." [41] As late as 1879 when **The Times** (London) reported that the coffee industry in Ceylon was" passing through a trying ordeal" Ferguson in Colombo, described the report as "prejudicial to planting interests" and "calculated to alarm the home public unnecessarily".[42]

The Planters' Association made amends of sorts in 1880 when it elected Dr. Thwaites as the first honorary member of the Association, while Governor Sir William Gregory (1872 - 1877) struck a penitential note;

> I much wish I had attended to his (Thwaites) wise admonitions as to the instability of coffee. Year after year he foretold its downfall and he was subjected to obloquy and ridicule for his disloyalty to the great King Coffee ... He knew no remedy and laughed to scorn the various nostrums that were to have exterminated the disease. He implored of me not to lend any money on mortgage upon coffee

estates, telling me how he had called in all his investments and had transferred them to land and houses in Colombo. I should have been a much richer and less worried man had I hearkened to his advice.[43]

In 1881 the Planters' Association called upon the Government to follow the example of the authorities in Java and offer a reward of Rs. 250,000 to any person, or persons, who could provide a cheap and effective cure for the disease. H.S. Saunders told the meeting at which the matter was discussed that even in Fiji "a colony just starting in existence" the Government had taken over the liabilities of an estate that had been affected by the disease. A.G.K. Borron said that instead of spending money on saving the coffee industry the Government was spending money on" abortive tramways and in putting up fine habitations for criminals and lunatics." [44] Java suffered the most from the disease after Ceylon. Production fell from 60,000 tons in 1876 to 20,000 tons in 1881. The disease also affected coffee plantations in India but Brazil escaped.[45] By 1883 planters had begun to realise that the industry was doomed. George Wall, said that if they had "to suffer the almost entire extinction of the staple on which we have so long depended, it will not be a new thing in the history of the world, but will only be further proof of the rule of laws which are to us inscrutable." [46]

Governor, Sir Arthur Hamilton Gordon (1883 to 1890) struck a poignant note when he opened a session of the Legislative Council;

> The sight of a body of energetic and industrious men reduced from affluence to embarrassment by no error or fault of their own, but through the mysterious ravages of a microscopic fungus, must, under all circumstances, be a sad one, but when it is remembered what these men, or those whom they have succeeded and represent, have done — that it is they who have given to this Colony the proud position which she occupies — that it is they who have changed the silent forests into broad stretches of cultivation ringing with sounds of life and industry — I think it must be impossible even for the most insensible or the most prejudiced, to escape being moved by genuine and ungrudging sympathy.[47]

In 1884 the P.A. recorded the transition to tea. The annual report stated that "in almost every planting district the greatest activity has been displayed in planting up both old and new land with tea" and that it was "to the tea industry that the planting community and country must look for a return to prosperity". Cinchona, cocoa, cardamoms and rubber were the other new products whose prospects were assessed.[48]

The closure of many estates with resulting unemployment caused distress among the planters. It was ironical that the Planters Association appealed to the Kandy Friend-in-need Society which had been established mainly to deal with sickness and destitution among the coffee workers. The FINS was able to help some planters with money for passage fares to Australia. The Government also helped one planter and his family with passage money to return to England but in correspondence with the P.A., George T. M. O'Brien, the Assistant Colonial Secretary said the Government could not make any general commitment as each case would be considered on its merits, and only if there was extreme distress among those who wished to return to the U.K.[49]

In the "background of darkness" that prevailed with the collapse of coffee, says A. C. L. Ameer Ali, "cinchona provided a saving light" [50] and there were widespread hopes that "King Coffee" might be succeeded by the Countess of Cinchon(a). The role

played by the cinchona industry in cushioning the impact of the steep fall in the volume and value of coffee exports is also one of those neglected aspects of Ceylon's history, wrote Ameer Ali in 1974. Thwaites had been the first to suggest cinchona cultivation to worried coffee planters, and Thwaites was actively supported by Governor Gregory. When Gregory arrived in Ceylon in 1872 there were only 500 acres under cultivation with cinchona. When he left in 1877 there were 6,000 acres of land under cultivation. By 1885, cinchona was the sole crop on 23,853 acres of land. In the mid-1880's Ceylon was providing almost three-quarter of the world's bark manufacture. In the turbulence of the coffee crash, cinchona was not only an economic lifeboat but also a psychological raft. According to John Ferguson, about 400 out of 1,700 coffee planters left the Island during the depression of the eighties but this number could have been greater if not for the hopes aroused by the successful cultivation of cinchona at this stage. This success however proved to be meteoric. Quality had been sacrificed for quantity - a lesson the tea planters did not forget. While American and European purchasers formed a syndicate to watch their interests, endeavours to promote a syndicate among growers and exporters failed. The decline in exports was as dramatic as the earlier rise. Exports fell from 12,600,000 lbs. in 1885-1889 to just 990,000 lbs. in 1895-1899. As the Director of the Royal Botanical Gardens remarked, the barks were scarcely worth harvesting.(51)

Providentially for Ceylon, the fall in the value of coffee exports corresponded with a proportionate rise in the value of tea exports both before, and after, cinchona had flattered and failed. In 1878 coffee accounted for 99.4% of the combined value of coffee, cinchona and tea exports. In that year cinchona provided 0.5% of the value of exports, and tea just 0.1%. The peak year in the value of cinchona exports was 1886 when it accounted for 25.1 per cent of the value of exports, with coffee having fallen to 45.7 per cent, and tea having risen to 29.2 per cent. The figures for 1900 are almost exactly the opposite of those for 1878, with tea now accounting for 98.8% of the value of exports; coffee a mere 1.1 per cent and cinchona 0.1%(52)

"King Coffee's reign was over...," says I. H. Vanden Driesen. "But while he yet lay on his deathbed, the old monarch could take pride in the thought that the new economic design he had created would live on."(53)

"The new economic design" certainly survived. "The King is dead. Long live the King" said the coffee planters who took to tea but the metamorphosis that had come over Ceylon during the coffee period was not due only to the physical transformation of the landscape and the infusion of capitalist strategies that coffee monoculture had involved.

As Asoka Bandarage and other economic historians have shown it was the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms of 1833 that provided the politico-juridical framework for the modernisation of Ceylon.(54) There was a confluence in the development of the coffee industry and the implementation of the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms which flowed together in the nineteenth century.

When Colebrooke and Cameron were in Ceylon in the late twenties and early thirties there was still no indication of the dominant role coffee was to play in the economy of the country. Colebrooke was in Ceylon from 11 April 1829 to 14 February 1831, while Cameron arrived on 26 March 1830 and left with Colebrooke.

In 1825 Barnes had abolished the export duties on coffee and cotton, and in September 1829 he also exempted sugar, indigo, opium and silk from export duties.[55] Barnes could thus be said to have sown the seeds of Ceylon's future economic development but he was pessimistic about utilitarian ideals finding a fertile field in Ceylon. "Whatever Utopian ideas theorists may cherish of universal fraternity without regard to colour, religion or civilisation, or whatever notorious levellers may wish to see adopted, I am decidedly of opinion that this people cannot, nor ought, to have under the existing circumstances any greater share in the Government," he wrote in a despatch to the Earl of Bathurst.[56]

Colebrooke and Cameron were evangelical liberals who had investigated conditions in the Cape of Good Hope and Mauritius before they came to Ceylon. Colebrooke who knew Ceylon fairly well as he had served with the Army in 1805 and 1807, was a nephew of Wilberforce.[57] Cameron visualised Ceylon as a model for other British colonial possessions. "The peculiar circumstances of Ceylon, both physical and moral," he wrote, "seem to point it out to the British Government as the fittest spot in our Eastern Dominions in which to plant the germ of European civilization..."[58]

There were ambiguities in the recommendations of the Commission, and contradictions arose in policy decisions such as when the abolition of **rajakariya** (compulsory service to the State) was largely reintroduced by Ordinance No. 8 of 1848 which made all males between 18 and 55 liable to six days labour. However the overall structure of a Legislative Council consisting of officials and unofficial members; an Executive Council of the principal officials; the division of the country into five provinces, and the independence of the judiciary, which the Commission recommended remained more or less intact in subsequent decades.

Colebrooke returned to the Army in which he became a General and died in 1870 at the age of 83. Cameron returned to Ceylon in 1875 at the age of 80 as a proprietary coffee planter. His wife was Julia, the renowned photographer of Victorian celebrities. Cameron died in Nuwara Eliya, the salubrious hill station in Ceylon, in 1880 at the age of 85. The coffee estate the Camerons owned is still known as "Cameron Watte" (garden).[59]

Chapter Two

THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE LAZY NATIVES.

Why Foreign Labour Was Needed.

The myth of the "Lazy native" dies hard. To the conquering European colonial powers the peoples of the countries they subjugated were not just natives, but lazy natives to boot. In the decades after the second world war with most of these colonies gaining independence the use of the word "native" in a pejorative sense has gone out of fashion but the notion that these erstwhile natives are lazy persists.

In his monumental **A Study of History** Arnold Toynbee observed that between the Industrial Revolution and the first world war one of the distinguishing psychological characteristics of the British middle class was its unabated "zest for work".[1] Colonial administrators failed to discern this "zest" among the natives of the countries they governed and concluded that the natives were lazy.

"The litanies about the inherent laziness of the natives and the inherent industriousness of the coloniser were related endlessly in every part of the world," wrote Nawaz Dawood in 1980.[2] The Ceylonese, far from being an exception to the generalisation, were regarded as an example par excellence.

There is a mass of evidence that the British regarded the members of the majority community, the Sinhalese, as lazy, but they were not the first colonial power to take this view. The Portuguese who ruled the maritime areas from 1505 to 1656, and the Dutch from 1656 to 1796, when they were ousted by the British, also appear to have had a poor opinion of the natives.

Towards the latter stages of their power in the East the Portuguese resorted to granting prisoners in the mother country pardons, or remissions, if they helped to overcome shortages of labour in the colonies, while the Dutch brought to Ceylon South Indian refugees from Muslim invasions and victims of famines for work in Ceylon. In 1659-1660 the Dutch brought down about 2,000 persons for work on rice fields outside Colombo.[3] The inability of the Sinhalese to be self-sufficient in rice was a matter that intrigued successive Dutch Governors. The Dutch Governor Jacob Christiaan Pielat (1732-1734) in his **Memoir** to his successor, Diederik van Domburg (1734-1736) stated that the natives required continual urging to perform their duties and he described the inhabitants of the south of the Island as being particularly lazy and slothful.[4]

One of the earliest unfavourable reports on the Sinhalese by a British official was that of William Boyd, Commissioner of Revenue, who wrote:

> The inhabitants of Ceylon are by no means exempt from the indolence which is so prevalent in warm climates, and until they can be brought to such a state of moral improvement as to contend successfully against that disposition to inactivity, which is the predominant feature of the generality of Asiatics, it would be vain to expect any permanent increase of cultivation, let the encouragement be

what it may. If a man can secure as much from the produce of one crop as will be sufficient for the subsistence of himself and his family until the next harvest, no prospect of making an addition to his income will, I fear, stimulate him to any further exertion...[5]

These sentiments with variations only in wording were repeated throughout the period of British rule by Governors, officials, planters, businessmen, and very often by visitors in the books they wrote on their travels.

Ralph Pieris in quoting Boyd's remark noted that the British expected the Sinhalese to become wage earners in order to "better themselves". The expectation was based on their experience of an individualistic society. In traditional Ceylon there was no inducement, or even need, to accumulate wealth. Pieris also cites the view of Robert Knox, an Englishman who was captive in the Kingdom of Kandy from 1660 to 1679 and who wrote "For what should they do with more than food or raiment, seeing that as their estates increase, so do their taxes also... Neither have they any encouragement to industry having no vend, by traffic and commerce for what they have got."

The whip was wielded freely by the British in their colonies and it was used on occasion to counteract laziness among the natives. On 28 April 1828, a Regulation was gazetted by Robert Arbuthnot, Chief Secretary, authorising flogging of any labourers who showed "a great disposition to refuse to appear when summoned and to desert and neglect their work from an opinion that they are not liable to punishment for so doing."[6] At that stage those who avoided **rajakariya** (compulsory service to the State), were liable to flogging and Col. Colebrooke's decision to recommend the abolition of **rajakariya** may have been influenced by cases brought to his notice such as the incident at Walapana in the Central Province where a party of about 100 men agreed to perform some work which they had earlier refused to do, only after their leader had received 16 of the 30 lashes which he had been sentenced to receive before them.[7]

Almost every Governor in the British period commented on the laziness of the natives even before the question of a regular supply of labour for the coffee plantations arose. The first British Governor, Lord North (1798-1805) obtained labour from South India for a Pioneer Corps which functioned as auxiliaries to the British Army in an unsuccessful invasion of the Kingdom of Kandy. North had a poor opinion of Sinhalese civilian workers who "desert even before they reach the frontiers" (of the Kandyan Kingdom). He praised the South Indian Pioneers and stated that it was probably their good example that "contributed to the extraordinary and good behaviour of the Cingalese (Sinhalese) coolies who went with them."[8] Earlier however North had defended the Sinhalese against charges of indolence in a despatch to Lord Hobart, the Governor of Madras when he wrote :

> The Cingalese like every other people had rather be poor and idle than work for nothing; and during the Dutch Government they had no other alternative. The enjoyment of security and prosperity for a certain time is undoubtedly necessary to give them a correct idea of the relative value of labour and acquisition. But in the neighbourhood of the great towns, and even in the interior of the country they are every day acquiring that knowledge with a rapidity which astonishes me.[9]

Governor Sir Thomas Maitland (1805-1811) criticised North for having incurred expenditure in importing South Indian labour but he too criticised the Sinhalese, saying

"there is not an inhabitant in this Island that would not sit down and starve out the year under the shade of two or three Cocoa nut trees, the whole of his property, the whole of his subsistence, rather than increase his Income and his Comforts by his manual labour." (10)

Governor Barnes (1824-1831) would have tried Sinhalese labour before he experimented with Indian labour in which, as seen earlier, he was unsuccessful. That he held a poor opinion of the Sinhalese is seen in a letter to Bathurst in which he wrote that the coconut tree "supplies all their wants, which appear to be extremely small, for generally speaking they are, with a very small exception of covering round their waist in a perfect state of nudity..." (11) Barnes was unsuccessful in getting the Sinhalese to join the Pioneer Corps despite offers of high wages. While ordinary workers were offered 71/2 d a day, artificers were offered 91/4 d and in both cases the wives of the men were also offered rations in kind, or cash. Despite these terms less than a dozen men enlisted according to Colvin R. De Silva. De Silva says Barnes regarded the Sinhalese as "innately prone to idleness" but the Tamils were not brought under this accusation "their industry being always considered exemplary." (12)

As the coffee industry grew in importance the question of a regular supply of labour also grew in importance and none of Barnes' successors had any doubts that this supply should come from South India. As the next chapter shows, there were also occasions when the prospects of obtaining labour from China were investigated.

The sentiments expressed by British Governors and officials were also expressed, often in stronger terms, by Britons in various walks of life including visitors to the Island.

Bishop Heber of Calcutta came to Ceylon (which was part of his "parish") in 1826, and he too enunciated what was now becoming the coconut tree theory. "Give a man a coco (sic) tree and he will do nothing for his livelihood; he sleeps under its shade, or perhaps builds a hut of its branches; eats its nuts as they fall, drinks its juice and smokes his life away" he wrote. At the time Heber visited Ceylon **rajakariya** was still in force, and in this respect, Heber sympathised with the Sinhalese. "A man can hardly be expected to pay much attention to the culture of his field," he wrote, "when he is liable at any moment to be taken off to public works; in his own district he receives no payment for road making but when removed to a distance he has three fanams or three half pence a day." (13)

While the perception that the Sinhalese were lazy was one of the main factors leading to the import of Indian labour, this attitude — or prejudice — does not however tell the whole story. After noting that the pioneer coffee planters tried both Kandyan Sinhalese and low-country Sinhalese, Michael Roberts and L.A. Wickremaratne conclude that

> it (the supply of Sinhalese labour) was fitful in supply. And this meagre supply soon petered out. It is possible that these labourers reacted unfavourably to the overseer system of organising labour and recoiled from the ill-treatment meted out by some of the early planters. As employment opportunities expanded, these local labourers, presumably the poorest of the poor, may have preferred to move into more congenial occupations. Or it may have been that planters discovered that Indian immigrant labour cost less. Be that as it may, one point is

clear, for their regular crop-preparing and crop-gathering labour force, the planters began, for the most part to turn to India.[14]

While the reluctance of the Sinhalese to work on the coffee plantations evoked both surprise and condemnation by British planters and officials the phenomenon of indigenous persons refusing or declining to work on plantations was of course not confined to Ceylon, and the remarks which the third Earl Grey made in respect of the sugar colonies, are equally apposite to Ceylon;

> Experience has long demonstrated that men whatever be their race or colour, will not submit to steady and continuous labour, unless under the influence of some very powerful motive; and that in general they can be induced to do so, either by direct compulsion, that is to say by being treated as slaves, or by constraint imposed upon them by their inability to obtain otherwise what their habits lead them to regard as necessary for a comfortable existence.[15]

In the sugar colonies the need for imported labour arose with the abolition of slavery. **Rajakariya** was by no means a form of slavery but by freeing the people from even a short period of compulsory service it left those involved free to accept regular employment. The British were however disappointed in their expectation that the Kandyans would take to wage labour after the abolition of **rajakariya.** The Kandyans preferred to carry on their traditional village existence rather than subject themselves to the regimentation of estate life. "Whether their refusal to work on the estates was purely a cultural matter, or whether the wage income offered to estate labour was not better than the fairly good subsistence income, which, thanks largely to nature, the traditional system provided, one cannot say " says Donald Snodgrass.[16]

There would have been advantages to the coffee planters if the Kandyan villagers had offered to work on the estates. As Bandarage has shown, the planters would have saved the expense they incurred in the provision of housing, food, and medical care to the immigrant workers[17] On the other hand there were also advantages in the employment of workers from abroad. The South Indians, in the words of Eric Meyer, were "an uprooted labour force, easy to control." The Indians were in the "lines" and were available whenever they were needed. Sinhalese workers would have returned to their homes at night and they would have had family and village social obligations to fulfil which did not arise in the case of resident foreign workers.[18]

Throughout the coffee period the unwillingness on the part of the Sinhalese to work on the estates was commented on by Britons, and later Ceylonese, in books, journals, and the newspapers. The "lazy native" was a recurring theme but many writers offered explanations, and in some cases justifications, of the position of the Sinhalese.

An early observer, Lt. De Butts, writing in 1840, even before the pattern of employment had become clear said the Sinhalese were "employed in the culture of their own fields — an employment which they infinitely prefer to servitude on the coffee estates, even though the latter proceeding would, generally speaking, be more lucrative and less laborious." [19]

In 1843, a correspondent in the **Observer**, who did not reveal his identity, but who was obviously a planter, stated that the Kandyan Sinhalese, like the low country Sinhalese, were "generally above labouring for hire". He said caste was one reason as

they did not wish to associate with the Malabars most of whom were of a low caste. If they did work it was to raise some money for arrack or gambling. He said the Kandyans were needed as axemen for which they were paid nine pence, or one shilling per day, but as soon as they received their wages they went off to spend their money, or to tend to their fields. The Sinhalese from the maritime areas were also unreliable, and abandoned their work whenever they heard that someone was sick, or to be married, or for other domestic reasons, and they generally stayed away for two or three months.[20] The **Observer** later commented on the caste factor. The paper stated that the Sinhalese looked on the Malabars with "horror and disgust," and "as daemons in a lower scale of animal existence." The paper stated that the Kandyans were "in their own home." while the Malabars were far from home, and it was to them that the planter had to turn. No dependence could be placed on the natives of Ceylon as permanent labourers. "We have heard shrewd men predict that the Malabars will eventually push out the Cingalese (Sinhalese) and finally occupy their place" the paper stated, adding that the Malabars were not given to gambling which was almost universal among the Sinhalese.[21]

The fact that the Kandyan villagers were themselves proprietary planters, even if, on a very small scale, was stressed by William Boyd, a coffee planter and author. He stated that as a general rule the Kandyan villagers owned paddy fields, or cows and bullocks, or had fruit gardens, and managing these took up all their time.[22]

Sir Emerson-Tennent, Colonial Secretary, described the Sinhalese as "habitually averse from labour" in a despatch to the Colonial Office in April 1847, when he was acting as Governor, but he was far more critical of the planters, and in the process he explained why the Kandyans were reluctant to work on the estates. Of the Kandyans generally, he said that their wants were so few, that these were supplied by nature without much exertion on their part as "even the merest strip of irrigated land yields a sufficiency of rice to raise the tiller above the necessity of toiling for hire under a master." He stated that some Kandyans had offered their services on the estates but had given up because of "the want of good faith on the part of their employers by the breach of engagements and the unkindness of their general treatment." [23] In another, and more scathing condemnation of the planters, Tennent enclosed copies of reports submitted by Colepepper, the Superintendent of Police at Kandy, and C.H De Saram, the Police Magistrate at the planting town of Gampola. Colepepper stated that the Sinhalese were not work-shy and had worked on estates, but even these persons had given up because they were not paid, or kept for long periods without wages. De Saram stated that he had been told by Village Headmen that the villagers had given up working on estates after they had been duped and cheated of their dues.[24]

In a book of two volumes on Ceylon, Charles Pridham provided the historical background to what he saw as a lack of enterprise among the "upper classes," and the apathy of the "lower classes." He stated that although the Native Chiefs owned considerable extents of land there were no capitalists among them, while the lower classes "universally refused to labour." He stated that until the Sinhalese were stimulated to energy through education the country could only be developed" through the agency of strangers and foreign capital."[25]

Some extreme views on the Sinhalese were expressed in the mid-1850's by Major Edward Sullivan who stated that it was "a very good thing" that the Sinhalese were being supplanted in their own country by the Malabars as the Sinhalese were a "miserable, effeminate, treacherous, lying, cowardly race." Sullivan did however state that the "Tamuls" (Indian Tamils) were "not good at hard labour such as hewing and digging," and that in these two tasks the Sinhalese when employed as contract labour "beat them easily." (26)

There were articles and letters in the newspapers at this stage that the unwillingness of the Sinhalese to work on the estates was due to the fact that they disliked working under Indian Tamil kanganis. R.W. writing in the **Observer** stated that he had tried to employ Sinhalese even by paying them higher rates than the Indian workers but the Sinhalese disliked being "domineered over by a Tamil kangany." R.W. said he had also noted that the Sinhalese and the Malabars did not get on "particularly well together." (27)

That the Sinhalese disliked working under the Kanganis was also stated by C. R. Rigg, a coffee planter, in a series of articles he wrote for the **Ceylon Examiner**. Rigg stated that "being obliged to obey orders and to do just what they are commanded," was "galling to the Sinhalese." Rigg stated that in the early years of the industry some Sinhalese had worked on the estates but they later went away and "spent their hours in indolence and their earnings in debauchery." He stated that at the time he was writing, (1852) Sinhalese were employed on estates only as domestic workers, artificers, traders, or carters.(28)

Governor Sir Henry Ward (1855 to 1860) was initially critical of the Sinhalese but later modified his views. In a despatch to the Colonial Office in June 1855 Ward said

> The attempt to induce the native population to take part in those improvements that have converted the jungle into thriving coffee plantations upon which an enormous amount of British Capital and Enterprise has been expended, has so failed so entirely that the whole of the work of the plantations is carried on by Immigrant Coolie labour. No amount of wages, no hopes of prospective advantages, no desire to improve their conditions by imitating... (illegible) or habits of their European neighbours, have acted as yet upon the Sinhalese mind, or roused the people from their apathy. With wants easily satisfied, and a fertile soil subdivided into small holdings, they can always command the absolute necessaries of life and seem to look no further.(29)

Five years later Ward stated that it was "the irregularity of the hours — the discipline — the somewhat rough control exercised by the overseers — not the amount of work, that the Sinhalese object to." Ward stated that the whole of the paddy and the coconut cultivations were in the hands of the Sinhalese, and they had also contributed substantially to the development of the coffee industry by the clearing of the jungles, and in the transport of coffee from the estates to the ports of shipment. In addition, the Sinhalese owned small coffee gardens which they cultivated with members of their families and the annual value of coffee produced in this way was in the region of £ 250,000 to £ 300,000.(30)

Some of the harshest criticism of the Sinhalese in the last century was expressed by Governor Sir Hercules Robinson (1865 to 1872) who accused the Sinhalese of indolence and apathy not only in their refusal to work on the plantations, but even in their traditional occupation which was the cultivation of rice.

In opening a session of the Legislative Council on 3 October 1866, Sir Hercules said, "The wants of the natives are few and easily supplied by an occasional day's work in their own gardens or paddy fields. Their philosophy, their love of ease and indolence, or their limited ideas, whichever may be the real cause, renders them perfectly content with whatever they possess." Sir Hercules was merely repeating what his predecessors had said earlier, but he also criticised the Sinhalese for a lack of response to the efforts by the Government to restore the ancient irrigation works in the North Central Province. He said that one of the tanks (artificial lakes) which had been restored was capable of irrigating 400 acres of land, and the population within reach of it was sufficient to cultivate this acreage but "such is their indolence that rarely so much as even 150 acres are made use of." There had been a shortage of rice during which prices rose in 1866 and during which the Island's inability to achieve self-sufficiency in rice had been spotlighted. Sir Hercules said it was futile to think that the Sinhalese would grow sufficient rice for the Island's needs and also those of the immigrant Indian population whose presence was necessary because of the apathy of the Sinhalese.

Sir Hercules leaned heavily for advice on Sir Richard Morgan, the first Ceylonese Queen's Advocate (as the post of Attorney General was then known). Sir Richard noted in his diary that the Governor's remarks had caused offence to the Sinhalese and Tamil members of the Legislative Council and that they resented his references to the apathy of the natives. William Digby, who later edited Sir Richard's diaries in two volumes, noted that the Ceylonese members felt that as most of the Ceylonese were land owners there was no reason why they should degrade themselves by working as "ordinary coolies." (31)

The alleged laziness of the natives figured frequently in the newspapers and while both the **Observer** and **The Times of Ceylon** were European-owned, the **Observer** generally defended the Sinhalese, while **The Times of Ceylon** condemned them to the point of ridicule.

In January 1863 when a Sinhalese member of the Legislative Council, Harry Dias, complained that very little had been done for the indigenous population although they had to pay heavy taxes such as those on rice and salt. **The Times** retorted that Indian labour had to be brought down to work on the estates because the Sinhalese were "idle, apathetic, or too well-fed" to undertake such work. **The Times** asked whether Dias expected the Government to abolish all taxes, make arrack freely available, distribute betel leaves (which the Ceylonese chewed) free twice a week, and take measures to improve the breed of fighting cocks (for gambling)? (32)

In contrast Ferguson of the **Observer** highlighted the part played by the Sinhalese in the coffee industry. In 1864 Ferguson estimated that there were 13,000 Sinhalese carters engaged in the transport of coffee. In addition there were thousands of men and women "chiefly Singhalese" engaged in coffee picking and in the making of the casks in which coffee was exported at the coffee stores in Colombo.(33) Shortly after Robinson's

speech in the Legislative Council the Observer editorially stated that "The wholesale and sweeping condemnation of a whole race was unjustified and uncalled for... Bearing in mind that it is in the tropics that their lot is cast the Sinhalese toil and labour much better than any other tropical natives".[34]

George Wall, Chairman, of the Planters' Association for a number of terms in the sixties, seventies, and eighties, espoused the cause of the Sinhalese peasantry in his campaign against the grain tax for which he was awarded a gold medal by the Cobden Club. Wall said Sir Hercules had criticised the Sinhalese villagers "before he had any opportunity of judging for himself". Wall referred to a number of industries such as coir making, lace work, basket weaving etc in which women were employed, and as for the men "fishers, cart drivers jungle contractors, axemen and carpenters are all conspicuous for their readiness to accept employment." [35]

In a book on **Rice Cultivation** Leopold Ludovici, a Ceylonese surveyor and writer, said a belief in native apathy had become fashionable. "It has had a prescriptive existence of above half a century and the members of the Government seem to cling to it as a venerable article of faith in their political science" he wrote.[36]

William Sabonadiere, a veteran coffee planter, wrote that while the Indian workers excelled in coffee picking they were quite inexperienced in the clearing of land. Both the Kandyan and low-country Sinhalese were "perfect adepts" in felling trees and it was "a wonderful and interesting sight to see a large body of them at work." [37]

Ponnambalam (later Sir) Arunachalam, the Registrar General, stated in an **Administration Report** that the Sinhalese who took pride in the ownership of land clung tenaciously to even minute portions of land as "not to own land almost augurs one a vagabond". Ceylon was "par excellence the land of small proprietors" with frequent disputes arising out of the ownership of trees and the produce of trees.[38] (In 1934 the Banking Commission estimated that 80% of the Ceylonese owned land).

While persons resident in the Island were defending the Sinhalese against the charge of laziness, visitors to the Island continued to be critical.

Ernst Haeckal, the German naturalist, wrote that "The indolent Cingalese lie stretched on benches before their open huts, happy in their idleness, contemplating the ever green surroundings, or busy in weeding out the native population of their long black hair. Naked children play in the road or hunt the butterflies and lizards which make it gay."[39]

In recent years the role of Sinhalese labour in the coffee industry has been examined by Eric Meyer and Asoka Bandarage. Eric Meyer states that the role of the Sinhalese on the plantations has been under-estimated owing to the paucity of evidence. In a research paper that deals mainly with the tea period, Meyer states that during the coffee period there were no compelling factors for the villagers to leave the subsistence economy in which they lived. Using data from the decennial Census reports Meyer gives the Sinhalese population resident in estate areas in the coffee period as being;

1871 .....3.33%
1881 .....2.98%
1891 .....7.48% [40]

Did the Sinhalese lose by not becoming estate labour? Asoka Bandarage thinks they did not. "Had the Sinhalese peasantry made a large scale conversion as plantation labour, it would not have helped improve their standard of living. The miserable living conditions and debt bondage of the immigrant estate labourers was a constant reminder of that fact," she says.(41)

As seen earlier, Ceylon was by no means the only country in which the British encountered "lazy natives". In the West Indies where Indian labour was employed in the sugar fields, Thomas Carlyle found that the West Indian preferred to be "lolling around up to his eyes in water melons".(42) In the African colonies the natives were not only "lazy" but also "dirty, immoral, untruthful, devious, imprudent, impulsive and excitable" and whenever any work had to be done the African made his wife do it.(43) In India, the natives were not only lazy but also liars and cheats and the exceptions were "the fighting races" - the Muslims, Sikhs, and Rajputs. Lord Curzon had a very poor opinion of even the educated Indians and when it was suggested that an Indian should be appointed to the Executive Council he replied that "in the whole continent there is not an Indian fit for the post."(44)

CHAPTER THREE

SING A SONG FOR CHINAMEN.

Attempts To Import Chinese Labour To Ceylon.

In the historiography of Sri Lanka there are vast tracts of virginal soil that await the sowing of the seeds of historical inquiry. One of these areas concerns the attempts to introduce Chinese labour into Sri Lanka. There are only casual references to the subject in reviews of Indian immigrant labour in the country, and also in official correspondence; the newspapers; the minutes of the Planters' Association, and in the writings of interested individuals. This chapter attempts to synthesize these scattered references to plans to import Chinese labour into the country both before, and during the coffee period.

The Chinese, like the Indians, were the workhorses of capitalist entrepreneurs all over the world and a web of circumstances determined who went where, and why, and how.

While volumes have been written on Indian and Chinese settlement all over the world, "a comparative study of the overseas Chinese and the overseas Indians is a subject yet to be explored by political sociologists," wrote K. N. Ramachandran in 1979.(1)

As it happened, it was the South Indians who were chosen for employment on the coffee plantations. In the last major census just before Independence on 4 February 1948 there were 780,589 Indian Tamils on the plantations, while there were just 497 Chinese in towns, and most of them were engaged in retail trade, catering, or dentistry.(2) Ceylon was thus unlike Malaya, where the Chinese were 45% of the population with the Indians being only 10 %, while in Burma, the Chinese were second to the Indians of whom there were about one million.(3)

The presence of Chinese in South East Asian countries was due more to circumstances than policy. "The infiltration of Chinese into South East Asia was in general a voluntary, instinctive movement which owed nothing to the direct encouragement of Governments; indeed there was an official ban on Chinese emigration until 1894," wrote Brian Harrison.(4) In Ceylon official policy at times seemed to favour the import of Chinese labour although this did not materialise with the availability of South Indian labour so much closer at hand.

As in many aspects of economic policy, the Dutch due to their earlier presence, anticipated the British. It was during the period of Dutch supremacy in the Indian ocean that an attempt was made to send Chinese from Batavia to Ceylon. The Chinese in Batavia had been law abiding, but in the 1740's there was some unemployment, crime and discontent. Fearing a possible revolt by the Chinese the authorities decided to send those who did not possess passes certifying that they were legitimately employed to Ceylon and the Cape of Good Hope. Some Chinese obtained such passes through bribery but others resorted to acts of violence. There was a rumour that those who were to be deported

were really to be thrown overboard at sea, and this fuelled further violence. The Dutch panicked when the house of a Chinese Governor went up in flames. The Dutch Governor-General lost his head and did nothing to prevent a massacre of Chinese by the Company's troops.[5] It is interesting to note that earlier when the Dutch Governor at the Cape suggested the import of Chinese labour from Batavia, Joan Maetsuyker, who was then on the court of Directors (Heeren XVII) but who had earlier been Governor of the Dutch "conquests" in Ceylon, (1746-1750) described the Chinese as workers in glowing terms". With you, "he wrote to the Dutch Governor at the Cape" we are of the opinion that 25 good Chinamen will better promote agriculture at the Cape than 50 of our present lazy and unwilling agriculturalists. "Maetsuyker regretted that he could not send any Chinese to the Cape as they could not "be induced in a friendly way to proceed thither, apparently not liking the idea." [6]

There are references to the presence of Chinese in Ceylon during Dutch times but their numbers were very small. Governor Jacob Christiaan Pielat (1732-1734) in his **Memoir** to his successor, Diedrik van Domburg, stated that the European youths who had arrived from Holland were engaged in supervising the work of "some Chinese who pretend to understand the breeding of silk worms." Willem J. van de Graff (1785-1794) made two attempts at obtaining Chinese labour for rice cultivation but both were unsuccessful. He was admonished for detaining Chinese members of the crew of the **Sparenrijk** so that they could demonstrate, a system of transplantation to Sinhalese cultivators and his request to the authorities at Batavia for 50 Chinese rice farmers was also refused.[7]

One of the earliest references to Chinese labour in Ceylon after the British occupation was made by Anthony Bertolacci, a Corsican who had been employed by the first British Governor, Hon. Frederic North. Bertolacci stated that there were about 80 to 100 Chinese in the Island but that they had not brought to Ceylon "that industry and ingenuity for which they are famous in their own country," as they were addicted to gambling and dissipation. Bertolacci said these Chinese had rented gaming houses and cockpits from which the Government through a mistaken policy derived revenue by selling the exclusive rights to the operation of such places. These Chinese had also not brought their wives and had formed connections with Sinhalese women.[8]

The second British Governor, Sir Thomas Maitland (1805-1811) imported about 100 Chinese labourers from the Malay peninsula but the scheme was not a success.[9] It was during Maitland's governorship that a visitor to the Island, Maria Graham, visited, and later described," a little colony of Chinese near the fort" (of Galle). She said they had been brought down as gardeners, as Europeans had not been successful in growing vegetables. "The patience of the Chinese has however succeeded and I saw not only esculent vegetables of every kind, but also thriving sugar canes under their management" she wrote, Graham stated that each colonist had a home of his own and that the principal room contained a high table over which was a tablet containing the names of the occupant's ancestors.[10]

The success of the Chinese as gardeners at Galle may have prompted Admiral Drury to plan to settle Chinese at the naval base at Trincomalee to grow vegetables. Drury hoped to make Trincomalee, rather than Madras, the headquarters of the British East

Indies Fleet and he had no difficulty in obtaining Maitland's enthusiastic support as Maitland was "a wily Scot who was shrewd enough to realise that a naval base would inject lifeblood into the economy of Ceylon." [11] Drury reported that his endeavours had irritated the merchants at Madras but expressed confidence that the Home authorities would treat their "unwholesome noise" as it merited. A decision was taken to shift the headquarters to Trincomalee but Drury died before the news was conveyed to him.[12]

In 1816, Capt. L. De Bussche of the 1st Ceylon Regiment who was on the staff of Governor Sir Robert Brownrigg (1815-1820) who annexed the Kingdom of Kandy stated that the Kandyan Province could become "the seat of paradise" but that there was a need for "capital, labour and a spirit of enterprise." He felt that the Chinese who were" laborious, skilful and peaceable" would make much better workers than the indolent Sinhalese. De Bussche stated that an earlier experiment with Chinese labour had failed as the men were from the Prince of Wales Island, which he described as the Botany Bay of the East, where they had acquired bad habits. De Bussche who had served in Java earlier said the Chinese there were more industrious than the Javanese, and even the Dutch. "Mynheer was cooped up in his house, dressed in a loose night-gown, smoking his pipe or dozing over it. The Javan lay stretched under a shady veranda on a mat fast asleep, but the Chinese were hard at work in the smith's or carpenter's work sheds" [13] Despite De Bussche's enthusiasm his proposals were rejected by Brownrigg's successor, Sir Edward Barnes (1824-1831) on the grounds that an influx of Chinese would only result in an increase in the population.[14]

Among prominent Britons who favoured the import of Chinese labour after coffee had become the staple product were Sir Samuel Baker, and Lt. Col. James Campbell. Sir Samuel felt that if Chinese were imported there would be an increase in rice production and revenue. Of the "industrious" Chinese he wrote — "Show them a never failing supply of water and land of unlimited extent to be had on easy terms and the country would soon resume to its original prosperity." [15]

Lt. Col. James Campbell who was Commandant of the 48th and 50th Regiments felt that many parts of Ceylon were suitable for the growth of tea and "with the aid, in the first instance; of a few Chinese to instruct the settlers and natives in the process pursued in its preparation for the market, there can be no doubt that those Europeans who may attempt its cultivation will be successful," he wrote.[16]

One European who did attempt tea cultivation at this stage was the German, Maurice Worms, who with his brother Gabriel, had formed the Eastern Produce and Estates Co. Ltd. Worms introduced the China tea plant to Ceylon, and also got down a Chinese teamaker, but the cost of the tea produced was £5 per pound.[17] Tea could not have been marketed at this price and the Worms brothers abandoned the idea.

The fact that an attempt had been made at manufacturing tea was communicated to the Colonial Office by Sir Emerson-Tennent, Colonial Secretary in his capacity as acting Governor but Tennent's despatch indicates that it was the cost of obtaining Chinese labour rather than the high price at which the tea had been produced that would be a stumbling block. On 10 May 1847 Tennent reported that tea had been grown by Messrs Worms "the most enterprising planters in the Island at their estate in Pusilava" (Pusselawela). Tennent stated that the climate at 3,000 feet above sea level was well

adapted for the tea plant "but the very great difference between the price of labour in Ceylon and China will, I fear, prevent its profitable cultivation.[18]

Tennent was acting as Governor until the arrival of Lord Torrington (1847-1850) and Torrington arrived with instructions to investigate the possibilities of importing Chinese labour not only for work on the plantations, but also for projects in the Northern Province which at that stage included the existing North Western and North Central Provinces which were rice growing areas. It so happened that soon after Torrington's arrival there was a surplus of labour in the Island and Torrington had to find relief work for idle and starving displaced coffee workers. His compassion only earned him a rebuke from the Colonial Office which felt that the planters, and not the Government, should have provided relief to the surplus coffee labour. Despite the presence of excess labour Torrington did however carry out his instructions to ascertain the prospects of obtaining Chinese labour and corresponded with the authorities in Hongkong.[19]

In a despatch to Earl Grey, Torrington cited the views of Johnson, Secretary in the Foreign Department at Hongkong who, he said, possessed "a perfect knowledge of Ceylon as well as of the Chinese labourer." It was Johnson's view that two Chinese required as much food as three Malabars, and also that the Chinese required certain "luxuries" which the Malabars could do without. Johnson had also stated that the Chinese would have to be transported to Ceylon at the expense of the Government, or the planters, whereas the South Indian workers came on their own. Another problem which Johnson mentioned was that it would be impossible to induce the wives and children of the workers to go to distant Ceylon.[20] According to C. R. Boxer the large Chinese communities which developed in places ruled by the Dutch in Indonesia were "procreated by the marriage (or concubinage) of Chinese men with Indonesian women, since very few Chinese women ever left the Middle Flowery Kingdom."[21]

Proposals for the import of Chinese labour continued well into the fifties and sixties both officially, and unofficially. In 1852, C. R. Rigg suggested the import of Chinese not merely as plantation labour but as colonists. Rigg felt that Sinhalese women would marry Chinese who would be able to "keep them in slothful indolence and comfort" and that the Chinese would thus become "eligible matches for the young girls on the neighbouring villages." He felt that with the Chinese inter-marrying into Sinhalese families they would establish permanent links in the country. Rigg stated that the Chinese had much greater physical strength than the Sinhalese and the Indians, and they were constitutionally better adapted for work in hot climates than the Europeans.[22]

In 1855 there was an exceptionally good crop of coffee and an even better crop was expected the following year. It was feared in some quarters that the country would experience a shortage of workers and artisans and at a discussion on the subject at the Provincial Road Committee in Kandy it was decided to request the Government to import Chinese as carpenters, masons, and blacksmiths.[23] The Committee's request was conveyed to the Government through E. Rawdon Power, the Government Agent of the Central Province, and although nothing came of it, Power continued to urge the import of Chinese labour through the newspapers.

In 1860 the **Examiner** reported that the first ship taking Chinese labour to the West Indies had left a Chinese port and it raised the question of the import of Chinese

labour to supplement the workforces from South India. The newspaper stated that the planters in the West Indies seemed to be particularly successful in obtaining their requirements of labour. "India or China is all the same to them and they compete successfully with colonies closer to the source of supply," the paper stated.[24] The newspaper published a letter from Rawdon Power who wrote that he had consulted various persons all of whom were in favour of the import of Chinese labour as had been done in Jamaica, Trinidad, and Demerera. "A Chinese would, if efficiently and judiciously superintended, do the work of two or three Tamil labourers," he wrote.[25] The **Examiner** also reproduced statistics from the **China Mail** about the number of Chinese workers or settlers in a number of countries as follows :

Borneo . . .	350,000
Java	125,000
Singapore . . .	50,000
Malaca	30,000
Siam	50,000
India	5,000
Australia . . .	70,000
California . . .	50,000

[26]

Early in 1861 there were again fears of a possible shortage of workers and this time possible remedial action was discussed by the Immigrant Labour Commission which decided to request the Government to investigate the prospects of obtaining Chinese labour and also to obtain the prevailing Table of Wages from the authorities in Hongkong. The minutes of a subsequent meeting of the Commission show that correspondence did take place on the subject between officials in Colombo and Hongkong but the contents of the letters were not discussed at meetings of the Commission.[27]

The import of Chinese labour was discussed at several meetings of the Planters' Association in 1863 and 1864. At a meeting on 25 May 1863, Capt. Henry Byrde proposed that an inquiry be instituted into the feasibility of importing Chinese workers as this had been done successfully in other countries and could be done in Ceylon too. C. S. Hay, who said he had experience of Chinese labour in Australia, opposed the proposal, but H. Brown said as the Government proposed to spend £ 20 per head in importing Sikhs from the Punjab he saw no reason why it could not import Chinese workers where the cost would be only £ 6 per head. Byrde's resolution was carried and the matter was discussed again at a meeting in September. At this meeting D. Webster said that a few Chinese on every estate would be of great assistance in the performance of contract work. Brown said the Chinese were men of the plough and the hammer and would not object to contract work. He again drew attention to the proposal to import Sikhs at a cost of £ 30,000 and said he saw no reason why the Government could not spend a few thousand pounds on the import of "real instead of fancy labour." Meanwhile William Leake, the Secretary of the P. A., had written to the Colonial Secretary stating that as both planters and other employers were experiencing a shortage of labour the Government should consult the authorities in Hongkong about the prospects of obtaining Chinese labour. E. S. Templer, Assistant Colonial Secretary, replied that at that stage the Government was against the idea. Templer stated that the Governor had earlier

considered the matter favourably on the basis of a report from Thomas Rust who had visited China but subsequently the Commissioner of Roads and Civil Engineer had advised against the proposal.

Rust in his report had stated that the Chinese were strong and muscular and would emigrate to Ceylon on lower rates of wages than they expected in Australia. He said the Chinese lived on the same rice diet as the Indians and the Sinhalese and as there were many of them in a state of destitution in China they would be willing to emigrate to Ceylon. The Commissioner of Roads and Civil Engineer at the time, Major Thomas Skinner, took up the position that as the first batch of 300 recruits from the Punjab were within sight of Ceylon's shores the Government should pause before it embarked on any similar undertaking. Skinner also stated that the import of Chinese workers would cause discontent among the Indians as it would be difficult to convince them that "the Chinaman did more work than they". Skinner advised that if Chinese labourers were ever to be brought to Ceylon they should be employed only in the Eastern Province "so as to keep the higher wages as distant as possible from those paid in the other provinces."

The Sikhs who were imported by the Government proved disappointing. At a meeting of the P.A., Nicol described them as "a worthless lot" who were roaming the streets of Kandy "in droves begging for six pences and cigars. Our lowest caste cooly would have scorned to do it," he said.[28]

Meanwhile **The Times of Ceylon** also opposed the import of Chinese labour, except possibly as artificers, as any number of workers could be obtained from South India. **The Times** later referred to reports in the Bombay **Saturday Review** that there had been frequent brawls among Chinese workers who belonged to different gangs. "How far their capacity as labourers has been tested we do not know, but it is evident that any country importing this description of labourers must be prepared to strengthen its Police force to a considerable extent," **The Times** stated.[29]

The docility of the South Indian workers, as compared with the Chinese, was undoubtedly a factor in the decision of the coffee planters to retain the workers they had without experimenting with Chinese labour. K. S. Sandhu has stated that amenability to discipline was one of the main reasons why employers preferred South Indians to Chinese who were often aggressive and turbulent.[30] Y. S. Menon stated that as the children of Indian workers grew up they became even more servile and docile than their parents. "Long years of economic and social subordination have left indelible marks of servility in their minds," states Menon.[31]

In the 1860's and 1870's Chinese prisoners in the Opium wars were sent to two camps in the Nilgiris district and many of them were later employed in coffee plantations. K. J. Tanna cites a local legend that it was these ex-prisoners who provided coffee planters with the know-how for tea growing, for in the Nilgiris hills — as in Ceylon — coffee cultivation gave way to tea.[32]

CHAPTER FOUR

PUSH AND PULL FACTORS.

Why Millions Of Indians Came To Ceylon.

The coffee planters did not have to "go to the moon" (as Trinidad's Prime Minister, Eric Williams, said) for their labour. India's teeming millions were just a boat ride away from the northern coast of Ceylon and so once the planters had convinced themselves that the native Sinhalese were incorrigibly lazy this crude generalization became a licence to import South Indian serfs.

The South Indians themselves would not have come, as Amitra Dutta has shown, if they enjoyed a reasonable standard of living. It was "pressure of population on one hand, and (by) the extinction of village industries," that propelled the Indians to Ceylon.(1)

The population pressure arose from the fact that the British had created conditions of peace among previously warring peoples and this pressure was intensified by the distress in the Indian weaving industry which could not compete with machine — produced cotton goods from Britain.(2) The extent of intensity of population pressure as a driving force is seen in the fact that while there were 240 persons per square mile at Tinnevely, Madura, and Tanjore from where the migrants came, the ratio in Ceylon was 70 persons per square mile.(3)

Economic distress constituted the "push" factor with landlessness, unemployment, and famines being the chief causes but even domestic unhappiness was sometimes a compelling reason for emigration.(4)

Val. C. Prinsep writing over a century ago described Madras as "famine country," and recorded a conversation with a military officer who told him — "The place was quite stinking with the smell of dead people who lay along the roadside. I do not know what we should have done without the dogs and the vultures." (5) In times of famine South Indians mortgaged or sold not only their land but even gold and cattle. When there was nothing left to mortgage or sell they left the district in search of employment and food with substantial numbers going to Ceylon.(6) One of the worst famines in India in the last century was that which prevailed in 1876 which affected an area of about 200,000 square miles, and with about one third of the deaths being in the Madras district. The population which had been increasing at about 500,000 annually showed no increase for the decennium ending 1881.(7) In 1901 the Famine Commission estimated that 19 million Indians had died in famines in the last century.(8)

Landlessness, and caste, with the two often going together were among other "push" factors. Emigration with the prospect of savings while abroad held out the prospect of an improved economic and social status on return. Even those who did not belong to "low" castes calculated that by working abroad for three to five years they could save sufficient money to purchase land or property on their return to India.(9) A

survey carried out by Gilbert Slater, Professor of Economics at Madras University, showed that emigration to Ceylon was "one way of escape" from economic difficulties such as indebtedness to landlords. Slater observed that those who had been to Ceylon were generally well off and had been able to purchase land on their return.[10] Not all emigrants who did well in Ceylon returned to South India. Some did not return because caste differences were less strictly observed in Ceylon than in South India. Carpen, a kangani, whose autobiography was recorded by a planter was such a case. He stated that if he returned to South India — "I will have to live outside the walls and I am not respected on account of my caste. Here (in Ceylon) even Chetties (South Indian money lenders) will take meals in my house and I am a man of position, respected alike by Dorais (masters) and natives." [11] Carpen's autobiography was recorded after he had spent many years in Ceylon during which he amassed considerable wealth.

"Pull" factors worked in conjunction with the "push' factors. The Kanganis depicted Ceylon as an El Dorado. To South Indian peasants living in poverty the lavish promises of the recruiters and the glowing pictures they painted of life in Ceylon provided the "pull." Saha says "Emigration was liberty to them from a life of incessant toil and exploitation." And if some hesitated, their doubts were dissolved when they saw the "comparatively large fortunes" brought by returning migrants.[12]

The physical charms of Ceylon to the intending migrant were quite colourfully expressed by Major Thomas Skinner, the Commissioner of Roads, in a letter to Governor Sir Stewart Mackenzie (1837 to 1841) in which he wrote;

> Who can view this exquisite scenery, enjoy this perfect climate (at present the thermometer is between 67 degrees and 68 degrees) without feeling that it would be conferring a blessing on humanity to be the means of removing some 20,000 of the panting, half-famished creatures from the burning, sandy plains of Southern India to such (comparative) paradise, benefiting not only them, the Colony, the individual by means of whose capital they would be brought here, but also our own native Singhalese people inhabiting the margin of this wilderness, living as they are now like monkeys, for safety compelled to hide in places scarcely accessible to man, to render their dwelling inaccessible to elephants.[13]

W.C. Twynam, the Government Agent at Jaffna, in the Northern Province, who would have spoken to many of the immigrants stated that the availability of food in Ceylon was one of its attractive features. He said they regarded Ceylon as "a land of plenty" and many had heard of the palmyrah fruit while in South India.[14] Twynam identified himself with the people of Jaffna where he lived for about fifty years (and died in 1921) so he could not perhaps resist the temptation to extol the virtues of the palmyrah grown in the north but as far as food goes it was the assurance of regular meals of rice that lured many South Indians to Ceylon.

A fortunate coincidence of timing generated the flow of workers from South India to Ceylon at least in the early stages. The demand for labour on the coffee estates was largely seasonal and was at its highest during the plucking season from August to November. These months coincided with the slack season in the grain fields of South India which enabled workers to come to Ceylon when demand and wages were good, and then return to South India at harvest time.[15]

The earliest emigration to Ceylon took place at a time when the authorities in Britain and India, as well as the lobby against slavery in the United Kingdom, were becoming alarmed by reports of suffering and distress among Indian workers who had gone abroad. There were meetings not only at Exeter Hall in London, but also in Calcutta, where Young, the Sheriff of Calcutta, presided over a meeting which demanded an inquiry into reports of ill treatment of Indian workers at Mauritius and Demerera. In Britain the Aborigine Protection Society was formed in 1837 and the British and Foreign Anti Slavery Society in 1839. Lord Glenelg the Colonial Secretary at the time was an Evangelical and so was the powerful Permanent Under-Secretary, James Stephen, who virtually ran the show. In 1837 the Government of India imposed curbs on the export of labour by stipulating that Indians could not be recruited for work abroad except on contracts of service for a period of five years. In July 1838 the Government ordered the authorities at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras not to permit any ship to take workers to the West Indies, and in November in the same year the prohibition was extended to other colonies including Ceylon.(16)

The Indian Act, No. 14 of 1839 which prohibited the employment of Indians abroad was however not enforced as far as Ceylon was concerned. While there had been a trickle of workers to Ceylon from 1837, the year 1839 in which 2,432 persons arrived is regarded by Kondappi as the year in which "systematic recruitment" began.(17) William Digby also regards 1839 as the year in which emigration to Ceylon became "certain and regular."(18) The trickle soon became a steady stream and as early as 1841 there was a surplus of labour with the **Observer** reporting that there were "shoals" of labourers in Kandy. The **Observer** stated that some had come voluntarily while others had been brought down by planters. The paper stated the surplus of workers had been aggravated by the prevailing wet weather which had made many estates reduce their staff.(19)

The first organised body to take up the question of the labour supply with the Government was the Ceylon Agricultural Society which had been formed in 1842 with Philip Anstruther the Colonial Secretary, as its President. Anstruther who was Colonial Secretary from 1830 to 1845 had, as seen earlier, a strong vested interest in the coffee industry in which he owned 3,973 acres of cultivated land. Under Sir Stewart Mackenzie, Governor from 1837 to 1841, and again under Governor Sir Colin Campbell (1841 to 1847) it was Anstruther who was the effective ruler of Ceylon, according to K.M.de Silva.

The Agricultural Society appointed a committee to report on the labour supply and this committee recommended that inducements should be offered to workers to come to Ceylon. Members of the committee did not agree on the causes of shortages of labour. Some said it was due to sickness caused by heavy rains, while others felt it was due to panic. The committee did not mention the cause of the panic which, as de Silva, suggests, must have been an outbreak of cholera. Although Anstruther favoured State- assisted emigration the authorities in Britain felt that Ceylon's case was quite unlike that of emigration to Mauritius, or the West Indies, and rather resembled the case of Irish agricultural labourers seeking employment in England.(20)

The supply of labour in the forties generally remained satisfactory. In 1843 Campbell told the Colonial Office that the annual inflow was about 30,000.(21) The actual figure for 1843 was 31,201. In 1844 there was a sharp increase to 71,173 but in 1845 the

figure dropped to 67,278.[22] In 1846 and 1847 there were shortages of labour in some areas which were due to the fact that the area under coffee production had doubled between 1845 and 1847 from 26,429 acres to 52,722 acres.

Although the Planters' Association had still not come into existence at that stage a number of planters held a meeting at Kandy on 9 June 1846, and formulated a memorial to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in which they accused the Ceylon Government of neglecting those who had arrived, and also of not ensuring a regular supply of labour. 1846 was a bad year in which only 34,971 workers arrived against the figure of 67,278 in the preceding year. Governor Campbell was criticised by the planters, the newspapers, and in the Legislative Council where the unofficial members went to the extent of drafting a Bill which made provision for the Government to sponsor and subsidize emigration even though they had no powers at that stage to introduce legislation. The Government rejected both the Bill and the suggestions in it, and Campbell wisely left the defence of the administration in the capable hands of the Colonial Secretary, Sir James Emerson-Tennent.[23]

The controversy over the Government's alleged neglect of the labour supply brought into focus the fact that workers were coming to Ceylon contrary to the provisions of the Indian Act No. 14 of 1839. Ceylon's case for permitting entry was argued by Tennent who convinced the Indian authorities of the advantages of employment in Ceylon to the workers who were coming over. He was later to accuse the planters of callousness in their treatment of the workers, but in his negotiations with the Indian Government Tennent described the planters as enlightened and benevolent.The Indian Government did not raise "awkward questions", and Ceylon was added to the list of countries to which workers could be sent provided Ceylon was not an **entrepot** for the emigration of Indians.[24] While it is factually correct that Ceylon was never an **entrepot** the fact that there been some attempts at making it "a half way house for the supply of coolies to Mauritius" was later revealed by A.M. Ferguson. According to Ferguson the **Nimbus** had come to Ceylon in 1838, and the **Porcupine** in 1839, with the purpose of obtaining workers for Mauritius but the Government prevented such recruitment.[25]

Lord Torrington (1847 to 1850) who had succeeded Governor Campbell assured the Indian Government that steps would be taken to prevent Ceylon from becoming an **entrepot.** In an address to the Legislative Council Torrington stated that in the past thousands of Indians had come over "of their own choice, without the authorization, and in some degree in opposition to the regulations of the Indian Government" but action was being taken to put the whole question on "a wholesome and satisfactory footing". He said the Government intended to introduce "complete and systematic legislation upon the general question of cooly immigration."[26]

The Indian Act No. 43 of 1847 which legalised emigration to Ceylon was not to come into force until the Governor-General in Council certified that the Legislature in Ceylon had made provision for the protection of immigrants. On 5 November 1847 the Indian Government received the Ceylon Ordinance No. 3 of 1847 which contained provisions prohibiting the employment of Indians in Ceylon for work in other countries or even from their leaving on their own for employment in any other country.[27]

While the decks had been cleared for emigration a new problem arose with the disturbances of "Rebellion" in 1848. Planters expressed fears that those in the Island would leave, and those intending to come from India would not do so. The authorities in Madras were asked to assure prospective migrants that peaceful conditions prevailed in Ceylon and officials at landing points and along the routes to the estates were asked to assure workers about conditions of normalcy. Torrington in a despatch to the Colonial Office stated that the workers had behaved with courage and had not abandoned their masters or posts.[28]

It was during the anxious times in 1848 that planters began to regularly employ kanganis to go to South India and bring labour. It is commonly believed that planters paid kanganis advances which became known as "coast advances" from the earliest times but there is plenty of evidence that the coast advance system was not a feature of the early years of the coffee industry.

According to William Sabonadiere coast advances were neither sought, nor paid, in the early days of coffee planting. The kanganis brought workers with their own money, or with money borrowed from the Chetties, the South Indian community of money lenders. Sabonadiere wrote that he first heard of coast advances during the troubles of 1848 when planters felt that workers would be scared to come over unless some financial inducement was held out. He said that as the number of estates increased, and the demand for labour intensified, the payment of coast advances became essential to ensure labour.[29]

Sabonadiere's statements are borne out by other pioneer planters. P.D. Millie wrote about the early days in his graphic and humourous style.

> One might meet a solitary planter, or perhaps two or three in company, wending their way down the Atabage Pass, clothed in leech gaiters and a hunting cap, with a white cover hanging down the back of the neck, going to Kandy for coolies. "Hallo Jones, where are you off to now ? Is it for money or for coolies ?" for it must be one or the other. We never knew where we might find coolies; it might be within a few miles of the estate, or within a few hundred.

On one occasion Millie prepared for a recruiting mission on the basis that it might last months but had barely left his estate when he came upon gangs of 50 to 60 workers each, and was back on his estate the same evening with all the labour he required. Millie states that on encountering gangs on the road it was a good sign if they stopped to discuss matters. If they just marched on the chances were that they had been paid for employment on an estate and in such cases they generally shouted out the name of the estate to which they were proceeding.

The towns in which labour could be found were Gampola and Kandy. In Gampola they occupied waste land or outer streets, while in Kandy there were "lines" constructed out of mud and wattle between the Kandy lake and Bogambara which then housed a coffee mill and on which the Kandy prison was subsequently built.

Millie states that as the demand for labour increased some superintendents of estates came down to Colombo from where they left for the South Indian coast and then went into the villages for direct recruitment. In such cases they generally left "a supply of money for the benefit of the relations" of those who agreed to make the trip to Ceylon.

Millie says that with planters going to the South Indian villages the "kanganis and coolies now began to open their eyes; they must be people of very great importance and consequence that the "**durais**" (masters) took all the trouble and were at all the expense in coming so far to visit them." Millie says that later planters paid kanganis to go in their place and gave them various sums of money for the purpose. This was "the thin edge of the wedge," says Millie. Initially the payments were small and ranged from £ 3 to £ 10, and the kangani also left behind a gang of workers as security for his return. At that stage no accounts were kept but the kangani generally paid up on the first or second pay day. Sometimes when a kangani went off with an advance he would arrange with the gang he left behind to pay the advance out of their wages even before he returned with the workers for whom he had been paid an advance. Generally however the advance was paid after the second pay day as the money received in the first was used to make purchases of requirements in Ceylon.(30)

R.B. Tytler who often claimed to be the first planter to obtain Indian labour said that they came to him. In a letter to a newspaper in March 1860 Tytler wrote "I was the first planter, I believe, to employ Malabars from the coast coming on their own account to seek work. Some of them are (still) now with me."(31) In a letter to another newspaper, Tytler wrote of the changes in the pattern of availability of workers. In 1871 Tytler wrote that in the earliest days would-be workers went from estate to estate in search of employment. As the demand grew however the kanganis began to meet workers at some point on their trek to the estates and these places were generally Kurunegala or Matale. As competition developed between the kanganis to recruit workers on behalf of their masters, the planters began to give the kanganis sums of money to go to South India and recruit the workers in their home villages.(32) K.M. De Silva states that by an ingenious system of estate accounting the expense of engaging the workers was shifted to them. The coast advance was to enable the kangani to meet the expenses of recruitment; food along the journey to Ceylon, etc. Invariably the kangani inflated the amount of money he had spent when he rendered accounts on his return. The total cost of the operation was divided by the planter among the number of workers who had been brought to the estate and was entered as a "Debt account" against each of the individuals involved. If a worker left an estate before his "Debt account" had been liquidated it was divided among other workers who had come with him. Planters sometimes paid kanganis a bonus for the workers they had brought but this was generally only after the men had worked for at least six months or a year. The system, says De Silva, became "deplorably corrupt". The kanganis spent only a fraction of what they received and tried to keep the bulk of it for themselves. It was estimated that the kangani often spent only about one third of the money he received. Expenses could be kept low if the journey, especially the trek from the north-western coast to the estates, could be accomplished as quickly as possible, and this resulted in workers who fell sick being left behind. Generally the kangani brought with him slightly more than the number required, and these excess workers enabled the kangani to fulfil the quota expected of him even if some fell sick and had to be abandoned on the way. If the kangani found himself with an excess of workers he tried to find employment for them in the area but in any case those who did not receive jobs had no remedy against the kangani.(33) According to the centenary history of the Planters' Association, Capt. Henry Bird (later Byrde) was the first to send a recruiter to South

India. According to this version, Bird asked the Conductor of his estate to obtain some workers. The Conductor went to Trincomalee where he asked a Tamil friend to go to South India and obtain some workers. This friend returned with 14 labourers. "This is the first recorded case of a "recruiter" being sent from Ceylon to the "Coast" to recruit labour states the P.A. history.[34] In the days when groups of workers came to Ceylon on their own, the kangani was a democratically elected leader chosen by the emigrants from among themselves to act as their leader in sorting out problems, and in acting as their spokesman in the matter of employment. He was probably one of the elder members of the group and in the early years it seems likely that those who set out for Ceylon were related to each other, and, or, were close neighbours. In return for his services the kangani received a portion of the wages of each of the workers, and on small estates the kangani became a worker himself, in addition to his supervisory duties. On the large estates there was a head kangani with a number of **sillara** (or sub) kanganis working under him.[35] There was a gradual increase in the cost of recruitment. Tytler wrote that initially "a couple of rupees or less would suffice for every recruit but as the years rolled on the amount of the advance became gradually heavier until at this date (1871) perhaps few come in under rupees ten per head." [36] As the number of estates increased, so did the competition for labour, and the head kanganis began to employ the sub-kanganis to recruit labour. According to Sabonadiere, these sub-kanganis often defrauded the head kangani. According to a report submitted to the P.A. by Sabonadiere, the head kangani had to make good the sums defrauded by the sub kanganis as the estate management had paid the head kangani for the workers it needed, and he was thus "obliged to make good the money." [37]

While the planters were always griping and grousing about labour shortages, or likely shortages, only one Governor, Sir Henry Ward (1855 to 1860) tried to place the recruitment of labour for the Island on an organised basis, and this was probably due to the fact that a large supply of labour was required not only for the coffee estates, but also for public works such as the railway, and roads. Ward was determined to succeed where his predecessors had failed in introducing railway communications in Ceylon, and it was during his period that a contract was signed with Faviele, a London firm, for the construction of the Colombo-Kandy railway. Ward quite justifiably argued that among other benefits, the railway link was also" an absolute imperative necessity" for the colony as it would otherwise "cease to exist as a coffee producing colony" owing to competition from Brazil and Java.[38]

In a despatch to the Colonial Office, Ward stated that while the planters welcomed the railway they feared that workers whose recruitment they had arranged would join the railway construction works, and that they would then be compelled to pay higher wages to retain their labour. Ward stated that sufficient labour would be available for both the railway and the coffee industry without any increase in wages if steps were taken in concurrence with the Indian Government for the recruitment of workers from the interior districts of South India at regular intervals. For this purpose he advocated the establishment of a Coast Agency which would maintain depots at convenient points. He suggested a capitation tax of 3 shillings per head which would bring in £ 18,000, if 120,000 workers arrived. He said he had sounded the Planters' Association and although there had been much "warm language" the planters were basically in agreement with his

proposals.[39] In another despatch he allayed Colonial Office fears that a new tax could prove unpopular (as in 1848) by stating that the capitation tax would be borne entirely by employers of labour, and not by the natives except for one or two Sinhalese, such as Charles Henry de Soysa, who were wealthy coffee planters. He stated the employers he had in mind were the coffee planters; the railway works; and other Government departments which utilised the South Indian labour. He said he had held further discussions with the planters on an Immigration Commission which would oversee the inflow of Indian workers. "There is no question on which the mind of the colony has been brought more largely to bear — none certainly in which discussion has led to greater unanimity" he wrote, in what was soon to prove a very optimistic assessment.[40]

The Ordinances No. 13 of 1858, and No 15 of 1859, aimed at the establishment of an Agency on the lines of the Mauritius Agency but Ward's scheme never really became effective largely through lack of financing as the planters objected to the capitation tax saying that only about one third of the labour arriving would be employed on the estates. Another method of computation based on the number of days worked by each labourer was considered but it was complicated and was never implemented. The 1858 Ordinance "for the regulation and promotion of immigrant labour" was amended by the 1859 Ordinance "to promote and regulate the employment of Indian labourers on lengthened terms of service." This, in effect, would have been the introduction of an indenture system as it provided that contracts of service had to be signed in the presence of an Indian official. The Ordinance provided for an Immigration Commission with an office consisting of four members in Colombo, and an Agent in South India, to supervise the flow of workers from South India to Colombo by steamer, instead of native craft across Palk Strait. Ward thereby hoped to eliminate the distress and mortality that arose in the long trek the workershad to make from landing points on the north-west coast to the estates. Unfortunately the introduction of the scheme coincided with a sharp drop in the number of workers seeking to emigrate to Ceylon due largely to improved economic conditions such as more facilities for agriculture, and the availability of employment on railway construction work in South India itself. Ward's biographer, S.V. Balasingham, states that the supply of labour fell by about one third in 1859. The Immigration Commissioners suggested that endeavours should be made to obtain labour from new sources such as the N. Circas but nothing came of the proposal. Early in 1860 Ward was appointed Governor of Madras. He left Ceylon on 30 June and would undoubtedly have continued in his efforts to facilitate the flow of workers from India to Ceylon if he had lived, but he contracted cholera shortly after his arrival in Madras and died on 2 August[41] Ward's successor, Sir Charles MacCarthy (1860-1863) was determined to build up funds for the railway and on immigration he reverted to the earlier policy of laissez faire where the planters were on their own.

Although periods of shortages of labour were few and far between, in the coffee period, the planters who had no way of knowing what the morrow would bring lived in nervous apprehension of shortages of labour. The likelihood that the crops would be good but that labour for plucking would be short, was a recurring nightmare in the lives of the coffee planters. "The scarcity of labour is our only fear," wrote William Sabonadiere. Sabonadiere felt there was no danger of over production as with increasing population the consuming countries would absorb not only any increase in Ceylon's output but even

increased outputs from other producing countries. Labour however was the problem in that there was never a season when everything went right. If the crop was better than expected then labour was short. If the crop did not come up to expectations then there was an excess of labour. Excessive rain or drought with their adverse effects on production were also worrying leaving the planter "anything but a contented man." (42)

"We are in a measure almost dependant on chance, or the caprice of the coolies as to when they will come, or whether they will come at all," wrote P.D. Millie in a letter to the Planters' Association.(43) Lieut. De Butt suggested that planters could avoid finding themselves short of labour by introducing a system of apprenticeship. He suggested that the period of apprenticeship during which a worker could not leave should be limited to two or three years to "avoid any tyranny or oppression." (44) A system of legal apprenticeship would have been impossible to enforce and was not tried.

"We've aye been provided for,
And sae will we yet"

Ferguson quoted these lines from a Scottish song in one of his periodic surveys of the inflow of labour and said he had little doubt "that the sentiment at least affords consolation to many a puzzled planter when driven almost to the extremity by the ever recurring fears of a short supply of labour." (45) To add to the planters worries there were often rapid changes in supply. In 1852 there was such a surplus of labour that the **Times of Ceylon** suggested that estate owners should hire boats to send the excess workers back to India: The suggestion was not acted on, and in 1853 there was a shortage.(46) On another occasion when there was a shortage of labour the **Times of Ceylon** urged planters to go beyond South India for their labour as these districts had "not yet contributed their quota of labour to the Island." It stated that all that was needed to tap these sources was to assure labour that "the means of reaching the coffee districts of Ceylon are abundant; that the time required for the journey is short, and the expense trifling." (47) From time to time there were efforts by planters both individually, and collectively, to establish an agency under European supervision in South India but none of these efforts was successful. In January 1856 Hugh McClenan of Kelvin Estate, Dolosbage, submitted a comprehensive scheme to the Planters' Association for such an agency and offered his own services to set up and manage the institution. McClenan suggested that an agent of the P.A. should be stationed at Mandapam in South India. Those who required workers were to inform the P.A. of their requirements and make the necessary payment to it. The P.A. would then notify the agent of the number of workers required and send him the necessary funds for recruitment, passage fare, etc. The P.A. did not accept McClenan's offer. In May 1864, Patrick Ryan of St. Clair Estate, Dimbulla, submitted a scheme for the establishment of a Ceylon Cooly Immigration Association. Ryan, like McClenan, worked out all the details of his scheme but this too was not accepted by the P.A.(48) Even as late as the 1860's individual planters went on recruiting trips to South India but were not always successful. The **Times of Ceylon** commented that they were strangers in the districts they visited, and the journeys proved to be "little more than pleasure trips as far as results are concerned." (49) In 1864, W.A. Swan, a senior planter went to South India and on his return stated that not enough was being done to induce workers to come to Ceylon. He said he found that workers there wanted to come to Ceylon but were anxious to get information about the country before setting out.(50)

Although the P.A. did not take the initiative in formulating a scheme for immigration, in October 1865 it advised members to form an unofficial combine to resist the demands of the kanganis for higher advances. In a circular to members, William Leake, the Secretary of the P.A. stated that there had been several instances of kanganis demanding higher coast advances. "It is notorious" he wrote, "that of the sums advanced a very large portion never goes to the coast at all but are used by the kanganis for their own purpose." At a meeting at which Leake's circular was considered, members decided that the advance paid for labour should not exceed ten shillings per man, and that planters should also try to obtain security when they made advances. At this meeting W.D. Gibbon said the planters themselves through "insane competition" had created the situation in which kanganis were claiming more money than in the past. He said there were some honest kanganis but in their dealings with the kanganis the planters had to "stump up their money on the same terms with the scoundrels who use their advances on their paddy fields, in loans to Raman Chetty, or marrying, or giving in marriages." (51)

The sixties, as seen earlier, were a period in which economic conditions improved in the districts from which workers came to Ceylon, but Ceylon had by then become known as a country in which employment opportunities existed. There were occasional shortages but Ferguson assured the planters that India's "teeming millions" could provide their requirements, as well as those of the Railways. "A hundred or a couple of hundreds of thousands might be expected to come to us annually without the same number going back." (52)

Kanganis who defaulted continued to be a problem and in 1871 R.B. Tytler outlined a scheme by which planters could appoint an Agent in South India to prosecute defaulting kanganis or workers. He said the salary of an Agent would be £ 500 annually while another £ 250 would be required for expenses such as travelling. He stated that if there were 150 subscribers to this scheme each would only have to pay £ 5, and even this small amount would be halved if they could find 300 subscribers. "I would gladly give £ 10 a year in order to have some person competent to act for me promptly, of whose services I could authoritatively avail myself when a case occurred," he wrote.(53) The **Times of Ceylon** which publicised Tytler's scheme said the idea of an Agent had been tried out unsuccessfully in 1858 when it met with very little support. The paper doubted whether 200 to 300 planters would subscribe to make such a scheme viable.(54)

Tytler canvassed his scheme in the P.A. and in his memorandum he drew some interesting analogies of the push and pull factors in the supply of labour. "The inflowing stream of labour" he wrote, "is ruled by the same law which guides an aerial, or a fluvial current; it is drawn, not driven; it is the inducements they have in coming to Ceylon to earn rupees, much more than pressure of want, which generally brings them over." The P.A. submitted Tytler's scheme to Charles Ambrose Lorenz, the most famous Ceylonese lawyer of the time, for his advice. Lorenz stated that if an offender was to be tried in India, then the prosecutor and witnesses would have to go from Ceylon. He said India would not agree to undertake to trace defaulting kanganis and deport them to Ceylon, and planters would only be in a position to prosecute defaulters if they returned to Ceylon, and could be traced.(55) As planters continued to bemoan their dependance on the kanganis R.J. Corbet, a planter, said the experience was humiliating and degrading to the English character. He said such dependance was not "compatible with the high

character that an Englishman should bear, that we should go on as we are doing, begging, borrowing, hiring, crimping coolies from each other, according to our respective notions of right or wrong, stooping to acts we ought to be ashamed of ..." [56]

With Tytler's scheme also proving abortive, Sabonadiere wrote directly to Governor Sir William Gregory (1872 to 1877) and asked him to communicate with the Madras authorities about the introduction of an Extradition Treaty by which defaulting kanganis could be sent to Ceylon for trial. The Colonial Secretary replied, on behalf of the Governor, that the Indian Penal Code permitted extradition only in cases of heinous offences. "It is true," he stated, "that the Governor of Ceylon may make a special application for the execution of a warrant in India but it can only be done in an exceptional case when some offence of great gravity can be shown. His Excellency thinks that there is no use in applying to the Government in Madras to legislate on the subject as it is well known they would not accede to the application." [57]

While Gregory declined to correspond with the Madras Government on the question of extradition, he had a great deal of correspondence with the Colonial Office in London on the problems of the planters, and those of the industry in general.The Colonial Office suggested that a system of licences could be introduced and that the licences of defaulting kanganis could be cancelled.. The Colonial Office also suggested the introduction of a system of certificates that would contain particulars of the number of workers brought into the Island by each kangany, and the number of workers handed over finally to the estate management which had financed the recruitment.[58]

Gregory was in favour of the introduction of certificates but had doubts about a system of licences. He said certificates could be useful as the number of workers could be communicated to the Police, and medical officers on the route. He said a difficulty about a system of licences was that the kanganis were known only to the planters. In view of the large numbers of workers and kanganis arriving, it would be impossible for an Immigration Agent to be able to identify the holder of a licence, and it would be possible for kanganis to hand over their licences to others. "The kangany system is no doubt a bad one. There is hardly a planter in Ceylon who would not abolish it if he could. But it is now impossible to do so. It is the **custom** (Gregory's emphasis) and anyone connected with the East knows what a barrier that word is to any innovation however palpably beneficial," he wrote.

Gregory stated that the kangany system was also ingrained in the lives of the workers and whenever a kangany died those under him promptly chose someone among them as their kangani even if the planter asked them to work directly under him in which case they could earn more.[59] In another despatch Gregory opposed any restrictions on the influx of workers saying such action could have "disastrous consequences". He stated that there never really was an excess of workers because those who had too many loaned them to those who had too few, and in the slack seasons the workers joined in the works carried out by the Public Works Department. He said it would be extremely unfortunate if the word got around in South India that there were curbs or restrictions on employment in Ceylon.[60] Gregory informed the Colonial Office that some planters who were dissatisfied with the kangani system had obtained labour direct through some private agencies but that the men they had received were "of the most useless description and

not having any leader on hand to keep them in work, in many instances they ran away on being made to work." (61)

Towards the end of Gregory's term, famine conditions in Madras resulted in unprecedented numbers coming to Ceylon in search of employment, and there even were calls for a ban on immigration. It was left to Arthur Birch, Colonial Secretary, when acting as Governor, to remind both the planters and the Colonial Office that "Ceylon owes a debt to India for the development of her resources through the instrumentality of the Malabar coolie". Birch stated that apart from the question of humanity it would be unwise to do anything which could threaten the future supply of labour for the country's staple product.(62)

H. S. Saunders, Chairman of the Planters' Association, spoke of the difficulties planters were experiencing but he too took the view that curbs on immigration would not be in the long-term interests of the industry. He said conditions in South India were such that "sickness and famine stare men in the face; we hear of thousands of labourers congregated at Tuticorin to get across to Ceylon, spending the last rupee in their possession..." He said that while it would be in Ceylon's immediate interest to refuse them entry as most of them were "a sickly and useless lot", it was necessary for "Ceylon to maintain her character for being the best employer of labour the Tamil knows", and he added that both India and Ceylon owed allegiance to Her Majesty's Government.(63)

After the arrival of Sir James Longden (1877 to 1883) a deputation from the Planters' Association met him and assured him that the planters were doing their best to retain the surplus labour. A member of the deputation told the Governor that he had paid off about 200 workers but only three had left. The planters said they were retaining their surplus workers by employing them in tasks such as manuring and other maintenance work. Longden agreed with the planters that the Government could ease the situation by employing much of the surplus labour on the railway connexion between Kandy and Matale.(64)

The number of South Indians who came to Ceylon reached a peak in 1876 when there were 164,797 arrivals, and this figure rose even higher to 167,196 in 1877. However the 1877 record was due to higher numbers of women and children arriving. The number of men who arrived dropped from 121,743 in 1876 to 106,796 in 1877. On the other hand the number of women who arrived increased from 28,670 in 1876 to 41,786 in 1877, while the number of children increased from 14,385 in 1876 to 18,614 in 1877.(65) Many of those who failed to find employment on the estates drifted to Colombo and a temporary almshouse was established at Dematagoda.(66)

Workers in employment on the estates responded to appeals for relief funds. According to Ferguson, estate workers subscribed freely to collections for the Madras Famine Fund at Colombo, Kandy and Matale. The coffee planters apart from contributing to the Famine Fund also maintained surplus staff on their estates.(67) In a letter which John Ferguson, Editor of the **Ceylon Observer** wrote to **The Times** (London) while a passenger of the SS **Chyebass**, he claimed that "as many as 400,000 South Indians (men, women and children) found their means of subsistence in the adjoining colony, at an expense to the Government and planters of Ceylon, nearly equal to the amount raised in England for the famine fund." (68)

In the late seventies the coffee industry was still enjoying its "Indian summer". By the eighties the coffee industry was in distress. "By the 1880's the idea that indiscriminate charity should be extended to the Indians coming over to Ceylon in times of famines gradually waned. To begin with, rural distress in Ceylon, especially after the collapse of the coffee industry, had become a disturbing phenomenon," writes L. A. Wickremeratne.[69] It was also in the eighties with the supply of labour becoming "superabundant" that the coffee planters at last had no fears of shortages of workers, or that the kanganis would deprive them of their advances.[70]

In the half century in which the coffee industry flourished, officials, planters, journalists and other writers constantly recorded the comings and the goings of the coffee workers and there is a mass of statistical material which is in contrast to the paucity of information about other aspects of the lives of the coffee workers. The wealth of statistical data is however of very limited value to a researcher seeking to interpret the statistics as inconsistencies and inaccuracies only bemuse and bewilder. Two of the most obvious shortcomings in these statistics in respect of Ceylon are that workers could arrive, or depart, wherever native craft were available, and even at the official ports of entry where heads were counted, no attempt was made to record the identities of those who came and went. Tinker under-estimates the situation when he writes that "It is difficult to quantify the movement to Ceylon and Malaya in which many labourers must have come and gone more than once." [71] Since the coffee industry lasted half a century it seems quite possible that the same individuals came and went dozens of times. It is even possible that some of those who first came to Ceylon in their teens in the 1840's returned to Ceylon in each of the succeeding decades.

One of the lowest estimates of the estate population in the last century is that of B.L. Panditaratne and S. Selvanayagam who, while cautioning that the available official statistics are "incomplete and unreliable," record that during the years 1843 to 1880 a total of 275,418 workers arrived and that 187,062 returned leaving 88,356 unaccounted for.[72] In contrast I.H. Vanden Driesen after citing statistics for the 1840's states that "The arrivals rose to 58,27 in 1855 and to around 100,000 by the end of the coffee era." [73] Roberts and Wickremaratne provide statistical guidelines with the warning that "The lines distinguishing annual migrant, a longer-spell migrant, and an immigrant are not easy to draw and when dealing with amorphous statistical data the task becomes impossible." Using statistics provided in Ferguson's **Directories** Roberts and Wickremeratne estimate that between 48,000 to 70,000 came to Ceylon annually in the period 1848 to 1872, while an average of 24,000 to 68,000 left Ceylon annually. They say these figures should be regarded as underestimates as workers arrived and left at points which were not under official surveillance.[74]

The first islandwide Census in Ceylon was held on the night of 26-27 March 1871, and it showed that the total population of all races on the coffee estates was 123,803. On 2 August 1871, the Registrar General wrote to the Planters' Association that after making reductions for the European residents, and servants of other races, the number of Tamil immigrants on the estates could be estimated at "over 120,000." The Registrar General also stated that the number counted did not include those on the North Road; those who may have been in some other part of the Island, and temporary absentees, as the Census had been held during what was regarded as the slack period on coffee estates.

The Planters' Association in its reply stated that one third should be added to those actually resident on the estates as this was about the average proportion of those who returned to India during the slack period. The P.A. stated that according to returns obtained from 325 estates the total number of workers employed on the basis of the check rolls was 39,609 in 1868, and 45,476 in 1869.[75] These figures were far below the Census figure of 120,000 to which one third had to be added according to the P.A. for absentees in India. Writing two years after the Census, A.M. Ferguson stated that at the end of 1871, when the crop season was at its height the number of workers was around 165,000 according to the Immigration Returns. He stated that this figure was low as the 1871-1872 crop was poor.[76] Ten years after the first official Census the Planters' Association estimated that between 1843 and 1880 "no less than 2,700,000 coolies have passed to Ceylon from Southern India".[77] This neat, round estimate, could well have been the closest to reality.

CHAPTER FIVE

DEATH STALKS THE SILVER STREAK.

Disasters At Sea.

William Digby, with his journalistic flair for a neat phrase, described the Palk Strait which separates India and Ceylon as "just a silver streak", but long before Digby, Pliny said the sea between South India and Ceylon was "full of shallows not more than six paces in depth, but in some channels so deep that no anchors touch the bottom." [1] The South Indian migrants to Ceylon did not of course have to face anything like the dangers and horrors of the Middle Passage that African slaves to America encountered, and which the surgeon, Alexander Falconbridge, said were beyond human imagination.[2] Nor was the mortality anything like the ten to 40% recorded in journeys across the Atlantic.[3] Overcrowding of migrant vessels was however a common factor. Col. Henry Steele Olcott, the American theosophist, noted that coffee workers were ferried across "lumped together - like a tin of worms for bait",[4] and there were at least two major disasters at sea in each of which the death toll was over one hundred while others may have gone unrecorded.

In the climate of **laissez faire** that prevailed, the transport of the workers from South India to Ceylon and back again was left very much to the parties concerned, but in the earliest years of the coffee industry there was some Government assistance by way of provision of boats and free passages. Bertram Bastiampillai states that the object of free passages was "to help persons too poor to pay anything, and to discourage extortionate rates being levied by private boat owners." The facility of free travel seems to have been terminated in 1844.[5] Thereafter fares ranged from six pence to nine pence and, in terms of Indian money, from eight to 12 annas or even a rupee.

Migrants walked from their villages to a point of departure on the South Indian coast and were then rowed across to Mannar, or some other place on the north-western or northern coast.

The first official action on the Indian side to regulate the flow of traffic seems to have been taken in 1847 when the Madras Government introduced regulations limiting the number of persons who could be conveyed in vessels plying between the two countries. These regulations applied only to vessels carrying passengers to Ceylon, and not to vessels plying from Ceylon to India. The first known major loss of life in a tragedy at sea in 1853 took place on a return journey. In a strange coincidence, a schooner called **Colombo** sank in a storm shortly after it had left Colombo with coffee workers, many of whom were leaving because of an outbreak of cholera. The vessel was reported to be carrying around 150 passengers of whom "at least" 100 died. The **Observer** correctly forecast that the disaster would lead to some form of enforcement of the Indian laws in Ceylon. After consultations between the Queen's Advocate, the Executive Council and the Governor an Ordinance against overcrowding was enacted and duly approved by the

Colonial Office. K. M. De Silva states that this Ordinance "constituted the total of (Governor) Anderson's efforts to solve the problems created by the immigration of Indian plantation labour to Ceylon." The Planters' Association which had come into existence in 1854 urged the Government to import labour but Anderson declined to do so even after pointed reminders that he had followed such a policy when he was Governor of Mauritius from where he came to Ceylon.[6]

It was Anderson's successor, Sir Henry Ward (1855 to 1860) who made a determined effort to place all aspects of migration from South India to Ceylon on a secure foundation with an infrastructure established by the Government, but with finance coming from the private sector as well. Early in Ward's term there were efforts by businessmen in Colombo and London to establish a shipping line.[7] The Ceylon Cooly Transport and Steam Navigation Company was formed in 1856 with a capital of £ 25,000 to be issued in shares of £ 10 and there was a good initial response in London.[8] On 19 November 1857 Ward told the Legislative Council that he proposed to give the Cooly Transport Co. an interest free loan of £ 10,000 from the Surplus Fund as a steady supply of labour was essential for the coffee industry as well as public works in Ceylon.

In his address to the Legislative Council Ward said it was no longer advisable to trust entirely to individual efforts. "I look upon the Cooly Company," he said, "as the bridge that is to connect us with the neighbouring continent — to obviate the difficulties of the route by Mannar, and to furnish any agencies that may hereafter be established with the means of pointing to certain places upon the Coast where, for a given price, and within a given time, all coolies willing to form engagements in the Island may be certain to find the means of conveyance."

Ward said he was aware that there would be objections to the Government entering into a partnership with a private company but all he proposed to do was to grant the company which already had 22,000 paid up shares an interest free loan of £ 10,000 for a period of five years. Thereafter the Council could decide on whether the loan should be paid up, or on any other course of action. The initial loan would however provide the company with timely aid for an enterprise which was in the public interest, and also in the interest of the planters who needed labour.[9] The Colonial Office approved of Ward's proposal but the company did not get far beyond the original flotation. Half of the capital was to have been raised in London and the other half in Ceylon. Although the response in London had been good, there was very little financial support in Ceylon, and the scheme fell through.[10]

Ward said the project "fell to the ground" owing to "the want of concert among the interested parties," and also because of "the positive refusal of the Planters' Association to provide any portion of the funds required for the Indian agencies."[11]

Ward received Colonial Office approval to spend half of the money that was to have been given on loan, on the purchase of a steamer **Manchester** for use on the Indo-Ceylon sea route and went ahead with his plans.[12] Even before Ordinance No 15 of 1858 had been approved by the Legislative Council he told the Colonial Office that there was general concurrence over the salient features of his scheme and expressed confidence that Ceylon would receive between 50,000 to 100,000 workers annually from South India.[13] On 8 December 1858 he told the Legislative Council that he would take

upon himself the responsibility of bringing the Ordinance into operation as any delay would negative the effectiveness of Government intervention.[14] The Board of Immigrant Commissioners was given wide powers but despite all its endeavours the number of workers from South India to Ceylon showed a steep drop from 96,062 in 1858 to 40,105 in 1859.[15] To complicate matters the **Manchester** proved a bad buy. Ward informed the Colonial Office that the steamer was "rotten and worthless." While its purchase had cost £ 5,000 the necessary repairs were estimated to cost £ 7,500. Ward said he therefore proposed to sell the ship for breaking up.[16]

Even if all Ward's plans had succeeded it seems unlikely that there would have been a sudden switch from the traditional route across Palk Strait and along the North Road to the estates. The **Times of Ceylon** stated that it had "been demonstrated that Malabar coolies do not prefer steamers to the ordinary passenger boats across the Straits of Mannar and the Great North Road has not any terrors for them, despite the length and terrors of the journey".[17] Towards the end of Ward's term, both the Government of Ceylon, and the Government of India, took action to prevent the overcrowding of vessels plying between the two countries. Ordinance No 1 of 1860 enacted by the Legislative Council stipulated that no vessel could carry passengers in a greater proportion than one passenger for every four tons of the burden of the vessel. It also provided that there should be six superficial feet for every passenger, and not less than five feet of space between decks. Overcrowding was to be punished with fines of £2 for each passenger in excess of the stipulated number.[18] Apart from the action against overcrowding, steps were also taken to ensure adequate food and water for passengers and to prevent them from being landed at places other than those at which they had contracted to disembark. According to Ferguson these measures resulted in a steady increase in arrivals in the sixties.[19] A legal difficulty arose in that the Indian Ordinance No 25 of 1859 was inoperative in Ceylon, while the Ceylon Ordinance No 1 of 1860 was inoperative in India but the difficulty was sorted out by the Madras Government enacting legislation on the same lines as the Ceylon Ordinance.[20]

Meanwhile the Board of Immigrant Commissioners which was functioning from Colombo had set about its tasks conscientiously and it performed some useful service in its short three year existence. In its first half-yearly report for 1859, the Board stated that while the majority of workers travelled from Paumben to Talaimannar as Paumben was closest to the places in which they lived, many of those who lived in Tinnevely and Madura were taking the sea route from Tuticorin to Colombo which was less fatiguing but more expensive.[21]

In June 1861 the Board made an offer of bounties to owners of private vessels who would bring workers to Ceylon at reduced fares. The bounties were one shilling per adult; 9 pence per youth over 3 feet, 3 inches in height; and six pence per youth under 3 feet, 3 inches in height. The offer of the bounties was advertised in the Ceylon newspapers as well as the **Cochin Courier** and the **Negapatnam Recorder**.[22] The Board made several recommendations for improvements along the North Road as this still proved to be the most popular route to the estates.[23]

Ward's successor, Sir Charles MacCarthy (1860 to 1863) felt that Ward's schemes were proving ineffective and he told the Colonial office that he was not prepared

to undertake expenditure "for a single class of the community however respectable and important that class may be." [24]

Ward's Ordinance No 10 of 1859 was replaced by Ordinance 12 of 1861 which among other things liquidated the Immigrant Labour Commission.[25] MacCarthy said he doubted whether a single additional labourer had been brought into the Island under the provisions of the 1859 Ordinance which had only burdened planting interests "with a heavy and augmented taxation without any corresponding results".[26]

On 27 April 1861 MacCarthy told the Legislative Council that the Government had undertaken the duties and liabilities of the Immigrant Labour Commissioners and intended to place immigration on a sound footing through Government vessels. He said Ordinance No 12 of 1859 had been approved by the Colonial Office and had also been acknowledged in the most gratifying terms by the Viceroy in Council in India.[27] MacCarthy said that in addition to the shipping service the Government also proposed to improve the line of communication between the coast and the interior for the safety and comfort of the workers "without imposing any additional burden of taxation on the interests most directly benefited by it." He said the scheme of transporting workers in Government vessels had "so far been successful." [28]MacCarthy made a personal inspection at Mannar where workers were being landed and reported to the Colonial Office that the Government vessels stationed there were bringing over workers "in good health and condition". He said the **Sarah Armitage** and the **Geraldina** were first rate vessels which were far superior to those used earlier. The **Audy Letchmey** was being fitted up to be of the same standard as the other two. The cost of the three vessels was only £ 2,352 and due to their superior facilities native vessels had been "driven out of business".[29] It was the **Audy Letchmy** that was soon to be involved in what was probably the biggest single disaster at sea involving the coffee workers.

At this stage the Madras and Colombo Steamship Company offered to establish a service for the conveyance of the estate workers. The **Times of Ceylon** welcoming the offer stated that a certain and regular service was a long-felt need. The paper said that it was surprising that no attempt had been made to fill that need when every other part of the seacoast had such services.[30]

The Government considered offering the Co. a subsidy of £ 3,000 and discontinuing its own service between Mannar and Paumben but the Planters' Association opposed the discontinuance of the existing service as it feared a breakdown in existing arrangements. The Government then decided to continue with its service until it could be ascertained whether the workers would patronise the service.[31]

Meanwhile the biggest single disaster at sea involving coffee workers which this writer has been able to trace was reported in February 1864. According to the **Times of Ceylon** "a sad loss of life" had occurred when the Government immigration vessel, the **Audy Letchmy**, a barque of 150 tons was on its way from Vengalle (Vankalai) to Paumben and sank after being hurled in the air by a waterspout. The **Times** reported that only seven of the 120 workers on board the vessel survived, but 13 of the crew of 14 were safe. The newspaper reported that on 5 February at 7 a.m. the tindall of the vessel had noticed a waterspout north-east of the vessel but was not perturbed as he was steering north-west. As the vessel proceeded the waterspout approached it and the tindall's efforts

to steer away from it were unsuccessful. "The spout came nearer and from its whirring motion at its base lifted the doomed ship about three feet out of the water and capsized her." Most of the passengers were below the deck and the only seven who escaped survived by clinging to pieces of wreckage until they were picked up by a passing ship at two in the afternoon. One of the crew of 14 also perished in the accident. The report added that an official inquiry had been held and it was found that no blame could be attached to any member of the crew.

The news report did not elicit any comment but some months later after the **Army and Navy Gazette** in the United Kingdom had picked up the news and commented on it, the **Times of Ceylon** ridiculed the British journal for its presentation of the news item. "The view taken of occurrences in distant colonies by writers at home is frequently very amusing, if not instructive," **The Times** stated. The British journal had expressed the hope that an M.P. would call for an inquiry into the tragedy and **The Times** facetiously commented - "Our Government must indeed must be in a very wretched way when it allows its Immigration vessel to be caught tripping by water spouts. What was the Master Attendant at Colombo about when such a gross piece of negligence took place? Where was the Immigration Agent while this occured? These will no doubt be questions asked when the benevolent member of parliament rises in his place to move for the inquiry alluded to." (32)

There was a much smaller loss of life in 1864 when the **Sarah Armitage** was blown off course in a gale on to the coast of Chilaw. Initially there were reports that about 60 workers were missing but **The Times** later stated that the only certainty was that two bodies had been recovered.(33)

There undoubtedly were cases of native craft being caught in storms and sinking with some loss of life but with the minimal interest in the death of "natives" and "coolies" in the British -owned newspapers such incidents would have gone unreported. Ward's biographer, S. V. Balasingham states that "Very often overcrowding was allowed on these boats and this led to boats capsizing with loss of life," but he does not provide details of any such cases.(34)

In the controversy whether the Government should grant a subsidy to the Madras and Colombo Steamship Co. the Executive Council approved of the company's plans to operate two services between Madras and Colombo, and Negapatam and Colombo, but the Planters' Association maintained its opposition even though it conceded that there was a great deal of mortality among those who landed at Mannar and came to the estates along the North Road.(35) Finally the Government curtailed negotiations with the Madras and Colombo Steamship Co. and concluded an agreement with the Bombay Coast and River Steamship Navigation Company to operate a service between the coast of India and Ceylon for a period of three years for an annual subsidy of £3,000. The Company agreed to carry out the service performed earlier by the Government-owned **Pearl** for a subsidy of £ 1,000 with the Government transferring the **Pearl** as part payment of the joint subsidy.(36)

In 1867 the company said it was incurring losses and asked the Governor Sir Hercules Robinson (1865 to 1867) to be relieved of its obligations. Robinson stated that he would not impose the penal clauses in the contract if the company continued to

maintain its services but these were finally discontinued the following year. The Government then advertised for a new contractor but without success.[37]

There was a touch of comedy when the Home Government said it could provide a ship called the **Oriole** for immigration service. Robinson welcomed the offer but said the natives would find it difficult to pronounce **Oriole**. He suggested **Serendib**, the name by which Ceylon was known to the Arabs in ancient times, and **Serendib** it was.[38] Robinson was pleased not only with the change of name but also with the ship's performance and reported to the Colonial Office that the service provided by the vessel was "admirable".[39]

During Sir William Gregory's term of office as Governor (1872 to 1877) there was a gradual increase in the number of workers who travelled by steamer. In July 1872 Gregory informed the Colonial Office that four vessels of 150 to 300 chartered tons were being hired at rates of Rs.4 to Rs.5 per ton, per month, for the conveyance of workers.[40]

In this period shipping companies also began to exploit the business potential in the transport of coffee workers. In August 1876 Alston Scott and Co., who were agents for the British India Steam Navigation Co., offered facilities "to promote the cooly traffic as much as possible". In a letter to the P.A. the Agents stated that there was "no doubt that every cooly who proceeds by steamer seldom afterwards ventures by native craft, realising as they do the comfort of one as compared to the other." The Agents stated that as many who wished to travel by steamer were hampered by lack of funds, they were prepared to introduce a scheme by which prospective employers could pay the passage fares of the workers in Colombo while granting authority to the B.I. Agent at Tuticorin to draw the money paid through the Bank of Madras. The P.A. welcomed the scheme and said it would urge the Government to approve any scheme that was likely to prove successful.[41]

The P.A. at this stage also renewed its pleas for at least a reduction in the period of quarantine which it said had become a bottleneck in the flow of workers. The **Times of Ceylon** had reported in February that thousands of workers were being held up at Tuticorin and were facing starvation. When a deputation from the Association met the acting Governor one member produced a report he had received from Madras which stated that while there was no actual starvation many workers whose passages to Colombo were being delayed were living on roots and leaves "which they eat with only a little rice to give it a flavour." This type of food was said to produce the same type of sickness as starvation.[42]

The P.A. also made representations to the Government in Ceylon and in the U.K. about the need to extend the railway from Kandy to Matale, and from Nawalapitiya on the main line further inland into the hill country up to Haputale. The P.A. stated that the number of workers coming to Ceylon and returning was about 220,000 annually. If steamer and railway communications were improved, the horrors of the North Road would soon become a thing of the past.[43]

In June 1877 the Government agreed to a relaxation of the period of quarantine from 14 days to five days in the case of native craft. The Colonial Secretary said some period of quarantine had to be enforced in the case of native craft as "experience already

gained of the filthy and abominable state in which they arrive has demonstrated the absolute necessity of this restriction." He stated that the B.I. ships which were large and clean would be exempted from fumigation and disinfection provided they brought in only able-bodied and healthy labourers. The Colonial Secretary stated that the concessions that were being allowed would be withdrawn if it was found that "swarms of famine — stricken and diseased immigrants were arriving in the country."(44)

The P.A. felt that the concessions were inadequate. In July 1877 the P.A. adopted a resolution that "immigration should be unrestricted, that immigrants should be allowed to choose their own route, and that a land quarantine should be organised at once in the vicinity of Colombo, where immigrants could be conveyed immediately on arrival if necessary."(45) The P.A. was supported in its campaign by Sir Muttu Coomara Swamy who represented the Ceylon Tamils in the Legislative Council. He said he was speaking "not so much in the interests of the planters who had made themselves powerfully heard" but on behalf of the coolies themselves — "fellow countrymen" belonging to the same nation as he did and who though poor and humble were as entitled to fair treatment at the hands of the Government as any other class.

Sir Muttu said it was "inhuman" to keep the workers for five days in dhonies that were "not over-commodious and not over-clean, huddled together in large numbers and by no means overfed." He said the conditions in which the workers were kept were likely to cause the very disease for whose prevention quarantine was enforced. The Colonial Secretary in replying said the enforcement of quarantine was largely at the discretion of the Civil Medical Officer.(46)

Gregory's successor, Sir James Longden, (1877 to 1883) felt that the quarantine being imposed in Ceylon was "cruel and unmerciful," and appointed a Select Committee to investigate not only the arrangements for the reception and care of the workers but also whether an alternative to the Mannar/North Road route could be introduced. When a deputation from the P.A. met him Longden said his predecessors too had felt that something should be done about workers leaving India for Ceylon "in an unhealthy or half-starved state and often carrying the dregs of disease with them." Shortly before the meeting there had been reports in the newspapers about bodies of workers being washed ashore, and in one instance four bodies had been found floating in Colombo harbour on a single day. According to the P.A. report of the meeting Longden said vessels bringing workers were in such a filthy state that there was every danger of disease breaking out on the vessels in which the workers were cooped together.(47)

The official Committee which Longden had appointed stated in its report that the small native sailing vessels which brought workers were quite unsuitable for carrying passengers;

> The holds of these vessels contain ballast consisting principally of sand on which the coolies, principally the women and children lie; it becomes polluted by vomit, excreta and is seldom changed at the end of each voyage. These small vessels are also defective in ventilation, and in rough weather when the hatches have to be closed the air between decks becomes most foul.

The Committee reported that while there were steamers of the British India Steam Navigation Co. also operating on the Tuticorin-Colombo route, they did not bring

workers when there were epidemics of cholera in South India as they would run the risk of long a period of detention in quarantine in Colombo.

The Committee's main recommendation was that the Mannar-North Road route could be by-passed altogether if vessels bringing workers proceeded further south along the west coast of the Island and berthed in Dutch Bay which was off Kalpitiya, or Calpentyn, as it was known in the last century. The Committee stated that the Dutch Bay route would be 68 miles shorter than the 156 miles which workers had to walk from Pesalai, then a common landing point, to Kandy, while it was also about the same distance to the coffee districts as Colombo was.[48]

Kalpitiya had been a seaport in ancient times in which vessels bound for Colombo used to shelter and the Bay could accommodate large vessels.[49]

Among those who supported the Dutch Bay proposal was D. Wilson, who had been Chairman of the Board of Immigrant Commissioners appointed by Governor Ward. He said the hinterland of Dutch Bay provided ample space for a quarantine camp, hospital, etc. He said the line from Tuticorin to Dutch Bay would be a straight line and it would be only 100 miles instead of 154 to Colombo. He said that if a schooner service was established between Tuticorin and Kalpitiya each schooner could bring in as many workers as four native craft.[50]

The Planters' Association said the landing of workers at Kalpitiya was worthy of consideration but such a move would necessitate the construction of a light railway to the planting districts.[51]

The Dutch Bay scheme was not implemented with the recession that set in with the decline in the fortunes of the coffee industry, and also with the majority of workers beginning to use the steamer service operated by the British India Company to Colombo. The North Road route was closed in 1899 when the authorities took steps to prevent the spread of plague from India to Ceylon.

As seen at the outset of this chapter the mortality among Indian workers to Ceylon was fortunately on a much smaller scale than in emigration to Mauritius and the West Indies in ocean going ships over much longer distances.One of the biggest tragedies involving Indian workers took place in 1859 when 399 out of 400 workers travelling to Mauritius died in a fire on board the **Shah Allum**. The lifeboats on board could only accommodate 75 persons and the Captain and the crew escaped from the ship in these lifeboats. It was after this tragedy that new regulations were introduced about fire-fighting equipment, and provision was also made for more lifeboats. In 1864, 343 would-be emigrants died when the **Ally** sank in the Hoogly in a storm. In 1865, a total of 262 workers died when the **Eagle Speed** sank off Calcutta. There were doubts about the death toll when the **Souvenance** carrying 376 workers from Pondicherry to Martinique vanished at sea in 1871. 167 bodies identified as Indians were washed ashore at Natal but no survivors among the others were traced.[52]

Perhaps the biggest single disaster at sea involving migrant workers was when all but 50 of 640 Chinese migrant workers died in a fire on board the **Don Juan** shortly after it set out of Macao in 1872.[53]

CHAPTER SIX

SLIMY SNAKES AND HUNGRY LEOPARDS.

The Hazards Of The 150-mile Walk To The Estates.

Exactly where on the north-western coast the coffee workers set foot on Ceylon soil depended on their point of departure until late in the last century when the majority of South Indians heading for the dying coffee plantations, or the burgeoning tea fields, began to arrive by steamer at Colombo. Which way the winds were blowing, and whether the weather was fine or not, were also important determining factors in both the places of embarkation and disembarkation. Generally the South-West monsoon prevails from May to September, and the North-East from November to February, but cyclonic or inter-monsoon rains can be experienced at other times.

Paumben and Devipatam in South India were most popular points of departure and most journeys ended at Talaimannar, Pesalai or Mannar, on the island of Mannar, or at Vankalai just south of Mannar. The great trek to the coffee plantations began with the arrival in Ceylon and the journey by land was along the North Road, or as it was sometimes more grandly called The Great North Road, or the Great Trunk Road. From the coast the migrants headed interior and southwards, first to Medawachchi, then on to Anuradhapura which had been a capital of Sinhalese kings from 500 B.C. to the tenth century, then further south to Matale or Kandy. The North Road was not a road in the current usage of the word but more a path through territory that was often just scrubland or jungle.

Carpen, the kangani, stated in his autobiography that there were 14 stages of "Tapals" in the journey to Kandy which lasted six days and which made the workers "tired and weary". Carpen himself was in a party that had Kandy as its destination but he was due to take up employment much further in the interior of the hill country, at Nawalapitiya, and the walk from Kandy to Nawalapitiya took another three days.[1]

One of the first improvements along the route which was for the benefit of the migrants as well as the permanent population, was the construction of a causeway linking the island of Mannar with the mainland at Mantota. Governor J. A. Stewart Mackenzie (1837 to 1841) who was responsible for this work told the Legislative Council that until the construction of the causeway all those travelling between Ceylon and India had to wade in water carrying their belongings and sometimes also drive their cattle ahead of them.[2]

While the majority of the migrants travelled along the North Road some travelled south along the coast from Mannar to Puttalam, from where they turned inland to Kurunegala, and then on to Kandy. Sir Emerson-Tennent, Colonial Secretary from 1845 to 1850 described the road from Mannar to Puttalam which was 70 miles in length as "one of the most desolate and inhospitable roads in the Island."[3] Governor Ward (1855

to 1860) had first hand experience of it and wrote - "Let no man be deluded by the term "Road". There is none, not even the semblance of one."[4]

With very little difference between the alternative routes, G. R. Peterson, an Assistant Government Agent at Anuradhapura, stated that some migrants preferred the Mannar-Puttalam route as food and provisions were cheaper along this sea coast route, than along the North Road through the interior of the country. Another important factor seemed to be that along this route the migrants could meet Ceylon Tamils "speaking their own language and whose manners and customs are somewhat assimilated to their own and in case of sickness or sudden difficulty these persons may more readily find comfort and aid among a Tamil population than a Chingalese (Sinhalese) one."[5]

Despite these advantages it was the North Road that was used by a majority and this would have been due to the fact that official endeavours to reduce the rigours of travel by the provision of rest sheds, wells for drinking water, etc., were concentrated from the earliest years on the North Road. Bastiampillai has noted that even many who entered the country through the Mannar-Puttalam route returned to India by the North Road because when they were leaving they had money which gave them a sense of confidence, and had also picked up some knowledge of the Sinhalese language.[6]

It is a remarkable fact that throughout the entire period of the coffee industry arrangements for the reception of the coffee workers were supervised by only two British civil servants, Percival Acland Dyke and William Crofton Twynam, who between them functioned as Government Agent in the northern administrative capital of Jaffna for a period of 67 years. For a greater part of the coffee period the Northern Province also included the present North Western Province and North Central Province, which was established with Anuradhapura as its capital in 1874.

Dyke and Twynam were from nautical families and both chose of their own volition to serve in the north of Ceylon. Dyke who became known as "The Rajah of the North" was Government Agent of the Northern Province from 1829 until his death in 1867. In 1843 he was appointed Auditor General but after a few months in Colombo asked to be allowed to revert to his post in Jaffna. He died in the North and was buried in a churchyard at Chundikuli, in the Jaffna district.[7] Twynam who came to Ceylon as a passenger in the **Hindostan** which was the first P & O (Peninsular and Oriental) ship to the East, was appointed Assistant Government Agent at Mannar in 1845. Although he served in a similar capacity at some towns in the south, he spent the greater part of his official career in the north. He succeeded Dyke in 1867 and held the post until his retirement in 1896, when he was knighted. He continued to live in Jaffna until his death in 1916 at the age of 95.[8]

The key official in Colombo in the early stages of the coffee industry was Philip Anstruther, Colonial Secretary from 1830 to 1845, who, as seen earlier, was also President of the Ceylon Agricultural Society established in 1842. As Colonial Secretary, Anstruther asked officials in the north to exercise economy in expenditure. As President of the Ceylon Agricultural Society he complained that too little was being done by the Government and demanded Government assistance to the planters in their efforts to obtain labour.

With Anstruther being both personally and officially interested in the inflow of workers, and with Dyke, a capable and humane official on the spot, some progress was made in easing the difficulties of the earliest arrivals in the early forties. In 1843 a road was constructed across the island of Mannar from Talaimannar on the western extremity to Mannar on the eastern side of the island. Shade trees such as margosa and banyan were planted along the sides of the road and wells were dug at regular intervals to provide drinking water. Anstruther had approved of Dyke's plans on condition the work was carried out at "moderate expense".(9)

Anuradhapura was an important halt along the route, and Anstruther asked the Government Agent of the Northern Province whether "Shelters sufficient for the sick labourers passing through Anooradhapoora (sic) might not be put up at moderate distances for a trifling outlay." He also told the G.A. that he should do everything in his power "to ,aid the unfortunate labourers passing though Anooradhapoora," and that he should warn the Headmen (supervisory village officials) that they would be held responsible for proper attention to the sick.(10) Anstruther then directed Dyke to have a road traced from Mannar to Anuradhapura. This was initially to be six feet broad, with widening to be considered later, if the utility of the road justified the expense. "As no scientific knowledge will be required you may probably be enabled to execute the work through the means of your Department," he wrote to Dyke.(11) Anuradhapura at that stage, and until much later, was regarded as "a pestiferous place" and officials stationed there were given two months full pay leave from the middle of December till the middle of February which was regarded as the "Sickly season". This practice continued until 1866.(12)

Meanwhile the Ceylon Agricultural Society sent the Government memoranda on the need for more rest houses and wells along the route. The Society did not however go as far as the **Observer** which wanted the Government to undertake the import of labour. Anstruther in his official capacity suggested State-sponsored immigration but, as noted earlier, the Home Government declined to approve such a course of action.(13)

Throughout the coffee period the **Observer** was critical of the Government, and in July 1863 it stated that during the 150-mile journey from Mannar to Kandy the migrant workers had to live on nothing but herbs and roots, and that they were "almost walking skeletons" when they reached the estates in such a weakened state that they were unable to bear the cold climate with the result that many who fell ill, died.(14) The adverse effects of the sudden change of climate from the dry, hot, arid plains of South India, and through the North of Ceylon, to the cold and wet weather experienced in the hill country of Ceylon was also commented on by P. D. Millie, the planter. Millie stated that "Few gangs of coolies arrived on the estates without some deaths occuring on the road, but more took place after arrival on the estates being worn with the journey and the change of climate."(15)

Dyke did not allow the criticisms of the Ceylon Agricultural Society to go unanswered. In his comments on a report submitted to the Government by the Society, Dyke stated that the Society was even under a misapprehension as to where the workers landed. The Society had stated that the workers landed at Point Pedro, the northernmost town in Ceylon. Dyke said this was erroneous as the migrants landed at Talaimannar, or

Pesalai, which he spelt as "Pissale". He denied that he had neglected the care of the workers, and stated that for "several years" he had been urging the need for places of shelter for the workers but on each occasion the financial estimates had not been approved.[16]

Apart from the physical hardships the workers suffered on the journey to the estates, they were also subjected to extortion and intimidation and to assault and even murder, if they did not yield to illegal demands.

In June 1842 Governor Sir Colin Campbell informed the Colonial Office that "bad characters" from the maritime areas were exploiting the influx of the coffee workers. He stated that in the hill country "some of the villages which are now rapidly rising such as Nuwara Ellia, (Eliya) Gampola, etc. are filled with the worst characters. Robberies are very frequent and some very desperate and atrocious murders have been committed."[17] In the following year too, Campbell reported on law and order problems mainly because the Kandyan headmen were "devoid of courage and energy" to supervise the influx of the workers.[18]

The extortion exercised on the workers began at the very point of arrival where toll keepers, and many pretending to be toll keepers, demanded various sums of money from the migrants.[19] According to G. K. Pippet, the Police historian, attacks on the workers were more common when they were leaving with their savings,and criminal elements from the lowlands found the coffee workers an easy prey. Pippet states that "three or four sturdy Sinhalese would not only dare to attack a gang of 16 to 20 coolies but they could do so with impunity depriving them of all they possessed, even of the little piece of coarse cloth which covered their nakedness". Pippet states that while the Kandyan village headmen were able to maintain law and order among Kandyan villagers who were engaged in home cultivation, they were "quite incapable of controlling such large masses of strangers". The Ceylon Police in its earliest stages had to engage not only in the prevention and detection of crime, but also in the enforcement of sanitation, and were quite understaffed for both jobs. Thus Kandy in 1842 had only one head constable, and four constables. Two of the four were stationed outside the town at Peradeniya and Katukelle. In 1843 a Kandyan chieftain, Dunuwille Lokku Banda, the Dissawa (chief) of Udapalata, was appointed Superintendent of Police on a salary of £ 60 per annum, while the head constable received £ 18. Under a new scheme of law enforcement residents of Kandy had either to perform patrol duty, or pay a tax, and the majority opted to pay the tax. Dunuwille utilised the proceeds of the tax to employ more constables, but friction soon developed between the constables and the headmen. It was with the appointment of J. S. Colepepper as Superintendent of Police in Kandy that the Police organisation in Kandy was placed on a sound footing and resident constables were appointed on several coffee estates. Constables were also placed at the ferries and along the roads to estates to prevent extortion. Colepepper reported that the constables were not receiving any co-operation from the Kandyan villagers. "The Kandyans of the interior, the headmen included, have such a mortal aversion to shelter, or assist, any Malabar man labouring under sickness that it is difficult and inconvenient to the Policemen to give to the perishing sick the required aid and assistance," he wrote. Colepepper who had been specially chosen for the post by the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1844, retired in 1859. Before he retired he commented on the poor quality of the majority of the constables who

were Sinhalese or Malays. He said they were no more to be trusted to their responsibilities "than a jackal in a hen roost".[20]

The Ceylon Agricultural Society had on its own initiative published advertisements in the newspapers asking for details of "the notorious extortion so constantly practiced upon the helpless Malabar coolie on his journey to and from the interior".[21] The plight of the coffee workers was also discussed at an informal meeting held by planters at Kandy in 1846, and in a memorandum submitted to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the planters stated that not enough was being done for the workers on their way to the estates, especially by way of medical facilities.[22] The **Observer** maintained its campaign for better facilities for the coffee workers. In January 1846 the **Observer** stated that the workers found nothing but "pools of unwholesome water" to quench their thirst, while there were only a few hovels which were few and far between in which they could rest. The paper stated that another grave hazard the workers encountered was that they had to cross rivers and ravines spanned by rotten wooden bridges.[23]

Sir James Emerson-Tennent in one of his despatches to the Colonial Office stated that the would-be migrants' problems really began in South India itself where they were subjected to ill-treatment and harassment from their own countrymen, along the line of march from Trichinopoly to Ramnad. The migrants were not only denied water but were also plundered of their money and possessions. He said complaints to the authorities in South India had gone unheeded. Tennent outlined what needed to be done as follows : (1) to facilitate arrival; (2) to provide safe and healthy roads; (3) to protect them from violence and ill-treatment; (4) to provide rest shelters; (5) to provide medical care, and to insist that they were humanely treated.[24]

Governor Lord Torrington (1847 to 1850) had a high falutin style of speech and writing and in his first address to the Legislative Council adopted a moralistic tone about the Government's attitude to the coffee workers;

> Our duty towards them, in fact, begins from the moment they set foot on our shores, a duty the more sacred, the more imperative, and not the less difficult, because they are destitute and almost helpless strangers, seeking at the distance of several hundred miles from their homes, a moderate recompense for the labour of their hands, under European masters to whom their services are indispensable. Do they not demand from us the special protection and encouragement of our legislature, no less than they require the control of our laws?[25]

Two years later Torrington listed what he had achieved. He claimed roads and by-paths had been improved; resting sheds had been constructed at moderate intervals; and hospitals had been erected for those who fell sick." I have in fact, "he wrote," never ceased to take a warm interest in the welfare and just treatment of the coolie."[26]

While Torrington exaggerated what had been done, his successor, Sir George Anderson (1850 to 1855) had a poor record and was criticised by the Planters' Association from its inception in February 1854. At a meeting on 7 October 1854 the P.A. called for immediate action by the Government "both on account of the magnitude of the interests involved, and on humane and sanitary considerations." Anderson in commenting on the resolution in a despatch to the Colonial Office, referred to the P.A. in supercilious terms.

He stated that every legitimate facility for the workers had been provided. "It is true "he wrote" that a further proposition has lately been made by certain gentlemen forming what they term a Planters' Association, calling upon the Government to establish a steamer service between Ceylon and India for the express purpose of importing cooly labourers." Anderson stated that he had consulted the Executive Council on the matter and the members of the Council agreed with him that such a plan should be left to private enterprise and capital.[27]

While the Governors of the period sent the Colonial Office assurances that everything possible was being done for the welfare of the migrant workers, coffee planters themselves depicted a very different scenario as seen in the writings of coffee planters who wrote books, or contributed to the newspapers. While C.R. Rigg and William Sabonadiere remained coffee planters throughout their careers, William Knighton, like John Capper, gave up planting for journalism.

"Many a bleached skull lies by the wayside, the only monument, the sole unrecognisable memento of a body which contained an immortal soul" wrote Rigg in his criticism of the Government for failing to improve conditions on the route to Kandy in a series of articles on coffee planting, which he contributed to the **Examiner** in 1852.[28]

William Sabonadiere stated that exposure to the elements; the lack of accommodation; the inadequacy of wells, and a shortage or food, were the main privations of the workers on their journey to the estates. Sabonadiere stated that in many cases the only sustenance for workers on the march was "rice water," or the water that had been drained off in the boiling of rice.[29]

The most graphic contemporary account of the fate of workers on the North Road was written by William Knighton.

> The hardships these Malabar coolies undergo in travelling on foot through the jungles of Southern India and those of North Ceylon are but little known... They must arrive within a certain limited period in the plantations district for their supply of food is small, or otherwise they would perish in the forests — hence accidents of a comparatively trivial kind are often death to them for their companions cannot wait; the race is for life and they must sacrifice one, or run the risk of being all destroyed. Hence the disabled member of the gang is necessarily abandoned, and deep in the recesses of the forests, amid wild beasts and serpents...he begs and entreats, but the other members of his gang are inexorable... it is his life or theirs... they have carried him ten or twenty miles...they can do no more...lying helpless at the foot of the tree, he sees them leave a bowl of rice, the little shell of water by his side...his outstretched arms, his agonising wails...fancy the slimy snake, or the wild leopard stealing towards him...[30]

Governor Sir Henry Ward (1855 to 1860) who was capable and energetic did a great deal to improve conditions on the route to the estates, and made no attempt to conceal the hardships the workers experienced. In 1855 the temporary sheds at several points along the route to the estates were replaced with permanent buildings at a cost of £ 300. Existing hospitals were improved and some rest sheds were equipped to serve as temporary hospitals. The surfaces of many roads were improved. The number of wells was increased and patrols were intensified.[31] The provision of more sheds did not

always benefit the workers as the caretakers were Sinhalese, who, on occasions turned away workers except in rainy weather.[32]

The lack of drinking water and food remained the main problems of the workers according to a letter sent to Ward by Dyke, the Government Agent. Dyke stated that while kitchens, a hospital, wells, and facilities for bathing had been provided on the island of Mannar there were still shortcomings even in the first stage of the journey to Mankulam before reaching Medawachchi with the result that three stops along this section were all made near irrigation tanks.[33]

Ward visited the Medawachchi district in the company of Twynam and Flanderka, who was Twynam's assistant, and had the unnerving experience of finding himself lost. What happened as he described it was that

> The **chulus** like ourselves, had gone astray and we had every prospect at one time, of passing the night where we were, for it was impossible without lights to retrace our steps (Chulus refers to the torches made of coconut leaves but Ward has used the word here to refer to the chulu bearers who were part of the official retinue)... Mr. Twynam, made matters worse by leaving us to seek a path through the jungle. Mr. Flanderka, his assistant, and the two peons (messengers) knew no more of the country than I did! And although the **chulu** bearers at last came up, we lost our way so efficiently, and described so many circles in attempting to reach the camp, that it was a great relief to all concerned when we heard the shouts of a party sent in search of us. The river abounds in alligators. The jungles looked a likely haunt of bears, and as generally happens in such cases — nobody had taken the precaution to bring a gun.[34]

While other Governors had also inspected the route traversed by the workers none of them probably had such a first hand experience of the perils involved. Ward's despatches to the Colonial Office also differed from those of his predecessors and successors in that he made no attempt to gloss over realities.In a despatch to the Colonial Office in May 1858 Ward stated that the workers were "decimated by sickness and fatigue during the long journey from Mannar to the Central Province."

Ward put the blame for this state of affairs on the kangany system;

> The Government has taken every means in its power to diminish the risks of this route by building cooly sheds and cooly hospitals at different points and furnishing the persons in charge of them with medicines. But the cangany system throughout is one of fraud and peculation. The coolies do not get the benefit of one third of the advances charged to the employer. Hundreds die of actual starvation upon the road and as there is no law under which agreements made in India can be enforced in Ceylon, or money advanced in Ceylon recovered in India, the abuse increases with impunity.[35]

Later in the same year Ward again referred to the difficulties encountered by the workers along "212 miles of sandy jungle". He stated that it was no exaggeration to say that "many of these poor creatures perish annually from want and disease in spite of the precautions taken both by the Government and the planters". He again criticised the kanganis stating that while the employers provided enough money for rice on the road, such advances were notoriously misappropriated, with the result that the workers reached the estates in a state of exhaustion.[36]

Early in 1861 Capt. D. D. Graham, who was the Emigration Agent of the Ceylon Government in India, made a personal inspection of all the sheds, hospitals and wells provided for the workers from the north-western coast to the estates. He found that some sheds had been closed for long periods while others were in danger of collapsing. In a report to the Board of Immigration Commissioners, Graham stated that in some cases the kanganis did not allow the workers to go into the sheds fearing that they would dirty the sheds. Cattle had been allowed to occupy two or three sheds and when Graham questioned one of the caretakers of a shed about its unsatisfactory condition "the reply was that he only received 15 shillings a month and how was he to do it?"

Graham found that while most of the sheds had tiled roofs some were in a poor condition. The roof of the shed at "Man Colom" (Mankulam) had collapsed but fortunately there were no workers in the shed at that time. If it had been occupied "hardly a man would have escaped". Graham reported that the roofs of three other sheds were in danger of collapsing. He stated that the road between Talaimannar and Mannar was "through deep sand causing walking to be very fatiguing". Generally the supervision of sheds was very lax and there was also a need for more medical attention along the route. Graham suggested that at least three medical officers should be posted along the route. He also commented on the extortion that was taking place in some cases even while the workers were still at sea, and at times after they had landed, when payment of four shillings was demanded instead of the one shilling due.(37)

Graham's comprehensive report was discussed by the Board of Immigration Commissioners with Governor Sir Charles MacCarthy (1860 to 1863) at "Queen's House", the Governor's residence. MacCarthy agreed with the Commissioners that a great deal remained to be done by way of provision of more and better sheds; sinking of more wells which he increased by 12; and on the need for more medical officers and Police Magistrates to supervise the work of the Police.(38)

The quality of the police constables continued to be a problem at this stage too, according to Pippet. Colepepper had been succeeded by C. di M. Drew who had come to Ceylon as a coffee planter. Drew toured the estate districts with the Superintendent from Colombo, W. I. Macartney, and Macartney on his return to Colombo stated that the Police force in the Central Province was "in a very defective and inefficient state quite unequal to the duties of so large a district". Drew at one stage exchanged duties with the Superintendent at Galle, Capt. William Fisher (the father of Admiral Fisher, the First Sea Lord of the Admiralty in Britain) and Fisher in a report on his stay in Kandy said he heard nothing but complaints about the Police from planters. Fisher stated that one of the police stations he visited was "not fit to die a dog in", and that the two policemen he met there loooked "more like Veddhas" (the oldest known inhabitants of Ceylon).(39)

At this stage Twynam was sent to South India to ascertain what improvements could be effected at the point at which the workers began their journey to Ceylon at Mandapam, and Devipatam. Some wells were sunk for the migrants at Devipatam because the residents there objected to the use of the wells by migrants most of whom were from the so-called low castes. Generally the Madras Government was not as co-operative as it might have been. "While Ceylon was providing more and more for the comfort and convenience of immigrants the Indian authorities showed little responsive

co-operation. The welfare of the immigrant labourers became Ceylon's and not India's burden," states Bastiampillai.[40]

The opening of the Colombo — Kandy railway on 1 August 1867, during the term of office of Sir Hercules Robinson (1865 to 1872) should have induced the workers to come to Colombo by steamer, and then proceed to Kandy by train, but this was not what happened and even those who came to Colombo by steamer preferred to walk from Colombo to Kandy.

Millie recorded that the majority preferred the "old route" to being landed at Colombo and then taking train as they were "so utterly deficient in calculation, that the expense of the train determines them to proceed by the old route because pecuniarly it costs them nothing. They never reckon the value of time."[41]

An official committee which later investigated the reluctance of the workers to travel by train found that the workers saved a few cents by walking. The train fare to Kandy was 75 cents and the journey took four hours. Those who walked took four days to do so and their expenditure on food at 16 cents per day, amounted to 64 cents. There was thus a saving of 11 cents, and only about eight per cent of those who arrived by steamer at Colombo travelled by train to Kandy. By spending four days in walking the workers lost the wages they could have earned in four days but the Committee found that the workers could not comprehend the financial advantage of using the train service.[42]

Robinson in a despatch to the Colonial Office stated that the workers were peculiar in that they were "jealous of any attempt to force on them even what is for their own good." He said Leisching, an A.G.A. at Anuradhapura had stated that if policemen actively supervised the workers on their trek to the estates such action drove the workers off the roads. He had therefore resorted to the system of "looking after them without seeming to do so."[43]

Earlier Leisching had stated in his **Administration Report** that the workers did not make use of bungalows that had been provided for their use, even when these bungalows had a wall round them, and a well for drinking and bathing on the premises. Leisching reported that

> The coolies seldom sleep in them if the weather is fine but prefer camping in the neighbourhood and cooking their meals in the open air; it is a pleasant sight to see these poor strangers grouped together at sunset under the trees near some tank and making themselves quite at home. They seldom use the well water if they can find any in a tank or stream.[44]

In June 1871 the Colonial Office suggested that free rice could be supplied to the workers on the grounds that there would be no difference in principle between a gratuitous supply of free rice, and the gratuitous supply of bungalows and wells, but Robinson after consulting his Executive Council stated that such a step would be unnecessary and would have undesirable results.[45]

Towards the end of his term Robinson stated that great improvements had been made along the North Road as the Mannar-Puttlam route was being abandoned by the workers. He stated that after the introduction of a system of medical checks at Devipatam and Mannar there had been no outbreaks of cholera.[46]

Sir William Gregory (1872 to 1877) was also an able and energetic governor but he too tended to exaggerate — perhaps even more than the others. In his first despatch to the Colonial Office on the coffee workers he said their conditions could not be improved and that there was not "a labouring population in any part of the world so well off." He stated that the planters simply dared not illtreat their workers for fear of getting a bad name. He praised the work being done by Reidy, the Emigration Agent in South India, and Twynam the Government Agent in the north, in attracting labour to Ceylon. Gregory, like his predecessor, Robinson, opposed the issue of rice to the incoming workers and stated that he had not met a single person in favour of the idea.(47)

Twynam in his **Administration Report** drew attention to the fact that incoming workers were often unable to use the bungalows that had been built for them as these were occupied by planters travelling to India. Twynam suggested that additional bungalows should be constructed for the planters because he had found that whenever an European arrived at such stations "the coolies in general give way to him, whatever the state of the weather may be, and they are thus deprived of the shelter that is peculiarly theirs." Twynam said that despite some ill-feeling on the matter he had ruled that Europeans should not be allowed to occupy the bungalows meant for the workers.(48)

In a second despatch to the Colonial Office after he had toured the areas through which the workers arrived, Gregory once again painted a glowing picture of the conditions that prevailed. "Although I passed some thousands, they all without a single exception seemed well and in high spirits. We constantly inquired of the groups if any of their party had fallen sick, or been left behind, and we were assured that all were well and none of the original number were missing," he wrote.

Gregory stated that at Matale hospital there were only nine coffee workers, and at Dambulla and Mihintale there were none. He described the building provided for the workers as substantial, tiled, and well ventilated and "far better than many of the huts I slept in during my excursion." He stated that there were 17 such bungalows along the 131-mile route from Mannar to Matale with 22 wells at convenient intervals. Gregory ordered the digging of more wells and the deepening of existing wells after being told that the wells ran dry at some periods. He reported that there were bazaars where rice could be purchased every ten or twelve miles and that as a result of an order by Dyke no trees were felled within 400 yards of each side of the road to counter heat and glare.(49)

Government officials and the representative of the planting community were by no means satisfied with the conditions along the North Road and also along the roads in the coffee districts. R. B. Downall, the Planting Member in the Legislative Council, stated that more sheds should be provided between Nuwara Eliya and Badulla. He said he had been unaware of how unsatisfactory conditions were until he had himself travelled between the two towns and found that in wet weather the workers were "in a most wretched condition."(50)

The Planters' Association itself called for the construction of more sheds within the coffee districts. J. L. Shand said that anyone travelling in the Dimbulla and Dickoya districts could not fail to observe the hardships of the workers "coming from one of the hottest countries in the world, to a country where they are exposed to all the climatic influences of the monsoons from which they were protected by a very scanty piece of

cloth." He said the only shelter often available to the workers was in cattle sheds and even at these they were mulcted by the lessees.[51]

In 1878 C. A. Murray, the Assistant Government Agent at Nuwara Eliya, described the position of the coffee workers as "truly piteous". In an official communication to the P.A. which received a lukewarm response Murray wrote;

> It is truly pieteous to see their arriving at the Government **ambalamas** (resting places) here in a complete state of exhaustion from hunger and cold, and if not for the aid given them by the keeper of the **ambalama**, many would die before starting again on their journey; many drop down on the Ramboda and Hakgala Passes, and are carried in by police patrols to the Civil Hospital where they are attended to. The other night the keeper found a mother and a child in the road drain near the **ambalama** in a state of unconsciousness. The gang of coolies arrived late at night and were themselves too cold and exhausted to render aid. If not for the timely arrival of the keeper the two would have been allowed to remain there all night.

The Committee of the P.A. circulated Murray's letter to five district associations in the area and expressed the hope that the members of the associations would assist Murray in his work. Murray had on his own initiative established two refuges at Hakgala and Tahugala to provide relief to the workers. The five district associations to which the P.A. sent Murray's letter reacted indifferently. G. Wharton of the Uva District Association stated that they had no funds available, and in any case, it was "in the nature of most coolies to take advantage of, and abuse any benevolent scheme set on foot for their benefit."[52]

Witnesses who appeared before the Immigration Commission appointed by Sir James Longden (1877 to 1883) generally expressed satisfaction over conditions on the North Road. They said reports of extortion were baseless but that there was some "blackmail" in India, and to a minor extent among peons and hospital attendants. Many witnesses suggested the need for more European supervision along the route.[53] As seen earlier, the Commission recommended a new landing point at Kalpitiya. The Commission also stated that the workers would not take to any new route unless it had decided advantages. In the event, the next two decades during which the coffee industry withered and the tea industry bloomed, witnessed the increasing popularity of the sea route from Tuticorin to Colombo, and the North Road was closed with effect from January 1899. An inspection camp for immigrants had been opened at Ragama, six miles north of Colombo, and all incoming workers were held in quarantine for a few days at this camp before being allowed to proceed to the hill country.

The North Road was closed on the recommendations of the Plague Commission which the Government appointed after an outbreak of plague in India. The Quarantine and Prevention of Disease Odinance was enforced so strictly that there were protests from Bombay. The first case of plague was ultimately recorded only in 1914, and was traced not to India, but to Burma.[54] The closure of the North Road was welcomed by the health authorities in Colombo. Dr. Allen Perry, wrote that "the main thing is that the coolies have been spared the hardship under which they used to march to their estates along the North Road." He said that under the new arrangements incoming workers were

held only for a day at Ragama Camp before being sent by train to their destinations. They were thus saved "a march of over 130 miles along a desolate and extremely hot road."[55]

CHAPTER SEVEN

MASTERS AND SERVANTS AND THE MEN IN BETWEEN

The Labour Legislation Of The Coffee Period.

Although the coffee workers did not become an organised body of workers owing to the absence of trade unions in Ceylon in the last century, they were nevertheless the first large body of wage earners, or workers, in the modern sense of the word. And although legislative enactments such as the Master and Servant Ordinances also applied to urban workers and even domestic servants, collectively called "journeymen artificers," in practise the ordinances applied mainly to the coffee workers.

Between the master and the servant stood the ubiquitous kangani. The kangani could act — and undoubtedly many did — as a buffer between the workers and even the most irascible planters, but there were also undoubtedly situations in which at a crunch — the kangani would have sided with the planter. The kangani was himself an employee, and his position was vulnerable. Generally, the planter saw the kangani as the man through whom he could extract the maximum output and effort from the workers.

In a prize winning essay on means of reducing expenditure on estates, E. Woodhouse stated that efficiency and output on estates depended on the kangani. "There will be little or no cause of complaint if the cooly does a good day's work for his pay but this he will not do — nor can he be made to — unless his Cangany assists the master in compelling him to it" wrote Woodhouse who said the phrase "Like master, like man," should read "Like Cangany, like coolies", on the coffee estates. "We cannot insist too strongly on this point," he added.[1]

Of course the kangani was very much more than the man between the master and the servant, or the man on whom the planter depended to get the maximum work from his employees. One of the most incisive descriptions of the role of the kangani on the estates was written by A. R. King, when he was District Judge at Badulla:

> He is the leader and representative of the coolies composing his gang and artfully binds them to him in every conceivable way. He is their banker and spokesman; and the principal relations between himself and the coolies are of a most complicated nature - a skillfully devised network by which he manages always to exercise a hold upon each cooly, either by virtue of his responsibility to the cooly, or the responsibility of the cooly to him. He disposes these relations much in the way that a practised gambler arranges his betting book, safe to be the winner in any event.[2]

The first attempt at regulating master/servant relationships was made during the term of Governor Sir Robert Wilmot Horton (1831 to 1837) when the number of Indian workers in Ceylon was very small. The proposed ordinance which gave the courts powers to inflict severe punishments on workers with no corresponding punitive powers in

respect of employers, was based on principles then prevailing in the United Kingdom but was disallowed by the Colonial Office.

Horton's successor, J.A. Stewart Mackenzie (1837 to 1841) resubmitted the proposed legislation to the Colonial Office and in doing so, he not only ignored criticisms of the original ordinance by the Colonial Secretary, Lord Glenelg, but introduced new clauses which were even more advantageous to the employers. Mackenzie recommended that in order to effect speedy settlements, breaches of labour contracts should be heard in the criminal courts and not the civil courts. Breaches of contracts were thus made criminal offences for which severe punishments were provided. Mackenzie argued that agreements would only be binding on those who were willing to enter into such agreements and that employers would have to provide for the welfare of their workers if they wished to retain their services but the Colonial Office once again refused to sanction the legislation.

It was finally Sir Colin Campbell (1841 to 1847) who submitted an Ordinance which the Colonial Office found acceptable. This was the Service Contracts Ordinance No 5 of 1841 which was "For the better regulation of Servants, Labourers, and Journeymen Artificers under Contracts of Hire and Service and of their Employers".(3)

Verbal contracts were deemed valid for one month but could be terminated at one weeks' notice by either party, or by the payment of 15 days' wages by the employer, or for "misconduct" by either party. Written contracts were for a period of one year and could be terminated at one months' notice.

Labourers who were found guilty of desertion by the District Court were liable to loss of any wages due and could be punished with imprisonment with, or without hard labour, for a maximum period of three months. Labourers could sue their employers for non-payment of wages, breach of contract, or misconduct and any master found guilty was to be punished with a fine of £ 10 with provision for imprisonment in case of non-payment of the fine. The Ordinance was in advance of prevailing legislation in the United Kingdom where employers were liable only to civil proceedings, while employees were liable to criminal proceedings.(4) Among the shortcomings of this Ordinance were that "insolence" and "misconduct" were not defined, and that while workers were punished with imprisonment, employers were liable to imprisonment only in case of non-payment of fines.(5)

In the prevailing milieu in which planters were part of the Establishment, and the workers completely lacked any form of organisation, it is hardly surprising that Campbell's Ordinance worked to the benefit of the employers who were aware of their legal rights, with the workers ignorant of their rights and unable to resort to legal remedies.

J.S. Colepepper, Superintendent of Police at Kandy, stated that the law operated "fully to the satisfaction of the employer but the labourer seldom avails himself of it, even when it was pointed out to him, and is advised to do so." The Police Magistrate at Kandy stated that "the coolies are nearly all ignorant that any law exists for regulating agreements" while the Magistrate at Gampola stated that the ignorant worker was "an easy prey to his knowing and unrelenting master." (6)

In Ceylon, unlike in the sugar colonies, as Michael Roberts has shown, there were no "Protectors of Emigrants". Tennent did suggest the creation of such posts but with the financial depression of 1847 to 1848, and the controversy that arose over Governor Torrington's handling of the unrest in 1848, the idea dropped out of view. Nothing also came of a suggestion by the **Observer** that the Government should investigate conditions on the estates. Desertion was a remedy left to the worker but if he did so he sacrificed the wages due to him; faced the prospect of prosecution and punishment, and of finally being returned to the very employer from whom he had "bolted." On the question of whether magistrates were biased in favour of employers Roberts states "We can cite cases of obvious partiality. Equally one can cite instances when the case went against the European." (7)

Kumari Jayawardena states that the laws operated in favour of the employer. "Although these laws were supposed to afford some measure of protection to the workers in their relations with the employers, in effect they served mainly to limit desertions from plantations by fixing penalties for breaches of contract," she states.(8)

There were no major changes in the law from 1841 to 1865. Ordinance No 14 of 1845 sanctioned contracts for three years but this was formulated mainly for labour employed by Government departments. The Insolvency Ordinance No 7 of 1853 empowered courts to order payments of wages to workers for sums not exceeding three months' wages or £ 30 out of the funds of estates that went bankrupt. In 1858 when doubts arose whether a kangani was a "labourer" an amendment was enacted that as far as wages were concerned a kangani was a labourer. Act No 15 of 1859 provided for the employment of Indian labourers on lengthened terms of service. It visualised the employment of workers "from more distant parts of India than those whence the present supply is obtained." (9)

In 1861 a sub-committee of the Legislative Council recommended that the ordinance for the hire and service of labourers should relate to the hire of labour generally, instead of agricultural labour only, as estate workers were employed not only in agriculture but also as road makers, builders, etc. With regard to a clause under which wages were to be a first charge the committee stated that this conferred a privilege on the worker in that he had a prior claim on the property on which he was employed for an indefinite period and this reduced the value of the property as security for money advanced. It also gave the labourer a privilege in that he could enforce his claim at any time and even after the property had changed hands. The committee recommended that a labourer's wages should be a first charge on an estate only in respect of three months' wages and that claims should be put in suit against estates within three months of termination of employment.(10)

In 1863 a judgement by Dickson, the District Judge at Kandy, that the coffee worker was a monthly labourer was affirmed in appeal by the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court in affirming the judgement proceeded on the ground that every engagement of service was to be deemed a monthly engagement unless there was something in the terms of agreement to exclude that presumption.(11)

In the run up to the major changes in labour legislation in 1865 the planting community became embroiled in a storm in a coffee pot. The trouble began when the

Government circulated among Justices of the Peace a letter from the Queen's Advocate, Richard (later Sir) Morgan that "a case was hardly ever known of a Justice (J.P.) in the planting districts doing anything to secure the apprehension of criminals in cases of serious crime, although the jails are crammed with scores and hundreds of men, women, and children arrested on warrants for desertion." Several planters were unofficial Justices of the Peace and when the Queen's Advocate's circular appeared in the newspapers there were cries of outrage from the planters. When the matter was first discussed in the Planters' Association, W. M. Thompson of Maturata established a record for brevity by saying "Gentlemen, all I have to say is that these statements are all damned lies!" Other speakers however waxed indignant and W. Martin Leake, the Chairman, said his only difficulty was to find language strong enough to express the sentiments of the planters. When the P.A. protested officially the Colonial Secretary declined to comment in detail on the letter saying it was "characterised throughout by (such) a strange want of courtesy and respect."

It soon transpired during the controversy that the Queen's Advocate's letter had been occasioned by a complaint from Thomas Berwick, a District Judge, and Deputy Queen's Advocate, at Kandy.[12] Berwick was the cause of many controversies during his career on the Bench. On one occasion when he was at Galle he ordered the arrest of the Commander of a French warship that was at Galle harbour on a charge of slander filed by a Galle businessman. This was a breach of diplomatic immunity as the warship was regarded as French territory, and the British Government apologised to the French Government. Some of Berwick's contemporaries even doubted his sanity. Joseph Grenier, K.C. who retired as a Supreme Court judge, wrote, "If he had been saner than he was, he would no doubt have been promoted to a seat on the Supreme Court judge but he clearly proved himself to be his own enemy and so retired from the Bench as a District Judge."[13]

In this, as in other controversies, Berwick was unrepentant. He said he had expressed his views on the matter when consulted officially on certain illegal warrants that had been directed to the Police and also as the execution of such warrants interfered with the normal work of the Police. He said there were only a few rural police stations and these were scattered at wide intervals. Each station consisted of one sergeant, and four constables, and their time and attention which should have been devoted to the protection of public peace and the detection of criminals, was being spent in travelling over the country in search of workers who were wanted on charges of desertion. Referring to the objection to the use of the word "crammed" he said it may not have been very happily chosen. He said to "cram" was to "stuff", or "to fill," and these terms were relative ones used chiefly in relation to space available. He said that on reflection it would however be seen that the use of the word was justified in either sense.

While the returns were themselves defective they showed that at least seven per cent of the balance of annual immigration had been arrested in 1862. The real percentage was double or more. Even if no allowance was made for departures, and the minimum number of known arrests, (which was 2,000) was taken into account, it would be seen that three per cent of the workers were arrested for desertion. Three per cent was the proportion of offenders of every description compared to the whole population of one of the most criminal towns in the world, Liverpool, in 1857, where the three per cent had

committed crimes of every description. Berwick cited statistics from Ferguson's **Directory** which showed the total number of workers minus departures to be about 30,000 in 1862, while the number of workers arrested on planter's warrants in the same year was 2,162. The returns showed that not hundreds, but thousands of persons, were being sent to jail. "I can vouch for having seen myself groups of men, women, and children brought into the Kandy gaol at a time (the men handcuffed) on no other charge than this — and one J.P. himself reports an average of about 20 men to each warrant," wrote Berwick.

Berwick stated that the planters had perverted the machinery of justice designed to prevent crimes into a means of obtaining, or recovering estate labour. He said that the P.A. had itself admitted that in the vast majority of cases the object of the planter was to get back errant workers, and not to punish them. He was glad public attention had been drawn to what he considered "a great and alarming and increasing evil before it reached a development when its exposure (which was sooner or later inevitable) would in all probability have brought violent remedies and serious evils to the general interests of the colony."[14]

There was support for Berwick from many quarters. "'Crammed', is but a feeble name for the condition of our jail," wrote the Badulla correspondent of the **Times of Ceylon**. The correspondent stated that 161 runaway coolies were serving out their term of one months' imprisonment with hard labour, on the roads in Badulla. The greater number of them were huddled into the Badulla jail from which they were released in the morning to resume their stone breaking operations. "Seen dragging their wasted limbs along the road it would be hard to recognise the lithe and active men who a few weeks ago, stood with folded arms, erect and proud, humble, yet defiant before the D.J. and received their sentence of imprisonment," the correspondent wrote.[15]

Morgan, the Queen's Advocate defended Berwick and said he had established the statements which he felt it was his duty to advance. Diplomatically he added

> No one can regret more than I do the annoyance which this subject seems to have given to the large and influential body of planters, and the angry feeling which it has provoked, but it must be remembered that, as officers entrusted with the administration of Criminal Justice, it is our duty to bring to light and to take steps to prevent irregularities which prevail in connection therewith, and that duty is rendered the more imperative when the performances of it seems called for in the protection of weak and comparatively helpless foreigners.[16]

Morgan's views were accepted by the Officer Administering the Government, and the Executive Council, but not by the Planters' Association which stated that it could not accept Morgan's view that Berwick had justified his charges. The P.A. stated that what had been established was that the offence of desertion had prevailed to a very great extent and that the small buildings called "station-houses" which consisted mostly of one room under 12 square feet had been insufficient at times for the purposes for which they had been intended.[17]

That the situation did not change very much is seen in the comments of C. Liesching, who was Assistant Government Agent at Nuwara Eliya, in 1868. "Except in the issuing of warrants against runaway coolies, unofficial Justices of the Peace must be

held a failure... The unofficial J.P. in practise, if not in theory, looks upon himself as a species of Estate Policeman, whose sole duty is to guard his neighbour's coolies, and acts accordingly," Leisching wrote.[18]

Planter lobbies exercised considerable influence with law enforcement agencies in plantation economies and the Ceylon coffee planters were no exception. Planters often bragged openly about how they could use legal machinery to deal with even minor offences such as malingering. W.A. Swan wrote to the P.A. that workers who did not report for work on Monday when they were "evidently in perfect health," could be sent to jail on Tuesday. "I have several times done this," wrote Swan. "Gone to muster on Tuesday morning, picked out, and sent to the Police court, one or two men who had not come to work on Monday; the beneficial effect on the following days turn-out has been most marked."[19]

While the controversy over Berwick's charges was raging the P.A. commissioned a leading lawyer, Richard Cayley, to draft an ordinance that would revise and consolidate all the existing laws on master/servant relationships, as it felt that there was a great deal of ignorance, even among the planters, about the existing laws and the relative rights of the employers and employees.[20] The Association brought pressure on the Government to introduce a consolidated ordinance and it accused the Government of partiality to the workers when there was a delay in the introduction of such legislation.

In its 11th annual report the P.A. stated that the Government had taken no action on a draft ordinance submitted on its behalf by Mr. Cayley, and stated that the Executive Council seemed determined to resist all amendments to the laws unless alterations were introduced to enable workers to desert. "It would seem" the P.A. stated "that the Executive Council having some time back incautiously published our opinion of the Queen's Advocate that ordinary coolies deserting from estates are not guilty of a legal offence under Ordinance No 5 of 1841, are now resolved that this opinion should become law." The Association stated that as a means of effecting this, the Council was insisting on the introduction of a clause making non-payment of wages within 21 days, a reasonable cause for desertion.[21]

The ordinance when finally enacted as Ordinance No 11 of 1865 provided that wages were a first charge on estates, and that if wages were one month in arrears, a worker could leave with two days notice, instead of the customary period of one month. The Ordinance also provided that verbal contracts were-unless expressly stated otherwise-deemed to be a monthly contract for hire and service and were automatically renewed unless terminated by either party, on one months notice. Contracts for longer periods — the maximum being five years for Government service and three years elsewhere — had to be in writing. The provisions had to be attested before a Magistrate or a Justice of the Peace. It was also provided that if a servant was incapacitated by illness he was entitled to food, lodging, and medical care during his illness.[22]

The P.A. in a memorandum to the Government and members of the Legislative Council said the new Ordinance gave "undue protection to the employed," and was "unfair to the employer". The P.A. stated that a worker arrived on an estate having received a full months wages in advance. Immediately on his arrival, and before he commenced work, he was supplied with rice, money, and a cumbly, and he continued to

be supplied weekly with rice during the whole of his stay on the estate. As a result it was more often the case that the worker was in debt to his employer than that he was a creditor.

The P.A. stated that under the provision of the new Ordinance a worker whose pay was overdue even a single day could sue his master with the certainty of recovering all that was due to him. Any employer refusing to pay a worker overdue wages was liable to a fine of five pounds, or imprisonment for three months, or both. On the other hand the employer who had advanced money to a worker could sue the debtor "with the certainty of recovering nothing," and the worker — debtor having given notice of intention to leave could leave his estate with the employer having no redress at all.

The P.A. urged that there should be reciprocity in the Ordinance. It objected particularly to Chause 21 which provided that any worker whose wages were unpaid for more than a month was exempt from all penalties attaching to neglect of duty, disobedience, or desertion, and it said it would have been better to have left the laws as they were, than to have introduced the new Ordinance.(23)

In 1866 Ferguson stated that the Ordinance caused a lot of gloom and alarm among planters as an impression got abroad that if a worker had not been paid on the first of any month, for work during the previous month, he would be able to leave without giving notice. In fact the law that wages could not be unpaid for any period longer than one month, actually meant two months in practice. Thus if a worker had not received any advances and had not been paid for July by the first of September — after one month had elapsed — he could leave the estate by giving two days notice. Ferguson stated that even in such cases the worker could only leave if what was due to him was more than what he owed his employer. For instance if a worker had received a cumbly, rice and money worth £ 2, and the wages due to him were less than £ 2 he could not leave. "Until the advances are worked off, or paid off, the cooly cannot leave his employment without subjecting himself to the penalties for desertion" said Ferguson.

Ferguson stated that the planters had tried hard to get the period extended to three months but the Ceylon Government had declined to allow such a period because it feared objections from the Government of India. He quoted the Queen's Advocate as saying "To justify desertion, the wages due must be for full two months. If the master owes £ 2 for July and August, and the cooly owes him 15 shillings for cumblies, rice and salt fish, two months' wages are not due." In effect this meant that the employers had received their original request for three months to settle wages, said Ferguson.Ferguson also quoted the Queen's Advocate as saying, "It was not right that the cooly should be forced to remain on an estate where his wages were not regularly paid. But it was equally not right that the cooly should make the non-payment of wages a mere pretext to leave his master's service when the higher inducement probably offered by a neighbouring kangany was the real cause".(24)

The 1865 Ordinance remained basically unchanged until 1884 when the Government introduced a Cooly Wages Bill. Some of the provisions of the 1865 Ordinance proved superfluous as was seen in the correspondence between the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Kimberley and Governor Sir William Gregory (1872 to 1877). When Kimberley asked Gregory to send him the existing immigration and labour laws, Gregory replied that Ordinance No 11 of 1865 was the only ordinance in

force and stated that it had been enacted after consultations with the Government of India. Gregory stated that although the Ordinance provided for contracts for periods of three years he had not heard of a single instance of a three year contract. He stated that in Ceylon the workers were free to come and go at one month's notice and were also free to select the district in which they wished to work, unlike in Mauritius and the West Indies where the worker was bound to serve a particular employer for a specified period however harsh the employer was. In Ceylon the workers were also free to return to their homelands unlike the workers in Mauritius and the West Indies where the worker was cut off from his homeland by "an impassable sea." (25)

In 1883 the Government sent the Planters' Association a draft of a Coolies Wages Bill and this aroused protests from the planters that it would spell the ruin of the coffee industry which was then beginning to feel the effects of declining production owing to the leaf disease. One of the problems which the new Bill sought to resolve was that workers seeking legal redress for non-payment of wages had to file individual applications even when the amounts involved were quite small. The planters were indignant when the Colonial Secretary stated in a letter that it was a "notorious fact that (such) wages are on a large number of estates heavily in arrears." The Colonial Secretary sent the P.A. a copy of a decision in a recent case heard at the Court of Requests, Nuwara Eliya, and reports of two other cases which had been reported in the **Times of Ceylon** which, he said, showed that the existing law "does not afford sufficient protection and security for due payment of wages of coolies employed on coffee estates and that evasion of liability for wages due is not difficult even though there is no denial of the performance of the work in respect of which those wages have been claimed." The Secretary stated that in addition to the cases referred to the Government was also investigating a case reported from Uva where workers had allegedly not been paid for 25 months. He said the Government was taking action "not only upon the dictates of ordinary justice to an ignorant class of labourers, but also in the best interests of the agricultural enterprise in Ceylon, the prosperity of which depends so essentially upon a cheap and abundant supply of labour from South India."

The P.A. once again repeated its assertion that wages were not really in arrears as the planters provided their workers with a weekly supply of rice and small cash advances for the purchase of currystuffs. "All estate labourers are thus provided with the means of comfortable subsistence," the P.A. stated, and it added that when wages due were adjusted against the value of rice and cash advances given earlier what remained was "little, if anything more than their *savings* which are frequently at the request of the coolies retained for safekeeping in the custody of the planter." The P.A. stated that the Government had apparently been misinformed about the case of non-payment of wages for 25 months because the workers could not have survived for 25 months unless they had received a considerable part of their wages in rice and advances.

The P.A. stated that it was needless to remind the Government they were themselves engaged in a desperate struggle to survive owing to persistent failure of crops. On many estates that were in difficulty the workers themselves had shown forbearance as they had faith in their employers, founded on long experience, (and) by reluctance to break up homes with which they are well satisfied, and by a strong preference for their present voluntary service over any alternative employment open to them elsewhere."

The Colonial Secretary in a reply stated that he had not referred to the issue of rice in his letter to the P.A. as the practice was well known in Ceylon, but the system that prevailed in the country had been explained in detail to the Colonial Office. He expressed the hope that planters were charging workers only the cost price of the rice because it would otherwise be stated that the workers were being mulcted of a part of their wages by the proprietors of the estates. When the Government announced that it would go ahead with the proposed legislation, George Wall, the Chairman of the P.A., summoned a special meeting at which he proved to be intransigent in his opposition although some members of the Association were willing to accept the changes.

Wall said the proposed legislation was altogether out of proportion to the circumstances of the situation and reflected unwarrantably on the honesty of the planters. It had aroused feelings of injury and humiliation and would also disturb the harmonious relationship between the planters and the workers. When Wall referred to the judgement in the Nuwara Eliya case which the Government had cited in support of its view that the law as it stood did not afford sufficient protection and security for the due payment of wages to the workers, W. F. Lindesay, a member, interjected - "I think we must admit that as being correct." According to the minutes of the meeting William Mackenzie and the Hon. J. L. Shand (who represented the planters in the Legislative Council) "were of the same opinion". In the discussion that followed, Wall said that if collective claims were allowed the kanganis would sue on behalf of the workers and knowing the set-up they would agree that the workers would then have to sue the kangani for their dues.

Shand was applauded when he said they should co-operate with the Government in the interests of the workers. "It is impossible that they can sue separately; the proctors would eat up their balances. I think they ought to be allowed to sue jointly and the money paid individually to each cooly," said Shand.(26)

The proposed legislation which was enacted as Ordinance No 16 of 1884 made all wages due to any worker a first charge upon the estate, and provided for recovery by suit provided the charge was limited to three months' wages and was instituted within three months of the last day of the period in respect of which the suit was filed. Owing to the depression in the industry many estates were being sold at the time and the Ordinance provided that the mortgage of an estate could discharge claims of workers for three months' wages and add such payments to the sum due on the mortgage.(27)

The Aborgine Protection Society was very active in th United Kingdom at this stage and it took up cases of non-payment of wages in Ceylon and other colonies. When Sir Arthur Gordon was Governor (1883 to 1890) the Society succeeded in persuading the Colonial Office to direct Gordon to make the payments from public funds of wages due to workers on an estate that had gone bankrupt. Some years later when Sir Arthur had been elevated to the peerage, as Lord Stanmore, he told a Committee headed by Lord Sanderson that when he was in Ceylon he had come across cases where arrears of wages went back as far as three years.(28)

While Sir Arthur was in Ceylon he tried to win over the planters by sympathising with them in their dislike of Government "interference". At an informal meeting with planters at the P.A. office in Kandy he said he not only understood the impatience they felt over Government interference but shared in their dislike of it. He was loudly

applauded when he said "There is nothing more odious than legislation which gives to any petty official the power of showing what a great man he is by interfering with other people." On the question of Government action on wages he said they had been forced to act because of "the force of disinterested public opinion; the force of the pressure of the Indian Government; (and) the force of the pressure of the imperial Government."

Wall in his reply said the Indian Government was being brought forward as a bogey from time to time. Earlier they had been "frightened into the medical bill". Wall said: "I should like to know what the Indian Government would do if they saw flocks of our coolies coming back to the country where they have no homes" and added that they could always clear their lines of those whose labour was not essential to them.(29)

The planters cut a very poor figure when Gordon appointed a high-powered Committee of Legislative Councilors and civil servants to investigate charges by the P.A. about irregularities in the working of the Minor Courts. The P.A. failed to substantiate its charges and the Committee in its report stated there had been "a scandalous abuse in the granting of warrants, particularly in that class of cases known as 'cooly desertion' cases". The Committee in its report stated that it had been appointed by the Governor at the instance of the Planters' Association which had complained of "notorious abuses" in the working of the Minor Courts. The Association had however not given evidence before it, or even submitted any representations. Instead the Secretary, A. Philips, had stated that "there is great difficulty in submitting definite evidence of specific cases."

The Committee stated that it had found that warrants were issued on the submission of affidavits from a complainant (usually the kangani to whose gang the alleged absconder belonged) to the effect that the attendance of the accused could not be secured by ordering summons. The Committee found that these warrants were in many cases simply made use of to strengthen the labour roll of the kangani. It referred to a case brought to its notice by the Magistrate at Nuwara Eliya where a woman was arrested as a deserter, but it was later found that she had never served on the estate from which she was alleged to have deserted. The kangani had secured her arrest because he wanted the woman to marry his son.

The Committee said it was also unsatisfactory that when workers were arrested in the execution of warrants issued by unofficial Justices, they were not as a rule produced in the Police Court, or before a J.P., as they should have been, but were taken to the estate from which they were said to have deserted. The Committee had found that when workers were arrested "whether they were deserters, or not, (they) elected to go with the kangani, simply because they believed that if they did not take that alternative they would be sent to prison".

The Committee said it had found that "one of the greatest abuses connected with the working of the minor criminal courts was that arising out of the indiscriminate issue of warrants". The Committee recommended that Police Magistrates should exercise greater care in the issue of such warrants and that no case should be instituted unless the superintendent of the estate or some other responsible person identified the person arrested as one who had worked on the estate concerned.(30)

CHAPTER EIGHT

JOLLY, JOLLY, SIXPENCE, AND RICE AND "CURRYWAD" TOO

The Wage Structure of the Coffee Estates

The Indian workers who came to Ceylon to work on the coffee plantations came literally to greener pastures but the real inducements were the wages, and the certainty of regular meals, that life on the coffee estates provided. There were elements of exaggeration in the stories circulated by the planters of workers returning to South India with their pockets full of sovereigns, and in the assurances of the recruiting kanganis of the pot of gold just over the horizon, but the fact that around two to three millions came to Ceylon in the fifty years of the coffee industry speaks for itself.

The coffee planters saw themselves as model employers, and also as the saviours of the starving millions in South India. Apart from "strikes" that were few and far between (as this chapter shows,) there was no serious labour unrest in the coffee period. However in this, as in other aspects of the working conditions of the coffee workers, there is a complete lack of evidence of what the workers themselves felt about the treatment they received. There is no Ceylonese equivalent of "Busha don't pay".[1]

In retrospect it seems clear that while the coffee workers received higher rates of pay than they would have earned in their own country, the planters also had good reason to be satisfied with the terms of employment. When John Ferguson, Editor of the **Ceylon Observer** was in London in 1884, he gave an interview to **The Pall Mall Gazette** in which he described the coffee planters as being very fortunate

> One of our great advantages is "Free labour". Close at our shores are the 12 million coolies of South India whose average earnings are between £ 3 and £ 4 each year. Yes, and he is able to live on it too and support a wife and family. From this vast source we draw our supply of labour, and fine, well-trained, diligent fellows they become. They come over perhaps with a wife, and three or four children; they are engaged for a period; a month's notice sufficing to terminate the contract on either side. There is a hut ready for them, with a bit of ground for a garden in which they grow vegetables and so on; the planter gives them a blanket and food until they are able to repay him from their earnings. Their wages range from 9 d to a shilling a man for a day; a woman can make about 7 d, and a child 5 d so they are well off.[2]

Ferguson thus painted a picture of idyllic working conditions for the workers, but also did not conceal the fact that in comparison with wage rates in Britain the coffee planter had a supply of "Free labour".

The coffee workers received their wages in Indian rupees which they took home with them. Indian rupees were imported for the purpose and there was thus a regular inflow and outflow of Indian currency. In the early decades of British rule there was a

bewildering variety of Dutch, British, Indian and Ceylonese notes and coins in circulation. For the greater part of the coffee period the Government kept its accounts in British denominations of pounds, shillings and pence, and the mercantile sector followed suit. The switch to keeping accounts in rupees and cents was introduced on 1 January 1872.[3]

There are very few references to wage rates in the early decades of British rule. Colonel Colebrooke provides some evidence of wage rates in the 1820's and states that wages varied according to districts. In Colombo the wage of "common labourers" was six pence a day, but in the country wages varied from 31/2 to 41/2 pence a day. Colebrooke states that these were the rates paid by the Government, and that higher demands were made on private employers according to circumstances. The wages of mechanics and artisans were higher than those of labourers but were still "extremely moderate". When Colebrooke was in Ceylon the only category of workers whose duties were comparable to those later performed by the coffee workers were the **chaliyas** or cinnamon peelers. They were paid according to output, at rates ranging from 1 1/2 to 51/2 pence per pound, and the variations in payment depended on the quality of cinnamon and the location of the plantations, with lower rates being paid on "preserved plantations" and higher rates on "abandoned gardens" or in the Kandyan province.[4]

Once the coffee planters found that they needed South Indian labour they offered rates which were higher than those prevailing in the Madras Presidency and this fact alone was sufficient to attract Indian migrants. Wages in Ceylon rose from four pence a day in the thirties to between six and nine pence in the forties. In the Madras Presidency workers received three pence a day up to the late eighteen fifties.[5]

As early as 1841, Governor Sir Colin Campbell (1841 to 1847) visualised a regular inflow of workers who would be tempted to come to Ceylon by high rates of wages.[6] Campbell's Colonial Secretary, Philip Anstruther, thought wages paid in Ceylon were too high, but James Stephen of the Colonial Office was not impressed by the talk of high wages. "So the rich invariably argue in all parts of the world. Whatever gives them a great command of the labour of the Poor on lower terms, they who hire such labour will always regard as a public benefit," he wrote.[7]

With wages fluctuating according to supply and demand, many of those who invested in coffee in the 1840's found that wage rates were higher than they had been led to expect. C. R. Rigg, a coffee planter, writing in 1852, stated that many coffee speculators came to Ceylon in the forties on hearing that labour cost four pence a day, but when they arrived here they found that the rate was 71/2 pence a day with gratuitous pay on Sunday for those who had worked the six days of the preceding week. Rigg stated that with increasing demand for labour, wages rose to 18 shillings, 9 d per month of 25 working days. He said that planters also did not tax their workers unduly as this would have given their estates a bad reputation on the coast of South India. "The man who would have a **quid** for his **pro** got a bad name," wrote Rigg.[8]

In the demand for labour in the forties, even those who had been in production in the thirties experienced competition for labour owing to the surge in investment in the industry. A contributor to the **Ceylon Observer** wrote that "Discharged appoos (cooks) notaries, ferry and arrack renters, canganies, men who had never seen a tree cut out on

the mountains outvied one another in taking tracts of 50,100 and 150 acres." As a result wages that had ranged from 41/2 to 6 pence a day in the late thirties rose to nine pence, and at times even one shilling, in the forties. The correspondent stated that while "new men" could be recruited at seven pence per day many planters preferred to retain their old hands at nine pence, or even a shilling a day.(9)

In the crisis the industry underwent in the mid-forties Tennent reporting to the Colonial Office in 1847 stated that planters were delaying by several months to pay their workers and in some cases were not making payments at all. He said those who asked for their wages were silenced by "blows and personal restraint." He said that in the majority of estates the proprietor was not on the spot, and the manner in which the superintendents treated the workers was "deplorable in the extreme." He stated that while Ordinance No 5 of 1841 contained provisions for the protection of the workers they were largely ignorant of their rights. Tennent suggested the appointment of special officers known as "Protectors of Coolies" ; an increase in the number of magistrates, and an extension of contracts beyond the one year period provided in the 1841 Ordinance.(10) In the confused situation that arose after the "Rebellion" of 1848 nothing came of Tennent's suggestions.

Governor Lord Torrington also described the planters as poor paymasters. In a despatch to the Colonial Office after the "Rebellion," Torrington stated that while there would be apprehension among estates owners about the supply of labour after the rebellion, any scarcity of labour that would arise would be due not to unrest in the country, but to "the disheartening effect upon the coolies of being kept many months in arrears of wages due to them in the course of the past season, and indeed at the present time, than of any fears they might entertain of the Kandians." Torrington said a vast number of workers had left the estates with considerable sums owing to them. In some cases that had been taken to court, the superintendents pleaded that they too had not been paid. Torrington suggested that the payment of wages should be made the first charge on estates, and that the transport of coffee from the stores of estates should not be allowed until arrears of wages had been paid.(11)

The criticisms of Tennent and Torrington were made at a time when coffee was still in a state of recession and complaints of non-payment of wages reached a peak at that stage. In a period of ten months up to March 1848, there were 2,584 complaints of non-payment of wages in the Kandy courts. Torrington can hardly be regarded as a champion of the workers but he did act on a suggestion by S. Hanna, the Police Magistrate at Kandy, that plaints by workers should be exempted from stamp fees; that the courts could order the seizure of estates where the owner was not in the Island, and that the claims of labourers should receive priority over other claims.(12)

The planters resented the charges made by Tennent and Torrington, and sent memorials on the subject to the Colonial Office but Torrington continued to maintain his criticism. In 1849 in forwarding a memorial from merchants, agents and traders in Colombo, Torrington reiterated his view that any dislocation in labour supplies would be due to delays in wages, and not to any fears of the Kandyans. He said he had abundant proof that workers had left estates because they were not paid; that the workers had undergone great hardships, and that the Police Courts and Courts of Requests were

"beseiged" by unpaid workers. He said Sir Emerson-Tennent had witnessed an incident in which the workers of an estate had prevented the planter and his family from leaving the estate as they had not been paid. Torrington later stated in a private letter to Earl Grey that the situation had considerably improved and claimed the credit for it." Plenty of coolies in the interior — and we never hear now of their being ill-treated or badly paid, and this is due to my having made known these facts in my despatches." (13)

Although wages were fixed on a daily basis, and payment was made on the number of days worked each month, actual payments with adjustments for the value of rice supplied were made once in three months; six months, or even once a year. In the early stages of the industry payment was made once in six months but this was gradually changed to once in three or four months.(14) In his autobiography, Carpen, the kangani, said "We were paid only once in six or eight months and all the debts were taken in." (15)

In the mid-sixties there were suggestions about the introduction of monthly pay but the **Times of Ceylon** expressing the views of the majority of planters argued that if monthly pay was introduced the coffee estates would become uneconomic. "Will anyone," it asked, "have the temerity to maintain that Tamil labourers must be paid for 30 days when they have but worked for fifteen? If this were to become the law of the land, coffee could no longer be profitably cultivated. No Malabar coolie would work for 30 days if he could command his month's pay by sleeping within his lines for a fortnight." (16)

The timing of payments of wages depended on the availability of cash which was closely linked with the fortunes of the industry and while payments were made once in three or four months, in good times, there were long delays as the fortunes of the industry declined in the 1880's. Dr. Rockwood, a Ceylonese who toured several estates during the eighties and spoke to workers found that estates which had earlier paid once in three months, were making payments once in six months, or at even longer intervals.(17)

For the greater part of the coffee industry payments were made not directly to the workers but through the kangani — a practice which strengthened the hold of the kangani on the worker. This practice prevailed until late in the eighties when Ordinance No 13 of 1889 authorised the payment of half a workers wages to a person nominated by the workers and this was invariably the kangani. Wages were paid direct to the workers only under the Minimum Wages Ordinance of 1927.(18) Direct payments were apparently made to workers on small estates. Millie has left a delightful account of what happened on pay days. "We were not very particular about paying correct the odd pence," he says, adding that the workers did not always accept their payments without a query.

> Probably the first man you paid would immediately declare it was short ... You asked him how many days he was absent... all of which he acknowledged to be correct but still his pay was short. What was to be done with a fellow like this but to give him a cuff and a kick and send him off?

Millie advised planters not to entertain complaints at the pay table and to direct that any complaints should be made the following day, by which time the aggrieved party would have forgotten his grouse. He noted that some shrewd workers kept count of the number of days they worked by putting aside a pebble for each day worked.(19)

Throughout the coffee period the delays in the payment of wages were cushioned by the issue of rice to the workers. In Ceylon, as in the sugar producing colonies, the basic food of the workers was imported. Eric Williams' remark about the West Indian sugar worker who "produces what he does not eat, and eats what he does not produce," [20] also applied to the coffee worker of Ceylon. Officials, unofficials, planters, and the press agreed that it was more profitable to grow coffee and import rice, than to divert labour and capital into the growing of rice even for the requirements of the estate workers quite apart from the permanent population.[21]

Governor Sir James Longden (1877 to 1883) spelled out the economics of the policy in a despatch to the Colonial Office. "The labour of the coolies engaged in coffee planting is worth nine pence a day, and it is therefore clearly more profitable to import rice for them from those countries where labour is worth not more than three pence a day, than to get them to grow rice in competition with those countries" wrote Longden in October 1877.[22]

The planters consistently opposed the diversion of funds to the restoration of the ancient irrigation works of the Sinhalese kings which had been neglected and fallen into disrepair as Sinhalese kings moved their capitals from the North Central districts of the Island to the south and centre. In 1884 the Planters' Association adopted a resolution that "the policy of attempting to restore large irrigation works has no justification and is the main reason for an unnecessary increase in taxation". T. N. Christie, who was Chairman of the P.A. from 1885 to 1887, went to the extent of saying that it had not been proved that the ancient irrigation works had been built by Kings such as Mahasena and Parakrama Bahu, and went on to declare that even if the tanks had been built by these kings the construction of the irrigation works had only been undertaken as the people had to be self-sufficient in food at a time when there were no roads. He said that with the network of communications they enjoyed, and with the availability of rice on the Indian continent, there was no need to grow rice in Ceylon. He said the Ceylonese generally would have been much richer than they were if they had grown other products and imported their requirements of rice "at a far less price than they can produce it".[23]

To the coffee worker it probably made no difference whether he ate imported rice or locally grown rice, but the system of making issues of rice to the workers as an advance of wages certainly benefited the estate managements. Some managements made a profit on the sale of rice, while there were others who claimed that they sold, or provided rice, to their workers at below cost. This question was never really investigated. In 1884 when Sir John Douglas, Colonial Secretary, spoke in defence of the Master Servant Ordinance No. 16 of 1884 which the planters had vehemently criticised, he said that if an estate management did not provide rice to its workers at prices that were fair and reasonable then it really amounted to a diminution of wages.[24]

P. D. Millie stated that some estates made a profit on the sale of rice, while on some other estates the profits became a "perk" of the estate superintendent, and he refers to an estate superintendent who made hundreds of pounds annually on the purchase and sale of rice. Millie records that it was often difficult to get the workers to accept their full quota of rice. Since money was deducted for rice supplied, the workers may have been motivated by a desire to draw as much cash as possible on pay day, and Millie says he

dealt with such workers by saying that even if they did not draw the full quota for a month they would still be charged on the basis that they had drawn a full month's supply. In addition to rice the estates also provided workers with one measure of salt per month at four pence; six coconuts at 11/4 d each, and salt fish at prices that depended on size and variety. Millie says that the calculation of the wages due after deducting for food supplied involved a lot of work. A curious trend which Millie noted was that as rice became more expensive the workers became more insistent on receiving their full quota. He attributed this to the fact that as the men worked harder their appetites improved, and also to the realisation that "rice is as good as cash". Rice could be exchanged for any commodity and it also became a form of saving. On issue days each member of a gang would hand over a small part of what he had received. All the rice thus "saved" was stored together and when a bushel had been saved it was sold and the money from it was divided among those who had contributed towards the bushel.(25)

Soon after the Planters' Association was formed it published correspondence it had received from members on various matters including the issue of rice. A number of members complained that they were experiencing difficulty in subsidising the rice they supplied to their workers at below cost price. Will Rose stated that the cost of rice was 10 shillings a bushel but he made it available to his workers at 61/2 shillings. He estimated that this subsidy on rice cost him £ 300 annually. "I am afraid we shall have to pay away our coolies as few can stand a loss on the article of rice alone of about £ 300 a year for each estate," he wrote. Another planter, Alex Hood, stated that rice cost 9 shillings per bushel on arrival at his estate but was sold to the workers at 7 shillings. P. D. Millie in his letter to the P.A. said the system of issuing rice was advantageous to the planters in that when the influx of workers began too early, the planter could make the workers stay on his estate until regular work became available by offering them rice as a stand-by wage.(26)

Another advantage to the planter was that by giving the workers rice he had obtained on credit, the planter was able to postpone incurring expenditure until the income from the coffee crop became available for a final settlement of accounts. The supply of rice to the estates was controlled by Chetties, the money lenders and financiers of the estate areas. As seen in Chapter One, the chetties performed many of the functions that would otherwise have been performed by banks.(27)

In addition to rice the estates also provided the workers with cumblies or blankets. Initially cumblies were given free but according to Millie the cumblies were not well maintained until the managements began to charge the workers for cumblies which they were allowed to retain unless, or until, they left the estate.(28)

While it was difficult to compare wage rates in Ceylon with those in the sugar colonies owing to the varying costs of living, and other factors, at least one Governor, Sir Henry Ward (1855 to 1860) felt that the coffee planters of Ceylon suffered in any comparison at least as far as regularity in payment of wages was concerned. In an address to the Legislative Council on 19 December 1859 Ward said:

> I am deeply impressed with the belief that more can be done by the Planters, collectively and individually than by the Government; that if the stream of Indian migrants be setting more steadily to Mauritius and the West Indies than to Ceylon,

it is because there is not the same certainty here with regard to wages, the cost of food, and the care of the labourer when sick, that prevails in the sugar growing colonies, where, from the nature of the crop the estate maintains its full complement of labour all the year round, and where arrangements may consequently be made which the fluctuating demands of a coffee estate do not permit of. But means must be found to render the coffee estates equally attractive during the time of its periodical activity, and that there is something wanting in these no friend of the Colony will deny. The leading planters are, I know, convinced of the fact and I can assure them that they rely upon the cordial co-operation of the Government in any well considered scheme of improvement which their experience may suggest.(29)

There was criticism on similar lines by other disinterested persons such as James Steuart, a leading businessman, who had founded George Steuart and Co. in 1835, and in the newspapers. Steuart also stressed the element of uncertainty in the payment of the workers. He stated that one of the main reasons for the want of labour from the neighbouring coast was "the uncertainty attending the payment of coolies on those plantations where the proprietors are in want of money". He wrote that it would be advisable for the Government of Ceylon to assure the Government of Madras that it would provide migrants with the same protection and benefits enjoyed by the permanent inhabitants of the country.(30)

The **Ceylon Examiner** disagreed with the claims of planters that they could not afford to increase wage rates. In 1860 there was a shortage of labour and wages rose to eight pence per day in one district. The **Examiner** commented that estates in that district had not been ruined in the process and stated that there was "no question but that with highly cultivated estates we shall be able to stand the brunt of any increase in the rates of wages". The paper stated that the low rate of wages in Ceylon had resulted in labour being diverted to other channels and said it would be in the interests of the owners of estates to offer even 9 d a day to induce workers to come to Ceylon.(31)

Among the South Indians who did come to Ceylon the preference seems to have been for work on the estates with the assurance of food and housing, rather than for Government departments which did not offer these facilities. In 1864 W. Hall, an Engineer of the Public Works Department, complained that the department was losing men every month to the estates which offered "cheap rice and good lines".(housing).

Hall stated that on the estates men were paid eight pence a day, and women six pence depending on their capacity for work, but they also received rice at eight shillings per bushel when the price in the open market was 13 shillings per bushel. He calculated that on the basis of the worker consuming one bushel per month the effective rate of payment was 101/4 pence per day for men and 81/2 or (1/4) pence per day for women in a working month of 26 days.

William Leake, Secretary of the P.A., on being asked to comment on Hall's observations, asked why Government departments did not provide workers with the same facilities that the estates did. "Let rice be given them at moderate fixed prices and let them be better housed than they are at present. But to raise their wages would be most impolitic," Leake wrote.(32)

In the forties rice had cost the workers around 5 shillings. In the fifties it was between six to eight shillings and the price remained at 8 shillings in the sixties. Wages averaged between seven and eight pence a day. In addition to subsidised rice the workers also grew

vegetables in the vicinity of the lines and some were able to rear poultry or keep a cow. Michael Roberts estimates that in the sixties wages with side-benefits such as the produce of home gardens or dairy products "were adequate for subsistence and for saving as well, though, obviously on the basis of a very low standard of living".(33)

William Sabonadiere stated that while wages in the sixties were generally eight pence a day with the calculation of the loss on the provision of rice, and with the payment per worker that the estates paid to the kangany, the cost to the estates on wages per worker was around ten pence per day. By the sixties it had become a practice on estates to make deductions from pay for irregular attendance or other faults on the part of the workers. Sabonadiere said the workers felt the deduction of wages much more than corporal punishment which was injudicious.(34) While Sabonadiere may have preferred a pay cut to corporal punishments many of the workers, if they were given a choice, would have preferred a beating to a pay cut. Carpen, the kangany, wrote in his autobiography that "An angry master beats us on the back! A quiet master beats us on the belly", meaning that the quiet master fined them and so robbed them of their money and food.(35)

The amounts realised from reductions in pay or stoppages were generally spent on the purchase of medicine for the workers. In 1866 R. J. Corbet suggested that separate accounts should be kept of the amounts thus spent because "Coolies too often think that these stoppages go into the pocket of the Superintendent, an idea which does not tend to elevate his character in their minds, though perhaps quite in accordance with native ideas of honesty".(36)

While there were pay cuts there were also rewards for good attendance and work. In 1869 W. A. Swan who had boasted that he sent workers who did not report for duty on Monday to jail on Tuesday, stated that he paid one or two pence higher per week for those who worked six days a week during the plucking season.(37)

The wages of estate workers continued to be calculated in pence until 1872 when the Government enforced the decimal currency of 100 cents to the rupee. In 1867 Governor Sir Hercules Robinson (1865 to 1872) informed the Colonial Office that the daily wages of men varied from seven pence to nine pence with women and boys earning from 41/2 pence to 71/2 pence. He said they worked an average of five days a week and were able to return to India after one or two years with their savings.(38)

Returns of wage rates collected by a member of the Committee of the Planters' Association and published in 1870 showed considerable variations in wage rates in the various coffee growing districts as follows :

District	Highest rate	Lowest rate	Remarks
Dimbulla	9d.	8.24d.	Returns from 5 estates
Dumbara	8.35d.	7.30d.	" 6 "
Kaduganawa	9.23d.	8.14d.	" 9 "
Hewaheta	10.44d.	7.63d.	" 10 "
Kurunegalle	8.79d.	7.63d.	" 13 "
Pusselawa	9.53d.	7.95d.	" 11 "
Matale East	9.36d.	7.85d.	" 20 "
Haputale	9.98d.	8.72d.	" 12 " (39)

The Kangani whether he worked as a labourer, or whether he functioned only as a supervisor, was a cut above the average worker and received higher wages and special payments. From the earliest days the kanganis received head money or pence money. The system as described by Peter Moir was that estates paid the kanganis a shilling a month for each worker in the task force. Some kanganis preferred the payment of half a penny a day for each worker who reported for work. Moir stated that under this system the kangani tried to ensure that the maximum number reported for work but that in cases when a worker was genuinely ill, the kangani received the half penny as if the man was at work.(40)

Apart from supervision of work in the field, the kangani was generally responsible for discipline in the field and on the lines. Kanganis were often suspected of acting in collusion with workers who shirked work and Millie who was generally sympathetic to labour was critical of the kanganis in this respect. Millie wrote that kanganis benefited by allowing workers to slacken or absent themselves when unpopular tasks such as weeding had to be done. "Report said," wrote Millie, "each got a premium from the cooly for every day he was allowed to slink from his work without detection. If the planter detected a man leaving the field, or in his lines, the worker always had an excuse — that he was going to fetch his cumbly or some implement, or that he had suddenly felt ill." (41)

Millie also noted that while the kangani was the usual intermediary between worker and planter there were occasions when the workers managed to convey something to the planter by talking loud among themselves to be overheard by the planter and if they felt the planter could not understand them, then they resorted to sign language. If rice stocks were low, for instance, the workers would comment on how hard it was to work without food. "Some of them will place the palm of the hand on the pit of the stomach, bend forward and groan heavily but whenever master turns his back and goes off to another working party, all this ceases." (42)

Over the years there was a change from the system of head money to a percentage - generally ten per cent of wages being paid to the kangani for the number of workers under him. In cases where the kangani also worked as a labourer, he generally received five per cent of the total of the wages of the workers under him. In the mid and late seventies, after the introduction of decimal coinage, there was yet another change with estates paying the sub-kangany who directly supervised work four cents per labourer per day, and the head kangany two cents for overall supervision of each worker in the labour force. Although payments were now made in cents and rupees planters continued to refer to the payment made to the sub-kangany as "the customary penny" and the payment to the kangany as "the conventional half penny".(43)

Even in the seventies and eighties planters continued to refer to the wages paid to the workers in terms of pence but wages were calculated, and accounts kept, in rupees and cents. Statistics furnished to the Planters' Association in the late seventies on wage rates in coffee districts were as follows:

Dimbulla - Men, 33 cents to 37 cents; women, 25 cents to 28 cents.

Kotagala - Men, 37 cents; women and big boys, 29 cents.

Haputale - average 34 cents.

Kadugannawa - Men, 33 cents and women 25 cents.

Kotmale - Men, 33 cents to 37 cents; women, 25 cents to 29 cents;

children, in proportion.

Pusselawela - Men (first class), 37 cents; (second class), 32 cents;

women and boys, 35 cents; children, 16 cents.[44]

The coffee industry was in the doldrums in the eighties but the P.A. maintained that despite "the desperate struggle" in which planters were engaged they had not neglected their obligations to their workers. The P.A. claimed that "in the history of British enterprise in Ceylon, the estate labourers as a rule were never in better health and condition, nor were more contented than they are at the present time".[45] However at this stage wages remained static. In 1894 the Silver Currency Commission stated that the rate of wages paid to immigrant workers had not increased for about 18 years but that the total income of families had increased as the tea industry which was replacing the coffee industry offered more work to members of families. The plantation workers were thus slightly better off than those in other employments in which wives and children were unable to work.[46]

Labour relations on the coffee estates were tranquil and there were none of the revolts, uprisings and murders that took place in the sugar colonies, but it is incorrect to state, as the anonymous author of the **Planters' Association Centenary Handbook** did in 1954, that "the first recorded strike took place on 17 April 1939 on Kotiyagala tea estate".[47] There was occasional unrest and there were strikes (even if the word had not come into fashion) in the coffee era as is seen in despatches by Governors, P.A. reports, newspapers, books written by planters, Sessional Papers and research publications.

The "strikes" in the coffee era, according to Kumari Jayewardena, were not strikes in the current sense of independent action by the workers but were more incidents which reflected the dependence of the workers on the kangani, who, in times of labour shortage could move his gang from one estate to another for financial inducements. In describing some strikes in Colombo and elsewhere in the last century Jayewardena states that these early strikes were "sporadic stoppages without organisation or leadership". In the absence of unions in the last century the leadership in the case of the coffee workers would have had to come from the kanagani. Jayewardena states that the earliest labour dispute which had the elements of a modern industrial dispute was a strike by 60 printers at H.W.Cave and Co. in Colombo in 1893.[48]

One of the first signs of unrest on the coffee estates was when Governor Torrington reported in a despatch to the Colonial Office in December 1848 that a portion of the crops on coffee estates would be lost owing to the refusal of the workers to work until arrears of wages were paid.[49]

According to C.T.Arasaratnam, "The first known instance of a strike took place in 1854 when the workers employed on estates struck work successfully demanding the extra penny that was being paid to workers on road work." [50]

S. V. Balasingham sheds more light on this episode in his biography of Governor Ward. According to Balasingham the Government increased the wages of road workers from six pence to seven pence and "Whole gangs of workers struck work on the estates for the same amount of pay and the planters were compelled to raise their wages". Balasingham adds that at the time there were reports of starvation among workers.[51]

"Striking work" was the headline given by a sub-editor of the **Ceylon Observer** to an article by a planter who wrote as "K.C.B." (It was a joke among coffee planters that they were K.C.B.s or Knights of the Coffee Bean). K.C.B. wrote that "If coolies would only strike when there really is some grievance to redress, or wrong to be put right, there would be few who would wish to deprive them of their power to redress their own wrongs. But unfortunately for them, and their employers, they observe no reasonable tactics". K.C.B. had a dig at colleagues who felt that there was nothing wrong in the workers going on strike as this was done by the workers at Home. He stated that in Britain agricultural workers stayed on the job day and night if there was a crop to be rescued and all they expected was a meal, a cup of coffee, or a glass of grog. "Yet ask a coolie (in Ceylon) to go ten yards or do the smallest service in his own time and he will demand his name to be put down, and if it is not, no one will be found to execute the job." [52]

R. W. Jenkins, a coffee planter who compared conditions on estates in the eighties with those that prevailed in the forties when he first arrived in the country, felt that workers "were accustomed to heavier work generally then than now" and added "I have often had them 'strike' against a task of 150 trees which, however, in the end they had to do." [53]

In May, 1864, Patrick Ryan told the P.A. that one of the batches of Ganjam people had struck work and were sent to jail. He said that earlier another batch of Ganjam workers employed by William Sabonadiere had struck work and "bolted back" to their country, or were allowed to go back, as they refused to work and spread false stories about their conditions of employment.[54]

It was probably this experience that made Sabonadiere give fellow coffee planters some advice on how to deal with labour;

> The Canganies and coolies will, when a new master assumes charge, endeavour to gain ascendany over him but he must be firm and just and show no personal fear of them. The consequence of this will be that they may strike and not work for two or three days, but the victory will rest with the master, for they will soon come to their senses when they perceive the material he is made of and that to use a vulgar expression they "cannot come over him." [55]

George Wall, nine times Chairman of the Planters' Association, also warned members against insubordination on the part of the workers. In 1865 he complained that "the coolies are getting a great deal too much of their own way," and warned that if workers were not kept in check "they will soon be virtually the masters." At that stage planters were experiencing difficulty if getting their regular workers to undertake weeding without contracts for the job. Wall stated that "On estates where these contracts exist I have observed almost uniformly that independence and insolence of the coolies was rampant." [56]

There was a rather cryptic statement by Governor Robinson in a despatch to the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos on 28 June 1867, in which he stated that he had been given to understand "that intimidation, combinations, and attacks upon overseers of Tamil labourers on coffee estates are of daily occurrence though every effort is made to prevent these manifestations from being known to the public." As attacks on kanganis by workers never became a problem on coffee estates Robinson may have been exaggerating some isolated incidents which a personal friend had narrated to him.(57)

The coffee workers were never known to be demonstrative but there was at least one occasion when they demonstrated publicly in Kandy, and the cause of the protest was a shortage of rice in 1866. William Leake who was Secretary of the P.A. at the time described the incident as the only demonstration involving some violence on the part of the coffee workers. He recalled that when planters and others were at a Sunday morning service at St. Paul's Church they suddenly heard "an unseemly uproar outside." A message was sent to F. Templer the Government Agent, and when he arrived he found estate workers breaking into rice shops whose owners were suspected of hoarding rice to force prices up. Templer ordered the rice merchants to sell their stocks at the prevailing price and averted further trouble. The Government ordered extra supplies of rice from India and Burma and a shortage was averted.(58)

While a number of planters were killed while conveying cash for the workers payments both in the coffee, and tea periods, there were no attacks on planters by workers for disciplinary reasons. There was however a case in which a planter, John G. Falconer, was shot in September 1866 by a kangani and at the trial it transpired that Falconer had been a strict disciplinarian. In opening the case for the prosecution, Van Dort, the prosecuting counsel said that before Falconer assumed office as Superintendent at Hantanne Estate, Kandy, discipline had been very lax with the kanganis and workers having their own way. When Falconer restored discipline on the estate the kangani who was accused of his murder was alleged to have told him — "Who is to know how many days you will remain on the estate. A great many masters have come and gone and they were all satisfied with my work."(59) Pippet the police historian, provided the additional information that Falconer was the third superintendent to die on the estate in 1866. His two predecessors had died of cholera.(60)

It is difficult to make any generalised statements about the adequacy, or otherwise of wages in view of the contradictory and conflicting evidence. That a large number of workers saved money is known but the savings may have been at personal sacrifice. K.M. De Silva states that the coffee worker "often stinted on his food to save part of his earnings, living on herbs, roots and even carrion flesh all of which made him very susceptible to disease."(61)

Ferguson on the other hand explained the workers ability to save by citing family earnings as wives and children were also often employed. Ferguson stated (in 1874) that the total earnings of a family could be £ 5 and a "good, steady" worker could save money at this level of income. Ferguson stated that once the Medical Aid Ordinance of 1872 became fully operative "few of the labouring classes in the world would be better paid and cared for than the coolies coming from South India to work and collect rupees on the coffee estates of Ceylon."(62)

A similar roseate view of conditions on the estates was taken by Major Walter Clutterbruck who visited the Island at a time when the daily wage was six pence. He said this was "so enormous" that the workers did not work for more than five days. He noted that the children had "enormous tummies" as a result of living perpetually on quantities of rice" and wore ornaments apparently of gold and silver." (63)

In 1867 Governor Robinson stated that the workers were well-off to the extent of becoming owners of land. He stated that while most workers returned to India with their savings there were also "many who originally came over to work on the estates and have become settlers and have acquired landed property." (64)

Towards the end of the coffee period Sir Muttu Coomara Swamy, who represented the Ceylon Tamils in the Legislative Council from 1861 to 1879, referred to a tour he had made of the plantation districts and stated that the workers were "exceedingly well off". He stated that there were cases of suffering "here and there" but generally he had found that conditions among the workers were "excellent". (65)

The other side of the coin was that coffee workers came to Ceylon in debt and remained in debt. As seen earlier, the workers were indebted to the recruiting kanganis for their travel expenses and often also for the settlement of debts before leaving for Ceylon. On the estate the first person the worker turned to in time of need was the kangani but the kanganis charged such usurious rates of interest that workers often ran away from estates to escape having to repay debts. P. D. Millie states that the kangani charged one rupee per month for a loan of Rs. 10 which worked out to 120 % per annum. The workers' wages, or a good part of them, went to paying the interest. Millie stated that on pay days the wages went "from the pay table into the well bulged out waistcoat of the kangani".

Millie poses the question "Why was this permitted?" and provides an answer:

> He (the kangany) had advanced money on the coast; if the cash went into the hands of the cooly, he would never get it out of him; his wages must be arrested at the pay table before he could possibly touch it. He, the kangany was responsible to "Master" for the whole of the advances and such steps must be taken to secure them. The master would say no more. Visions of refunded "Coast Advances" which would no doubt take place tomorrow filled his eyes.

Millie goes on to state that when the planters did in fact demand the return of money from the kangany to meet some urgent expenditure such as payment to the carters, the kangany often had excuses that the parents of a worker in South India were "starving," and that money was being sent to them, or that the grocer in the closest town was insisting on payment for supplies to the workers, or some such excuse. (66)

A worker who did not borrow from the kangany could only turn to the Chetties, or professional money lenders whose rates of interest were even higher than those demanded by the kanganies. In 1855, N.G. Maclellan told the P.A. that the chetties demanded double the amount originally loaned. "On objection being made, an action in Court is the consequence where a judgement by default is generally obtained should the poverty of the cooly prevent his paying." (67)

The most recent research on the economic status of plantation workers has been done by Eric Meyer, a French economic historian, and Asoka Bandarage, a Sri Lankan.

Meyer states that "Having arrived at the plantation in debt, the immigrant died in debt; his economic universe was one of complete dependence, his social position that of a pure proletarian." Meyer states that even if the prospective migrant was not in debt in South India when he decided to go to Ceylon his debt bondage began the moment he accepted employment in Ceylon. If, as was often the case, he owed money to various persons when he decided to go to Ceylon, then those debts had to be settled by the recruiting kangani. Travel expenses and preparations for the journey involved expense, and if the worker was a married man he would want to leave behind some money for his wife and children. Meyer states that the planters often held back wages to ensure that the workers stayed on for the entire season until the coffee had been gathered, and partially processed, for despatch from the estate.(68)

Asoka Bandarage states that the labour market was dominated by cash advances rather than wages, and this tied the worker to the plantation. Most workers were already in debt when they arrived and the cycle of debt bondage was embodied in what later became known as the **tundu** system. The **tundu** was literally a chit, or piece of paper, on which a worker's debts to his employer were noted, and it acquired the nature of a passport in that a prospective employer would expect a worker to provide a **tundu** from the previous employer that the applicant for work was free from debt.(69)

Ordinance No 16 of 1884 contained a provision by which notices of actions for recovery of wages filed by the workers, or prosecutions by the Attorney General for non-payment of wages, were first published in the **Government Gazette**. Some planters felt the procedure was humiliating as such notices were picked up and published by the newspapers in their local and overseas editions circulated in the United Kingdom. L.H. Kelly who was the first planter to be prosecuted under the Ordinance said anyone with a grudge against a planter could defame him by inserting such a notice in the **Gazette**. In his own case (which he explained) he had felt "like a sort of co-respondent." He said he was not against the workers being given their dues but he felt workers should not be able to chastise employers in an unfair manner. Kelly did not press the case for representations to the Government after several members said it was more advantageous to them to know of impending prosecutions than to suddenly find themselves being prosecuted in court and Kelly himself was acquitted in the case filed against him.(70)

CHAPTER NINE

"GET ME MY WHIP"

Repression and Resistance on the Coffee Estates

The sting of the whip sears through the pages of Hugh Tinker's narrative of life on the sugar plantations of Demerera, Trinidad, St. Lucia, and particularly Mauritius, where a Royal Commission recorded that 50 Indian workers had died of rupture of the spleen between the years 1867 and 1872 alone.[1] In India workers on indigo, and later tea plantations, were often flogged to death by planters whose only punishment — if civil action was instituted — never went beyond fines.[2] In Malaya a worker who was compelled to eat human excrement died of dysentery but a medical officer said it could not be established that the excrement which the worker had been forced to eat, was infectious. In another case a worker was starved to death in the stable of his employer's home just 50 yards from a police station.[3] The cruelties inflicted on workers on plantations from Java to Alabama, or from Cuba to Australia, defy summary. In every country in the world the history of the working class is awash with blood.

How did the workers on the coffee plantations of Ceylon fare? William Knighton provided more than a clue. "Every man is a magistrate on his own estate you know... and there fore as long as the man is working for you, you have a right to do what you like with him — that is anything short of killing."[4] These lines from Knighton's **Forest Life in Ceylon** have been widely quoted, but invariably without reference to the fact that the book was a novel, and not a factual account of life on a coffee plantation. The words in question were spoken by Siggins, a coffee planter, at a bachelor party. It is impossible to establish the proportions of fact and fiction that went into Knighton's work, and Knighton himself was both a coffee planter and an author. He apparently came to Ceylon in his late teens. According to Yasmine Gooneratne he was only 22 when his **History of Ceylon** was published in 1845, the year in which he became Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society branch established in Colombo that year. He became Editor of the **Ceylon Herald** which was started in 1838, and **Forest Life in Ceylon** was published in London in 1854.[5] Knighton was evidently sympathetic to labour as is seen in his statement that

> An amazing amount of sympathy has been lately wasted by the British public on the condition of slaves in America — that public has but to turn to a portion of the world with which it is more intimately connected, in order to discover abuses as gross; methods of life as repulsive, tyranny as flagrant, as any that exists on the other side of the Atlantic. In India all these are to be found, if the inquiry be but made.[6]

As Knighton has indicated each planter was monarch of the area he surveyed, and with planters and police officers being drawn from the same ruling class, the treatment of members of the work forces would have depended almost entirely on the character, and even idiosyncracies, of individual planters. In the earliest years of the coffee industry even some of the planters did not hold their colleagues in esteem, and

Government officials also criticised the planters. K.M. De Silva cites a pioneer planter as saying "In the course of time all the riff-raff of the round world came here... And we came to have a floating scum of coffee planters." William Boyd wrote of colleagues who treated their workers with "disgraceful injustice and cruelty." De Silva cites two Government officials, who are not named, as also being very critical of the planters. One of them stated that conditions on the coffee estates were as bad as those that had prevailed under plantation slavery in the West Indies, while the other compared the plight of the coffee worker to "Egyptian bondage." The most highly placed Government official who criticised the planters was the Colonial Secretary, Sir James Emerson-Tennent, who stated that "the conditions of the coolies on the estates and their treatment by their employers was not in every instance, or in every particular, such as humanity, or even policy, would have required in order to encourage and secure a continuation of their resort to Ceylon." Tennent's proposals for the appointment of Protectors of Coolies, as seen earlier, did not materialise.(7)

The individual worker could only have judged his employer on the basis of his personal experience. Generally the attitude of the worker to the planter was a mix of awe and affection and fear and faith. Individual planters had their own ideas and methods of maintaining discipline among their workers.

Sir Richard Morgan, Queen's Advocate, visited R. B. Tytler on Pallekelle Estate and was impressed by Tytler's scheme of leaving offending workers to be tried by a jury of elders who recommended what action, if any, should be taken by Tytler. There were some cases which Tytler decided on his own, and these, according to Morgan, were those which did not "admit of publicity". Tytler told Morgan that he had himself caned a kangani who was carrying on an intrigue with a woman, and he also caned two women whom he suspected of infidelity to their husbands. Morgan described Tytler as "a power, a great power; his influence for good is unbounded".(8)

Tytler's son, W. A. Tytler, who was a tea planter, in recalling his childhood wrote of how his father had "Fun with the coolies". One incident which Tytler (jnr) described was that

> He would first call the pody (small) coolies and tell them to go and catch a girl who was drying her hair with the others. Off they went with shouts and the girl angrily resisted, but in the end was captured and dragged before us. If the captured one did not resist the whole lot were punished by not getting a "Carriwad" (dried fish) all round. There was a big room full of carriwads and after each hunt the lot got a chit for a fish apiece if they fought well.
>
> The game became more and more serious as the age of the performers increased, and when it came to young girls capturing a big woman, blows sometimes were exchanged, and if there was real good sport, they got two fish each. It was very funny no doubt but we boys got bored over it and wanted to get back to the bungalow after our work ... the "patriarchal system" had many good points in it and the planter used to be very much in touch with his coolies.

Tytler (jnr) wrote that the severest punishments were reserved for workers who "bolted," or those who tried to "crimp" workers. He said that generally planters did not go to the courts in such cases but settled matters on the estate. When attempts were made

to "crimp" workers, his father's main concern was to know the name of the "**Dorai**" (master or planter) who was trying to steal labour. If this information was not forthcoming.

> My father would take a chair and the coolie would be held down face downward with a coolie squatting at his head and another at his feet and then the process of squeezing the information began. "Soloo" — (Tell me) whack, whack, whack, a pause, "Soloo" and then more whacks. If the coolie still held out the process was adjourned to the next day when it was renewed. Two, or sometimes three days, elapsed before the information was forthcoming. Then the **dorai** if he was really guilty, had a bad time of it.[9]

P.D. Millie wrote that his own kangani asked him no to worry about going to court as "Master's decision and pleasure are to us better than any court. Ramasami is a fool — just punish him at once —Master please give him **nalla odai** (a good beating) and have done with it." Millie wrote that when a worker was brought to him for punishment he would "pretend to be very angry," and "give him a good licking, but the blows did not fall very heavy; and the culprit screaming out as loud as he could bawl, seemed to satisfy, or rather satisfied, the complaining party".

Millie records how workers were used as beasts of burden and relates a case which ended in death.

> A string of coolies were carrying coffee down the steep face of Karagastalawa estate; one of them dropped as if he had been shot. He was dead; the bag of coffee containing two and a half bushels, had somehow suddenly shifted, giving his neck a sharp turn or twist, and completely broken it.

Millie wrote that the workers disliked having to carry bags of coffee, or rice and generally tried to avoid the more distant plantations, or those without cart roads where the workers had to carry the coffee leaving the estate, and the rice being brought in for the workers. Millie noted a change among the workers over the years with their becoming less submissive to the planter and resorting "to the law on the most trivial pretext." Millie also felt that the workers had one advantage over the planter. The planter almost always had no colleague, or friend, on the estate whom he consult over any problem. The worker had only to step into the "lines" where there was no lack of advice. He said this resulted in workers being instigated to say, or do, things which they would not otherwise have said or done.[10]

The role of the coffee worker as a beast of burden was also commented on by the author of **A Life of the Coffee Planter** who stated that coffee workers had to carry 35 pounds of beef, bread, and "other luxuries" for the planter on their heads. He stated that his own bearer had a bump on his head which came of carrying the heavy beef box.[11]

R.W.J. (Jenkins) stated that the working day on the estate began with the beating of a tom-tom (drum) or the sound of a bugle. When work ended at 4 p.m. too a horn was blown to indicate the end of the day's work. Jenkins like all other planters deplored "the restlessness of certain Government officials in framing laws for the cooly," as this tended to sap the humanity of the planter when he felt he was being harassed.

Jenkins stated that the employment of boys and girls from the age of eight or nine would arouse the wrath of "Mrs. Grundy" and speakers at Exeter Hall, but what they

forgot was that in the East a girl was "a woman at thirteen, a mother at fourteen, and a grandmother before thirty". In the case of males a boy at nine or ten was "mentally as precocious and forward as our boys at double that age," and that young men of twenty often had a large family to support which they did.[12]

Frederick Lewis, author of **Sixty Years in Ceylon**, was the son of a coffee planter who came to Ceylon in 1844. Recalling his childhood on his father's coffee estate, Lewis described how workers came to his father with all sorts of problems or complaints. His father looked into these matters and, where he felt it necessary, thrashed the wrong-doers. "I am not exaggerating when I say," wrote Lewis, "that the coolies loved their masters and would go to the world's end for them." Lewis also stated that after those detected trying to crimp workers had been beaten, they were drummed out of the estates with the beat of tom-toms.[13]

By around the 1860's the jury system, or trial by peers, had become fairly widespread. Ferguson reproduced a letter from a Ceylon planter to a friend explaining how the system worked. The Ceylon planter stated that trial by jury "saves the planter much trouble, it enlists the intelligence and good feeling of the men on the side of law and order; in fact it educates them and teaches them to govern themselves". He stated that flogging was the punishment only for insubordination, or for using indecent language, and he had never had occasion to flog the same man twice. The planter stated that he had come to know of the fine system when a man came to his table and put some shillings on it. On inquiry he was told of the incident that had led to the fine. The planter stated that appeals against the decisions of the juries were very rare and that as the accused did not know until the last moment who would serve on the jury, there was no attempt at bribing or influencing the members of the juries. The juries consisted of seven persons nominated by the Conductor. The cases were tried in the lines and the decisions were conveyed to the planter the following morning. Fines ranged from one to seven shillings and the money was used in purchasing "little luxuries" for the sick. Floggings generally consisted of six or seven strokes with the kangani's rattan.

The planter stated that his mere presence was sufficient to restore order among the workers if there was any trouble among them. He had noticed that a sudden hush would come over "15 or 20 half-drunk coolies squabbling in the lines, when the planter suddenly walks in and sits down in the middle of them. How intensely silent they become".[14]

Carpen, the kangani whose autobiography was recorded by a planter, came to Ceylon as a boy worker and recalled some of the beatings that he had experienced in his youth. On one occasion he and three friends had plucked some guavas off a tree in the planter's bungalow. They were summoned and asked to confess, but maintained they were innocent.

> Then we were cruelly thrashed. Our legs and arms were covered with cuts and warts and we could hardly get to the lines. Pitchai was covered with blood because being the largest he tried to resist and angered the Master more. For four days we were unable to go to work and all this for a small handful of fruit.

Carpen stated that it was probably not the value of the fruit that made their master angry but their "defiant impertinence". He added that no impertinence was intended. "We

were boys and boys are boys all over the world." Carpen stated that beatings were a "custom" and no one complained. Some who felt they had been unfairly or unjustly beaten simply ran away from the estate.[15]

Thefts of coffee became a problem in the sixties and seventies and the planters resorted to their time-honoured custom. Many planters, however, felt that flogging was too mild a punishment. When the Planters' Association sent a questionnaire on the subject to its members some of the "remedies" suggested were hanging, transportation, shooting with small shot, or salt, and lynch law. In cases which were taken to court the magistrates imposed sentences of corporal punishment which were carried out in the court premises. Some planters wanted these sentences to be inflicted on the estates in the presence of fellow-workers.

Under pressure from the planting lobby the Government introduced the Coffee Stealing Ordinance (No 13 of 1876) in which the accepted principle that a man was innocent until proved guilty was abandoned. Under the ordinance anyone in possession of "green coffee" was considered guilty of theft unless he could prove that it was not stolen, or not stolen property. The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Carnarvon, expressed distress over the enactment of the legislation and stated that it was being approved only because there was already provision in the Ceylon laws for the Governor to review all sentences of flogging. He hoped this provision of law would not be overlooked. Mr. (later Sir) Ponnambalam Ramanathan who made his maiden speech in the Legislative Council on the Bill said: "The lash on the guilty cuts not merely the guilty but even the innocent," and declared that the provisions of the Ordinance were "plainly repugnant to law and justice".[16]

Corporal punishment, and other forms of ill treatment of workers, figured only very occasionally in correspondence between Governors and Secretaries of State for the Colonies. In 1867 Sir Hercules Robinson wrote to Earl Carnarvon that there were occasional complaints of harsh treatment by planters but that such complaints were very rare and that generally relations between the planters and workers were satisfactory.[17] In 1872 Governor Sir William Gregory wrote that cases of ill treatment of workers were very rare, and that when such cases occurred there was strong condemnation by the planting community which felt that any malpractices were "a slur on their own character for justice and humanity". He said planters did not want to get a bad reputation as this would make recruitment difficult.[18] In January 1876 the **Times of Ceylon** reported that when a deputation from the Anti Slavery Society had interviewed the Secretary of State for the Colonies they were assured that any Europeans living in the colonies who assaulted natives would be severely dealt with.[19]

Whether cases of assault on workers which resulted in death occurred, and were hushed up without the Police being informed, or even with Police connivance, is not known, but in 1876 a planter was charged with manslaughter, convicted, and sentenced to imprisonment.

Lionel Foster Pilkington, Superintendent of Yattawatta Estate, Matale, was charged with manslaughter of Karpanan, a worker on his estate, before the Supreme Court sitting in criminal session at Kandy. Sir George Anderson, Chief Justice, was the presiding judge. Of the 13 jurors eight were planters. After Pilkington had pleaded "not

guilty" the Deputy Queen's Advocate, Owen Morgan, opened the case for the prosecution.

Morgan said Karpanan and another worker had been asked to clean the floor of Pilkington's bungalow by him before he left the house in the morning to inspect the plantation. When he returned to his bungalow at about 10 a.m. for breakfast the two men had not completed the job. Pilkington told the men that if they did not hurry up and complete the job they would be kept at it even till late until they finished the work. Karpanan is then reported to have said, "We will do as much as we can. We do not want to deceive (or cheat) our master." Pilkington was evidently annoyed that a labourer should have answered him and threw a bottle at Karpanan. The bottle did not strike Karpanan, but he fled. Pilkington chased after him, caught him, and struck him some blows. Pilkington then dragged Karpanan back to the bungalow, holding him by the hair of his head. As they were entering the house Karpanan slipped and fell into a drain. Pilkington, still holding Karpanan by his hair, took him to the room where he had been cleaning the floor, and asked him to get on with the job. Karpanan said he was very ill and died shortly afterwards. The postmortem revealed that Karpanan had an enlarged spleen but was otherwise in good health.

Viren, a worker on the estate, testified that when Karpanan answered Pilkington, the planter had told him, "Why do you stand before me and answer me back?" and then threw a bottle at Karpanan. Viren also said that when Pilkington brought Karpanan back to the bungalow from the garden he had said, "Roguish dog.- will you work or not?". Karpanan had said he would work. Pilkington had then said, "The roguish dog is cheating me (shamming). Get me my whip." Viren said he provided the whip and Pilkington struck Karpanan with it.

Allegan, another worker on the estate, testified that Pilkington had kicked Karpanan in the ribs when he was lying on his back. Allegan said, "The Master took off deceased's cloth and kicked him in the private parts. Deceased passed water and excrement". Allegan said Pilkington had then called the bungalow servants and told them, "This dog is shamming; remove him to the verandah and pour water on him."

After addresses by the counsel, and the judge's summing up, the jury took only ten minutes to consider their verdict. The foreman, O. W. Fuller, told court, "We find the prisoner guilty, but strongly recommend him to mercy." After Pilkington had said he had nothing to say the judge sentenced him to imprisonment with hard labour for eighteen months.[20]

The planting community felt that the sentence was too severe and this view was also editorially expressed by the **Times of Ceylon**

> The strict impartiality of British laws has been more than vindicated, and the Indian Government which keeps a strict watch over every proceeding which bears upon the interest of the Tamil immigrant cannot fail to be satisfied that their subjects meet with every consideration in whatever relations they may be placed with Europeans.

The editorial went on to state that a sentence of three months' imprisonment "would have met all the requirements of the case". The paper published some of the letters it received on the subject. "Fiat Justitia" in his letter stated that when one Reid of

Haldamulla assaulted some workers who were themselves assaulting another worker, he was charged with assault in court and fined Rs. 30. The workers paid his fine. Another correspondent drew attention to the different way in which Pilkington had been treated from that of Fuller, a planter in India, who under similar circumstances had only been charged with causing hurt and was fined Rs. 30. Another planter advised colleagues not to strike a worker anywhere "except on the head" and recommended the following motto:

> Fine moral suasions a humbug
> There's naething persuades like a rap i'th'jug.[21]

Governor Sir William Gregory also felt that the sentence was "undoubtedly a severe one," but added that the Chief Justice "was determined to put an end by the severity of this sentence to such high-handed acts of violence." [22]

While there were planters who inflicted corporal punishment on women, as seen in the case of Robert Tytler, ill treatment of women seems to have been generally by way of sexual harassment, and this, according to Carpen, the kangani, also caused great distress to husbands, parents, brothers, and sisters of the women involved. Carpen stated that the most that happened to planters who were known to be sexually abusing female workers was that they were sent to some other estate. Carpen stated that one day his wife fell at his feet and told her that the planter on their estate had taken liberties with her. The planter concerned had later told his superior that he had only acted in fun, and had not been **perily** (flirtatious). This planter too was transferred to another estate with a reprimand. Carpen had a word of advice for planters:

> I trust that the younger generation of today will take warning from this. They do not know how coolies resent any liberties taken with their women. They do not say anything even when they know it, but that is because a cooly, as a rule, hates any scandal, or else he is afraid that his powerful master may ruin him in some way.[23]

Were the coffee planters of Ceylon better or worse than their counterparts elsewhere? William Knighton posed the question and provided this answer:

> As a class, I believe, the Ceylon planters were kind and humane, as I have no doubt the Carolina and Mississipi cotton planters are — but there were Legrees and Hayleys (characters in Uncle Tom's Cabin) amongst them too, and always will be as long as human nature continues as it is. What redress could the poor coolie for instance have against his European master who ill treated him miles away in the jungle, far from a magistrate, or a court, with all his fellows up in arms against him less they should lose their employment, and his wife and family at the complete mercy of his persecutor or that persecutor's assistants? In such cases there must be despotism on a small scale, and wherever that exists there will occasionally be cruelty and injustice.[24]

William Digby, who like Knighton was a journalist but lacked Knighton's background as a coffee planter, felt that workers in Ceylon were treated better than in other British colonies and he cited the fact that there were no questions about conditions on the coffee plantations of Ceylon in the British Parliament.

> It is the proud boast of Ceylon, who has fully half a million "foreign" labourers working on her hillsides and in her low country stores, that she has never engaged the attention of the Houses of Parliament in respect of the treatment of her immigrants. Seldom do questions have to be put in her Legislative Council as

to alleged miscarriages of justice in which the cooly is the suppliant. Among the colonies of the British Empire where immigrant labour is employed she wears "the white flower of a blameless life". The writer pens the foregoing only after careful inquiry and if he himself says so, diligent research.[25]

The only course of action left to workers who were ill treated was to leave the estate on which they were working, and hope for employment elsewhere, but the workers' unhappiness was not always due to ill treatment by the planter. The worker was also liable to severe abuse and ill treatment by his immediate superior, the kangani. What happened in the lines would not even have reached the planter as the kangani was the intermediary and channel of communication. A. R. King, when he was District Judge, Badulla, went so far as to state that "Very rarely does a personal dislike to the Manager or to the estate itself operate as a motive for such a proceeding." (desertion). King said that discontent which led to desertion could invariably be traced to the kangani.[26]

CHAPTER TEN

MEN WITHOUT WOMEN

The Bleeding Statistics

"Statistics don't bleed," said Arthur Koestler, and on the surface they certainly don't, but the Rev. C. F. Andrews, the British missionary who toiled in India came closer to the reality that numerals conceal when he spoke of "the horror of statistical tables" in relation to matters such as the proportion of women to men, convictions, and suicides among migrant workers.(1)

Men. Women. Children. These were the categories into which the South Indians who came to Ceylon to work on the coffee plantations were divided. Planters, officials, journalists, and other concerned individuals pondered incessantly over the numbers involved but despite the prevailing puritanical ethic of the Victorian era, there is nothing in their statistics to indicate the connubial status of the adults involved. Children, as seen in the chapter on wages, were sometimes paid according to height which was taken as an index of age, but no questions were asked from the adults about their marital status, and no answers were recorded. What mattered was the "cooly's" output and efficiency, and not whether he was married or not. The "coolies" consoled themselves with a saying "What wife for a cooly?" (2)

As seen elsewhere in this book the overall statistics of arrivals and departures are suspect but allowing for inaccuracies it is still abundantly clear that the overwhelming majority of men had no wives. The marital status of the women who came is unclear although the majority were probably the wives, or mistresses of the men. The disproportion between women and men was highest in the early years of the industry but at no stage in the history of the industry was the ratio better than one woman to every four men.

The earliest available official breakdown of the numbers of men, women, and children who arrived relates to the first five months of 1839 but the Government Agent (Dyke) who submitted the figures to the Colonial Secretary in Colombo (Anstruther) warned that they related only to arrivals and departures at Talaimannar, whereas there were arrivals and departures at other points too.

Dyke provided figures for each month from January to May 1839, with the number of trips involved and the numbers of children also given.

January 1839

	No. of trips.	Men.	Women.	Children.
Arrivals.	3	64	13	14
Departures	4	91	10	4

The figures work out to approximately one woman arriving for every five men.

February 1839

Arrivals	7	265	31	16
Departures	7	270	35	10

In this month there was only one woman to almost nine men among those who arrived.

March 1839

	No. of trips.	Men	Women	Children
Arrivals	6	250	14	7
Departures	6	314	13	9

The proportion of women to men dropped even more steeply to one to every 18 men approximately.

April 1839

Arrivals	6	329	36	15
Departures	6	224	20	18

An improvement this month to one woman to around every nine men.

May 1839

Arrivals	7	294	42	13
Departures	6	215	21	13

The ratio in this month was exactly one to seven.[3]

Too much significance cannot be attached to figures that cover only a period of five months but they provide a useful snapshot of time and place. Even so experienced an official as W.C. Twynam, who was an Assistant Government Agent in the North, in the eighteen forties, tended to exaggerate when he gave evidence before a Commission many years later and recalled "the miserable gangs of coolies of 1843 and 1845 with one or two women to fifty or a hundred men, strangers in a strange land, ill-fed, ill-clothed, eating any garbage they came across..." (4)

C. Kondappi, the Indian historian, has referred to the Indian Government's indifference to the question of a sufficient proportion of female to male emigrants which he says was "one of the serious defects of early Indian emigration policy." (5) Official policy in India certainly differed in relation to Ceylon from policy in respect of emigration to Mauritius, and the West Indies. There was concern among officials in Madras, Calcutta, and London about ensuring

at least some minimum proportion of women to men among Indian migrants to the sugar colonies but Ceylon was a different proposition, both in respect of its proximity, as well as in the fact that migrants for employment on the coffee plantations were free to travel between the two countries as they wished, unlike in the sugar colonies where they went out as indentured workers on contracts of service that generally ranged from three to five years. It was only as late as 1922, that the Government of India stipulated that bachelors should not constitute more than one in every five of groups emigrating to Ceylon.(6)

Kondappi cites K. Natesa Iyer, the pioneer trade unionist among Indian plantation workers in the present century, as stating that even in the earliest stages of emigration to Ceylon coffee planters tried to ensure permanent labour forces by encouraging workers to bring their wives and children.(7) C.R. Rigg, the coffee planter who wrote a series of articles on coffee cultivation in Ceylon in the Examiner in 1852 puts it rather differently when he says that some of those who came to Ceylon even in the earliest years came with the intention of staying for a long period and therefore brought their wives and children.(8) It seems quite probable that both developments took place. Some planters may have encouraged those who came alone to return with their wives and children, while others may have come to Ceylon with their wives and children with the idea of spending at least a few years in Ceylon on the basis of what they had heard from those who had been to the Island.

Throughout the coffee period the Fergusons kept very close tabs on arrivals and departures utilising both official statistics, as well as data from other sources, to which they had access as journalists, and they provide a wealth of information and insights on the ratio of the sexes among the migrant workers in Ceylon. Thus Ferguson in 1874 commented that while the proportion of men and women could be regulated in emigration to other colonies such as Mauritius, Ceylon was different in that it was "socially and geographically a part of India and the immigration a perfectly voluntary process." Ferguson also made the point that the nature of the work on coffee plantations was such that men were preferred, and that women were employed only in lighter chores such as weeding.(9)

In **Sri Lanka. A Handbook of Historical Statistics** Patrick Peebles has published a detailed breakdown of the men, women, and children who arrived from South India both in the coffee and tea periods based on statistics from Ferguson's **Directories.** The first **Directory** was published in 1859 but A.M. Ferguson who became a Co-Editor of the **Observer** in 1846 was **au fait** with the statistics dating back to the thirties. Ferguson's statistics for the 1840's as reproduced by Peebles were as follows.

Year	Men	Women	Children
1843	35,195	957	448
1844	74,840	1,181	724
1845	75,526	698	177
1846	41,862	330	125
1847	44,085	1,638	417
1848	29,936	1,685	551
1849	27,732	1,430	268
1850	37,155	1,818	449[10]

According to these figures a total of 366,331 men arrived between the years 1843 and 1850, while the total number of women was 9,737, which meant that the ratio of women to men was in the region of one in 38.

Some statistics which Sir James Emerson-Tennent, the Colonial Secretary furnished in his famous despatch of 19 April 1847 reflect the divergent and unreliable nature of statistics of the period. According to Tennent 1,971 men and 182 women arrived in 1839 which worked out to one woman for around 11 men. In respect of 1845 Tennent stated that 66,557 men and 642 women arrived which meant a ratio of one woman to roughly 104 men. The figures Tennent gave for 1846 were 34,683 men and 257 women or only one women among about 135 men! Tennent did not comment on the sex ratios as such but coming as they did from the Chief Executive official of the Government the figures illustrate the imbalance in the sexes among arrivals[11] (Twynam was not exaggerating after all).

Ferguson's figures for the fifties showed an improvement in the ratio of the sexes which averaged around one woman to every eight men, with the total number of men who arrived between 1851 and 1859 being 448,522, and the total number of women who arrived in the fifties being 54,580. The highest number of women who arrived in any single year was in 1858 when 16,172 women arrived against 75,172 men.[12]

In 1865 Ferguson commented in the **Directory** on the increasing numbers of women who were arriving in the Island and also remaining in the Island. He stated that in 1864, 63,087 men and 14,214 women had arrived. The numbers who departed in that year which were 54,724 men, and 8,526 women, showed that both men and women were remaining in the Island in larger numbers than before.[13]

Ferguson's figures for the sixties, as reproduced by Peebles, again showed an improvement in the sex ratio from one in eight in the fifties, to one in six in the sixties. According to Ferguson's figures a total of 495,507 men; 76,484 women, and 29,125 children arrived in the years 1860 to 1869.[14]

The percentages of women and men arriving in the Island at this stage were discussed at a meeting of the Immigrant Cooly Commission when M.H. Thomas who represented Alstons, Scott and Co. who were both estate agents and shipping agents, appeared before the Commission. Thomas was asked if he felt that more women and children would come to Ceylon if the Tuticorin-Colombo sea route was popularised. He replied that the number of women and children who came to Ceylon depended to a large extent on the kanganis who went to South India to recruit labour, and also on the class of men selected by the kangani. Asked whether 30 per cent would be a fair percentage for women and children in the parties arriving in Ceylon Thomas replied "I like to see a fair percentage of women in my estates." Asked whether the number of women coming to Ceylon had increased in recent years Thomas replied "Yes I am glad to say it has... I do not consider any estate well supplied with labour if it has a few women."[15]

In the 1870's there were comments by planters on the imbalance between men and on estates and of some of the consequences. There was concern at this stage over the reluctance shown by estate workers to being admitted to hospitals when ill both among men and women. When the matter was discussed in the Planters' Association A.F. Harper

of the Dimbulla district said that the presence of a large number of bachelors in the "lines" was one of the main reasons why married men were reluctant to go to hospital even when they were seriously ill. "If we consider that a man may have to leave his wife among a lot of bachelor friends when he goes to hospital we need not travel far to find a very sufficient reason why coolies are so averse to be sent to hospital. The same applies to the women," he wrote.[16]

Another facet of estate life which planters commented on was the temporary nature of relationships between some of the men and women working on the estates. J.P. Ross of the Badulla district stated in reply to a questionnaire that "When asked by his master about his family arrangements Ramasamy will in most cases reply that his spouse **de facto** is on the Coast and that the 'Carpai' who has the honour of cooking his '**Shore**'on the estate is his better half only pro-tem". [17] Carpai is how Ross rendered Karuppaie, a common name among estate women. (**Shore** is Ross's rendition of **Soru** or Tamil for rice).

The highest number of women who arrived in any single year was registered in 1877. While 121,743 men had arrived in 1876, the figure for male arrivals dropped to 106,796 in 1877. The reverse happened in the case of women with the number of women arriving increasing from 28,670 in 1876, to 41,786 in 1877. The overall ratio for the seventies which was one in four was the best in the coffee period. Between 1870 and 1879 the total arrivals were 766,966 men; 191,796 women and 82,690 children. The eighties were years of decline in the industry and the sex ratio dropped to one woman for every five men. The total arrivals between 1880 and 1890 were 486,447 men; 95,125 women, and 42,592 children.[18]

The statistics of the shortage of women begin to bleed when the problems that flowed from it are considered. Prostitution; venereal disease, and infanticide were the chief consequences of the lack of women.

In describing the types of Indian women who accompanied migrant men to the West, Hugh Tinker says they included widows; women who had been deserted by their husbands for infertility or other reasons; prostitutes; entertainers such as dancers whose fortunes had declined; women who had been kidnapped, or women who had left home on pilgrimages. Together they constituted "a sorry sisterhood." [19]

Most, if not all these types, would have come to Ceylon too. A Ceylon planter writing to a friend in Madras stated that many of the women who had come to Ceylon had been "brought over for a purpose little better than prostitution." [20]

The coffee workers of the nineteenth century, like the tea workers of the twentieth century, were endogamous, and while there are no statistics of inter-racial marriages in the last century it seems very probable than any marriages between coffee workers and indigenous Tamil or Sinhalese women would have been very rare and exceptional. Coffee workers who were not accompanied by their wives would have formed temporary liaisons with fellow-women workers, or patronised prostitutes on the estates, or in the closest towns. Dr. Vandort the Ceylonese medical officer in charge of the hospital at the plantation town of Gampola wrote about the "sensuality" of the coffee workers;

> Sensuality is a vice to which Tamils of all castes weakly yield — as much from a natural defect of character as from their nomadic habits which prevent them from entering into permanent connubial relations. Hence it is rare to find a coolie, whether married or unmarried who has not suffered from venereal disease at some time or other of his life.

In his returns of admissions to the Gampola hospital Vandort listed the incidence of cases of syphilis and gonorrhoea

	Admissions		Discharge		Deaths	
	1867	1868	1867	1868	1867	1868
Syphilis. Primary	47	20	45	29	-	-
" Secondary	5	4	4	4	-	-
Const.	1	2	1	2	-	-
Gonorrhoea	9	8	9	8	-	-

Vandort stated that rheumatism, was a sequel of gonorrhoea and gave the following figures

	21	26	18	24	-	1[21]

Some planters tended to exaggerate the incidence of venereal disease among their work forces. Alexander Mackenzie went to the extent of saying "The greater number of coolies who die in the Island suffer from syphilis in one form or other," but Walter R. Tringham stated that "immorality among the coolies has been grossly exaggerated." He estimated that only two per cent of the workers died of diseases brought on by "immorality" and stated that this percentage was much lower than that for British soldiers and sailors.[22]

James Taylor, best known as the pioneer of the tea industry stated that on Loole Condera, the coffee estate on which he experimented with tea cultivation, "venereal disorders, secondaries and so forth are very common." Taylor also mentioned the case of a woman who died of an abortion which was something other planters did not comment on.

James Wright of Kundesale Estate stated that his workers who suffered from V.D. went to "native quacks." There would have been abortionists among the "native quacks" but Wright was probably referring to ayurvedic physicians who practise indigenous medicine.[23]

Venereal disease would have been spread on the coffee estates by infected women. George Lloyd Williams, a planter in the Matale district described how one woman infected almost his entire labour force. In a report to the P.A. he stated that when one of the women on his estate fell ill "there was no difficulty at arriving at a satisfactory conclusion as to the cause". He asked the woman to go to hospital but she refused. Williams then contacted the Government Agent who told him that the Contagious Diseases Act did not extend to the Matale district. "This eventuated," he wrote, "in the whole of my (limited number of) coolies being infected. One man after another left the

property and I have only seen one of them since, I am confident one half of them are dead." (24)

According to Dr. C.G. Uragoda, the authorities in Ceylon were concerned about the spread of venereal disease but this concern was mainly over the health of British troops stationed in Colombo, and some of the other principal towns. In 1864 the British Parliament adopted the Contagious Diseases Act and a similar Act (No 17 of 1867) was enacted by the Legislative Council in Ceylon. The Act which provided for the compulsory detention, and treatment when necessary, of prostitutes was initially enforced in Colombo, and its provisions were later extended to Kandy and Galle where regiments of the British Army were stationed.

In a recent book on the history of medicine in Ceylon Dr. Uragoda shows that planters, like many others, confused the symptoms of a disease known as parangi, with symptoms of syphilis. "Considerable confusion existed in the use of the term parangi till its etiology was elucidated at the beginning of this century" states Dr. Uragoda who adds that in early writings on this subject probably more than one disease was included under this name, and syphilis was one of them. In the 1880's it was suggested that parangi was the same as yaws in the West Indies and the supposition was later proved to be correct. (25)

Infanticide, or "child murder" as the planters generally called it, was also common on the estates with temporary wives or mistresses not wanting to be encumbered with children. In this case too some planters exaggerated greatly in their reports. J.P. Ross stated that infanticide prevailed "to an extent scarcely to be conceived," and added that this was not a cause for wonder with relations between men and women being "almost entirely of a temporary character".

Duncan Wm. H. Skrine also felt that infanticide was common but said it was difficult to detect as "neglect for a short time would cause death in a young infant." J.W. Gosset stated that while a number of infant deaths had been reported on his estate he felt that many were cases of child murder and he therefore did not include infant deaths in his returns of mortality. (26)

Government officials also commented on the incidence of infanticide. In 1872 B.F. Hartshorne, Assistant Government Agent at Nuwara Eliya, reported that 75 per cent of the deaths on estates were those of infants and in some cases the deaths were due to infanticide, especially in the case of female infants who "do not so soon become a source of profit to their parents by the proceeds of their labour". (27)

The shortage of women in the sugar colonies where the distance from the homeland was much greater than in the case of Ceylon resulted in suicides and murders. Governor Sir Arthur Hamilton Gordon (1883 to 1890) was in Mauritius before he came to Ceylon and while in Mauritius he reported a high incidence of suicide due to unhappiness over the lack of women and also nostalgia to return to India. (28)

The coffee planters in Ceylon did not comment on cases of suicide. It seems likely that deaths from suicide in the lines were not reported to them as such and that any cases of suicide which were reported were not regarded as sufficiently important to be mentioned in reports to the P.A.

The shortage of women in Mauritius was at least partially resolved when exporters of labour were directed to ensure the inclusion of a quota of women[29] but the problem of male workers without wives continued into the present century in British, French and other colonies. At Reunion a diplomat said it was quite common for four or five men to keep one woman and this led to disputes and murders. He said the shortage of women also gave rise to "acts of depravity of so disgusting a nature that they cannot be referred to."[30]

In Burma, the shortage of women was ascertained according to the different Indian castes and it was found that the ratio of women to men among the different castes ranged from one in eight, to one in 250.[31]

In Fiji, a quota of 40 per cent of women was insisted on in the last years of the indentured system.[32]

In British Guiana, it was found that "practically all the Chinese in the colony were affected with a virulent form of syphilis."[33]

In Demerera, John Gladstone, (father of the British Prime Minister) asked his labour suppliers to send about 40 to 50 per cent of women in batches of workers but if they failed to raise this quota then one woman to every ten men would suffice to perform the washing and cooking.[34]

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SOCIAL LIFE ON THE PLANTATIONS

Food: Housing: Education: Religion: Caste

Drums, gongs, horns, or bugles summoned the coffee workers to duty. The daily routine of the coffee worker revolved around work, food, and sleep with the only difference — according to individual preference — being that the main meal of the day could be taken before going to work, or on the return home in the evening. The hours of work on most estates were from six in the morning until four in the evening, but there were some estates on which workers were given a mid-day break in which case they worked till five in the evening. Those who had their main meal of hot rice in the morning had the left over food in the evening, while those who cooked the main meal in the evening kept the left overs to be eaten in the morning.

F.R. Saunders who was a member of the Medical Aid Commission of 1879 told members of the Commission that those who had their hot meal in the morning awoke at four in the morning and cooked and ate their rice before they went to the fields at six. Some took their rice with them to be eaten later in the day, or had it brought to them by a family member. Dr. P.D. Anthonisz, a Ceylonese, who was acting as Principal Civil Medical Officer when he gave evidence before the Commission, stated that those who prepared the hot meal in the evening had a peculiar way of preserving it to eat what remained in the morning. "The rice is boiled very hot, and while it is in this state cold water is suddenly poured over it. The result is that a skim is formed on each grain - something like the skin of an egg. The water does not permeate and there is no fermentation," he said. Anthonisz added that those who took boiled rice to the field parched it into something like a rusk.[1]

P.D. Millie appears to have worked on estates where the workers had their meal of hot rice in the evening for he recorded that a common strategem of those at work in the evening was to comment that the sun was going down rapidly and there would be no time to cut firewood and boil the rice. "It was a polite way of letting the master know that it was past four and time to stop work," says Millie.[2]

Although the coffee workers were rice eaters in Ceylon, many of them came from areas where other grains were eaten. Mr.(later Sir) Ponnambalam Ramanathan, the Tamil member in the Legislative Council, told the Council that in Madras 67 per cent of the grain consumed was millet and 33 per cent rice, with rice being consumed mostly in urban areas. Ramanathan said that in the villages the main meal was a millet porridge known in Tamil as cholam, varagu, and kambu. He said that in Ceylon the workers enjoyed at least two meals of rice each day and this made them "sleek of body: and inteliigent of mind".[3]

According to Sir Thomas Villiers, who was Chairman of the agency firm George Steuart and Co. a Legislative Councillor from 1924 to 1931, and who began his career

in Ceylon as a coffee planter, workers from non-rice eating areas had difficulty in adjusting to a rice diet in the weak condition in which they arrived on the estates. Villiers stated that when workers who had been accustomed to other grains were fed with rice on arrival at the coffee estates they suffered from colic or dysentery, and they were therefore given millet or ragu until they were able to assimilate rice.[4]

Rice consumption per individual, per year, ranged from 6 1/2 bushels to 9 1/2 bushels (one bushel equals 32 quarts or measures). Those who had a surplus of rice, or ate it sparingly added variety to their diet by bartering the surplus rice in the nearest bazaar for coconuts, dried fish, condiments, etc.[5] Dried fish, fried, or curried, was the main accompaniment to rice but if the workers had plots of vegetables near their housing lines, then green food too was added to the meals. In 1865 Ferguson noted that the value of dried fish imports had risen from £ 6,719 to £ 60,965 between 1837 and 1863. The value of condiments, currystuffs etc. imported in the same period rose from £ 240 to £ 60,000. The planters saw food as the main, and indeed only, necessity of estate workers. J.L. Shand said;

> They live in a perpetual summer; there is no necessity for providing them with warm clothes; the children do not require shoes; food and food alone is the only thing which is really necessary for their existence. Any surplus of money often goes to the nearest arrack tavern, or is melted down into jewellery for wives and children and other female connections.[6]

While rice, dried fish, and where available, vegetables, made up the main meals, there is plenty of evidence that the workers also ate almost anything or everything that came their way.

Dr.Vandort the Surgeon in charge of the Gampola hospital wrote;

> They eat to repletion and are far from discriminating in their choice of food. There is indeed nothing short of poison with which a low caste Malabar will not appease his hunger. Putrid meat, entrails, reeking hides, roots, leaves, nothing comes amiss to him. He will exhume the buried carcass of a sheep to feast on its decomposed remains, and if there is any dainty to which he is partial, it is a kind of ferruginous clay which he will chew and eat with as much relish as if it were some sweet confection.

Vandort stated that as a result of the worker's indiscriminate eating habits diarrhoea was regarded as a normal condition of the bowels — "any deviation towards health being considered as a sign of costiveness." Of the patients admitted to the Gampola hospital about three-fourths had diarrhoea as a complication for the disease for which they were admitted.[7]

R.B. Tytler defended the eating habits of the workers and had a tilt at Vandort in the process. He said that the workers taste in food was not very different to that of the English who ate game which was "high"; the Russians who ate caviare; the French who ate frogs, and the Congo negroes who ate rats, "My coolies," said Tytler "polish their rice bushel sold every month, done up with carawaddoos (dried fish) and condiments enough to make Dr. Vandort's mouth water." Tytler said that as for eating clay who had not heard of the tender sex in some countries eating chalk?[8]

Recent medical research has revealed the existence of a behaviour syndrome known as pica which manifests itself in a tendency to eat clay. One century later it is of course impossible to say whether these coffee workers suffered from pica which it appears is related to a deficiency of iron, but the diet of the coffee workers would certainly have been deficient in this respect.[9]

One deficiency in the diet of the coffee workers which was noted at the time and was regarded as contributing to eye disorders was commented on by Dr. Rockwood in 1878. Rockwood stated that the continued ingestion of rice with a deficiency of salt, and little or no curry, was frequently the cause of "asthenic ulceration of one or both corneas in coolies admitted for general debility or diarrhoea and which resisting all treatment leads to destruction of the eye and to subsequent death of the patient."[10]

Vandort was by no means the only one to comment on the coffee workers exotic tastes in food. There were frequent reports of workers dying by eating poisonous yams, and in January 1859 the **Observer** stated that it had been asked to publicise the danger involved in the eating of "jungle yams." The paper stated that there had been deaths among coffee workers due to their eating the **Gloriosa Superba** which was called **niyagala** by the Sinhalese who ate it to commit suicide. The paper stated that the plant produced a lily with its petals turned backwards "and when in full bloom nothing can be more magnificent than the blaze of varied scarlet, orange, yellow and green tints which it presents."[11] Despite warnings workers continued to eat the yam. In 1872 George Lloyd Williams, a planter in the Matale district, reported that there was a violent poison which was a thick leaved milky plant with purple flowers and the yam of the plant had been the cause of death of Indian workers.[12]

While Tytler spoke of the Congo Negroes eating rats, a planter who wrote to the **Observer** in 1866 on various pests on coffee estates stated that as far as rats were concerned the best remedy was to encourage the workers to "hunt, kill and eat the rats (**Gollundu Elliotti**) of which the Tamil coolies in Ceylon are fond, roasted, or fried in coconut oil." The planter stated that when Sir Emerson-Tennent was in Ceylon he had been informed that as many as a thousand rats had been killed on a single coffee estate in a single day.[13] In 1871 A.S. Sackville of Drayton Estate stated that some of his estate workers had died as a result of eating **Calen**, a species of fungus found on decaying trees.[14]

Dr.Kynsey consulted Indian medical authorities before he gave evidence before the Medical Aid Commission and he placed before members of the Commission a report on the food habits of South Indians by Dr.W. R. Cornish, the Sanitary Commissioner for Madras. Cornish in his report stated :

> The Indian labourer in South Indian is not by habit and custom a rice eater. His main staples of food are various millets which are suitable to the soil and climate of the several districts, viz, cholum (sorghum valgare) ragi (Elensive corocana) cumbu (Penicillaria spicata) and others such as Pannicum frumentaceum, Pannicum Italicum and co. He scarcely knows wheat or the way to use it. He eats certain beans and pulses occasionally, but not to the extent as do people of North India. He has a great liking for animal food of every description. Nothing in this way comes amiss to him. Fish, snails, frogs, fried rats, game of every description, fowls, goat, sheep, bullocks and pigs are all eaten with avidity by the

hardworking labouring man. In fact there is no description of food available from the animal or vegetable kingdom that the labouring classes of the people of South India will not use.

Kynsey in his own evidence stated that it was his experience too that the estate worker had "an enormous appetite eating when he can to repletion and not at all choicy in the selection of materials with which he fills the stomach." Kynsey went on to describe the worker as having "strongly developed animal passions, is filthy, and penurious in his habits, and possesses little regard for decency." (15)

That the South Indian estate workers in Ceylon were no different from Indians in other countries is seen in the evidence before a Commission at British Guiana where workers were said to "eat the putrid bodies of animals from trenches, cooking them and eating them mixed with curry". (16)

While the temperance movement was very active in Ceylon in the last century planters generally did not object to their workers having a drink provided it did not affect their work. The temperance movement attracted many British residents in the Island and there were Bands of Hope (modelled on an organisation in Leeds, U.K.) operating in Colombo and upcountry towns during the coffee era. Temperance workers in the plantation districts reported that it was difficult to promote abstinence among the coffee workers because of "the temptations placed in their way" and that Sunday was not a day of rest, as it was supposed to be, but a day of intoxication. "The tippling on the Saturday night is continued all day Sunday with the result of bad, or no work, on the Monday following," the **Ceylon Temperance Chronicle** stated. (17)

Official policy was ambivalent. Liquor was a lucrative source of revenue but Governors and officials were sensitive to charges that Government was encouraging people to drink and that the spread of the drink habit was one of the consequences of British rule. In the aftermath of the 1848 "Rebellion" C. R. Buller, the Government Agent in the Central Province, stated that while 133 taverns had been opened in the Kandy district between 1815 and 1848, only four schools had been established in the same period. (18)

One Governor who tried hard to reduce the incidence of drinking was Sir William Gregory (1872 to 1877). He had a map of the country installed in his office in the Legislative Council with crosses to denote existing taverns and coloured marks to show where taverns had been closed. Lady Gregory said that he was thus able to see at a glance whether his orders were being carried out. (19) Gregory told the Legislative Council when he opened a session on 30 July 1873 that while Government Agents had been instructed to reduce the number of liquor shops, he regretted to find that "constant recommendations are being sent in by planters in favour of licences being granted for liquor shops to various persons in the neighbourhood". (20) The situation was complicated by the fact that estate workers had been found to be robbing coffee to finance their drinks. The planters wanted draconian measures adopted to stamp out coffee thefts but Gregory told the Legislative Council on another occasion that it was "a notorious fact that so far as estate coolies are implicated in the crime of coffee stealing, the hope of obtaining arrack from the local grog-shop is a chief incentive." (21)

There were planters who objected to the siting of taverns in proximity to estates but F. B. Templer, the Government Agent of the Central Province in 1888, noted that such objections had not had the effect of reducing the consumption of arrack by the workers.[22]

There was acrimonious correspondence between the Planters' Association and the Police on the question of the sale of arrack to estate workers. In 1880 the P.A. wrote to the Police that dealers in liquor were being allowed to accept rice from estate workers in a barter arrangement. The Police claimed that where the practice existed it was due to delays in the payment of wages which made the workers barter rice for other requirements. The P.A. replied that the workers' desire for currystuffs was not as strong as the desire for arrack and that the availability of rice for sale at liquor shops showed that the Police had been "outwitted". The P.A. maintained that unless such illegal barter was stopped the workers would also be tempted to barter coffee for arrack. E. F. Tranchell, the Superintendent of Police in the Central Province, replied that what was happening was that the workers who were "not seldom kept months without pay", sold rice for salt, fish, currystuffs etc. and that some of the money they obtained from the sale of rice was also spent on arrack.

The Colonial Secretary who had been provided with copies of the correspondence wrote to the P.A. at this stage that the Police version of rice being sold owing to delay in the payment of wages was "corroborated by several instances which have come under the notice of the Government in which large numbers of coolies have been left unpaid for periods of one year or more. "The P.A. in its reply stated that the issue of rice on estates was so liberal that even when workers were paid up to date they still had supplies for barter for other requirements.[23] When the matter was discussed at an annual meeting of the P.A., W. Forbes Laurie said the Ceylon worker was not the only wage earner who bartered food for liquour "as our own countrymen were too unfortunately doing so". W.D.Gibbon complained that workers were exchanging not only their own rations of rice for arrack but also those of their wives and children.[24] The question was never really resolved and workers continued to barter rice for liquour.

It is difficult to estimate the extent of drug taking among coffee workers but in 1875 Dr. Vandort who was at that stage Superintendent of the Lunatic Asylum, referred to the "vicious habit" among carters, day labourers and workers of "smoking and eating opium and gunjah (Indian hemp)". He said there was hardly a single halting place for bullock carts at which these "poisons" were not sold openly or clandestinely.[25]

The earliest coffee workers lived in mud huts but these were not durable and once the industry was on a firm foundation estate managements provided their workers with permanent housing facilities.

William Sabonadiere in tracing the history of housing on the coffee estates stated that thousands of pounds could have been saved if the pioneer coffee planters had built permanent housing instead of temporary structures which had to be frequently rebuilt. He said that among the pioneers however were many who had come only to make quick profits and return to the United Kingdom while others were uncertain whether the coffee boom would last. In any case expenditure had to be minimised during the slump in the

mid-forties and it was only in the fifties after the industry was on a sound basis that estate managements began to build housing "lines" of brick and tile.

On the amount of space required, Sabonadiere noted that "Rooms twelve feet by twelve are a very fair size and will hold ten coolies as they have no objection to being packed tolerably close".[26]

In a letter to the Planters' Association in 1855 Sabonadiere noted that attempts were being made to build a better type of lines. He said that earlier anything was regarded as good enough for the workers who were in any case easily satisfied. He said that when the workers were allowed to build their own housing they managed "to improvise the nearest approach to a pig sty that can be made with mud and bricks".[27]

Why were the lines called the lines? Millie posed the question but confessed he did not know the answer. All he knew was that from the earliest days the lines were known as the lines.

The lines were actually long buildings divided into compartments by walls that extended from floor to roof but they had no windows or sanitary facilities. The living space in each unit was 10 feet by 12, and all the units shared a long verandah that ran from one end of the building to the other. Millie stated that while workers were satisfied with any sort of accommodation in the earliest days, they later began to give the unsatisfactory condition of the lines as a reason for leaving an estate. Millie commented that it was far more likely that the reason was spurious and meant to conceal dissatisfaction with the amount of work involved, estate discipline, or some other reason. In keeping with the notions prevalent in his time Millie discounted the theory that dirt caused disease. "That dirt causes disease is doubtful as a rule," he wrote. Millie felt that large lines were not conducive to efficient management because when large numbers were settled in one place there was a greater danger of quarrels and it was not easy to keep the surroundings clean. Millie approved of separate quarters for different castes if the numbers involved justified such action but as for any connexion between cleanliness and health he said he had seen "very dirty coolies in just as robust health as others who regularly bathed and washed". He conceded that "when disease does get among dirt it is apt to linger and become worse," but otherwise he did not think much of "sanitary measures" which had become "the craze of the age."

Millie recalled that on a particular estate it had been decided to make the accommodation "very comfortable" and large rooms were built so that four to six men shared a room 20 feet by 16. Some time later when he visited this estate he found that the workers had subdivided the rooms with the barks of trees thus making "quite a village inside the room".

With cooking done inside the lines there were frequent fires but Millie impishly observed that what surprised him was that fires were not more frequent than they were. The lines were also the "homes" of poultry or animals. Here again Millie humourously observes that in addition to his wife and children, a man would have a few head of poultry in a cage in one corner; a pet goat or sheep in another; a dog in a third corner, and on the verandah outside a pig or a cow. The head kangany of a group usually had a corner room

to himself as "a badge of exalted dignity," and outside this room workers would gather to discuss their wrongs and have them redressed.[28]

R.W. Jenkins, another pioneer planter, gave the dimension of the rooms as 12 by 12, with the roof at a height of eight feet. Each unit had a door, but no window, and although workers partitioned their rooms they did not try to partition the verandah.[29]

Most British commentators of the period saw nothing wrong with the lines. H.W. Cave, who came to Ceylon as private secretary to Bishop Copleston, and who established a firm of booksellers which still exists, wrote;

> It is obvious that they do not enjoy the luxury of much space but their ideas of comfort are not ours, and they are better pleased to lie huddled together upon the mud floors of their tiny hovels than to occupy superior apartments... Their condition does not call for pity or sympathy for in many respects they are a favoured class.[30]

A very similar view was expressed by the British novelist, Anthony Trollope, who wrote that the Indian workers in the West Indies "could not be treated with more tenderness unless they were put separately each with a piece of velvet on which to lie. In England we know of no such treatment for field labour".[31]

John Capper who came to Ceylon in 1847 as a partner in Acland, Boyd, and Co. and later acquired the **Times of Ceylon** of which he was also Editor, wrote that the lines of the workers appeared to be more comfortable than the quarters occupied by the planters and said that this was necessarily so as the workers would not live in remote areas unless they were well cared for. He said a planter's priorities were firstly lines for the workers that were roomy and dry, secondly a nursery for coffee plants, and thirdly "a hut for himself".[32]

Another journalist of the period, Dr. Charles Elliott, who resigned his post as Assistant Colonial Surgeon to become Editor of the **Observer**, was one of the few who stressed the need to keep the lines clean. He said this was essential because the coffee workers' habits were "essentially filthy". He urged that cleanliness should be enforced so as "to destroy the offensive smell perceptible in the immediate neighbourhood of old temporary cooly lines".[33]

The housing conditions of the workers rarely figured in correspondence between Governors of the colony and the Colonial Office, but in 1867, Governor Sir Hercules Robinson (1865 to 1872) assured the Colonial Office that the coffee workers were provided with well built lines which were clean and comfortable. He said Government Agents of the various provinces were of the view that the Indian workers were well housed and better cared for than in their own homeland.[34]

Major Walter Clutterbruck in his book on Ceylon said the lines were crowded and smoke-filled but that the workers liked it that way. Estate workers, he wrote

> Infinitely prefer living in small, clay-lined chimneyless rooms, where they can have a fire and make them as close and smoky as possible. When the atmosphere is so thick that you can cut it with a knife they breathe it in with utmost gusto. They actually seem to like having bloodshot eyes, the result of a smoky atmosphere.[35]

Housing for workers in the sugar colonies was probably on a par with those in Ceylon. When Lord Hardinge, Viceroy of India, announced the end of the indentured system in 1920 he said the unsatisfactory housing was one of the reasons for the high rate of suicide among migrant Indian workers. Hardinge stated that while the incidence of suicide among the people of Madras was 45 per million and 63 per million in the United Provinces, the suicide rate among these same people was 400 per million in Trinidad and 926 in Fiji. Hardinge stated that "sordid and miserable conditions" created a predisposition to suicide among the migrant workers.[36] There are no references to suicide in official or unofficial documents on the coffee workers of Ceylon.

In education, as in the drink question, it was the missionary organisations that were critical of Government policies. Following the observation by Buller, the Government Agent of the Central Province, that practically nothing had been done in the provision of educational facilities, in contrast to the proliferation of taverns in the province, the Bishop of Colombo made representations to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in the U.K. in which he admitted that there had been "scarcely any missionary efforts out of Kandy itself". The provision of educational facilities in the Central Province actually deteriorated after the "Rebellion" of 1848 owing to economies in Government expenditure, and even some of the existing schools were closed. As the estate population was in a state of flux at that stage the question of providing educational facilities to children of coffee workers did not arise but the permanent inhabitants of the Central Province were also handicapped vis-a-vis those living in the west, south and north of the Island.[37] For almost the first half of British rule Christian denominational groups enjoyed a virtual monopoly of education, and until the establishment of the Department of Public Instruction in 1867, education in Ceylon was administered through the School Commission which had been established in 1833. The School Commission was controlled by the Anglican Church and its poor record is attributed by K. M. De Silva to "sectarian strife and personal disputes". De Silva quotes a delightful couplet from the **Ceylon Chronicle** of 23 April 1838 which ran

> With the clergy as usual it's war to the knife
> A general diffusion of malice and strife.[38]

The education of children of estate workers has been the subject of a monograph by George Gnanamuttu, who states that the organisation which did most in this respect was the Tamil Cooly Mission, later known as the Tamil Church Mission. Gnanamuttu shows that the Mission was in fact not able to achieve very much because when children were old enough to be sent to school, they were also old enough to perform minor chores on estates for which they were employed along with their parents. There was also considerable difficulty in obtaining suitable teachers from districts such as Tinnevely from which many of the coolies came to Ceylon, or from Jaffna in the North where Tamil speaking teachers could be recruited.

J.S. Laurie, the first Director of Public Instruction, recommended to the Government in 1869 that estate proprietors should be subject to the same conditions as mill owners in the U.K. and he stated that those with whom he had held discussions were willing to "accept any reasonable conditions". The Government, according to Gnanamuttu, did not act on Laurie's recommendations but offered to make grants to those who were willing to start schools on the estates.

Estate proprietors were lukewarm but some initiative was shown by kanganis who were anxious about the education of their own children as well. There were night schools for children of labourers who were taught to recite **aathi soodi** (words of wisdom) religious verses, and precepts. The teachers seem to have been estate clerks or persons with some level of literacy and children were given a rudimentary education. In addition to the teachers estate schools also utilised the services of **poosaries**, (priests but not of the highest order) and **annavis**, (religious teachers) who organised dramas, the singing of ballads, etc. The lack of schools which provided even such elementary education is seen in the fact that in 1904 there were only 179 schools on the lines and 120 in buildings provided by the employers, while the total number of schools run on estates with Government aid was 60.[39]

Governor Sir Hercules Robinson (1865 to 1872) candidly admitted in a despatch to the Colonial Office that there were few, if any, schools in the estate areas and that children of the labour force received no secular education. In some districts there were clergymen and catechists "but the good result of their teachings is generally reported to be scarcely appreciable," said Robinson.[40]

The lack of opportunities for education in the estate areas was also commented on by well known personalities such as Sir Samuel Baker, who stated that missionaries did not want to go into the remote parts of the Island. "For many years," he wrote, "I have traversed the wilderness of Ceylon at all hours and all seasons. I have met many strange things in my journeys but I never recollect a missionary." [41] It was only in 1920 that school going was made compulsory for children on estates but the facilities and the quality of education available remained very poor.[42] The failure, or neglect, on the part of the missionary organisations, to pay attention to the provision of schools for the children of plantation workers was to seriously handicap their efforts at proselytisation as will be seen in the section on religion that follows.

For the Indian coffee workers in Ceylon — as in the other colonies — religion — or more specifically Hinduism, was an anodyne. Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam's remark that Hinduism was a consoling influence on the Indian workers who lived in Fiji in "degrading and miserable conditions...amid squalor physical and moral" was equally applicable to the coffee workers of Ceylon. The ritual of the Hindu religion, the propitiation of deities and votive offerings in exchange for favours granted, no doubt helped the workers to come to terms with adverse working conditions, and what at all times was a singularly hostile environment," says Kumari Jayewardena about the plantation workers of Ceylon.[43] Religion has always permeated peasant societies and the coffee workers of Ceylon were peasants in an alien setting who re-enacted their traditional religious observances in their new homes and work places.

C.V.Velupillai has described the role of religion in the life of the Ceylon plantation workers in a chapter titled

THE GODS THAT NEVER FAIL

Do not live in a country

Where there is no temple.

He states that this saying aptly defines the estate man's approach to God. The coffee worker found no statues or symbols of the gods he had worshipped at home in his new surroundings, so he fashioned the images of family gods such as Nondi Appachi, Iyanar, Sangali Karuppu and Mandasamy, and also those of sentinel gods like Muniandi, Sendakatti and Madasamy out of clay, stone, brick, or wood. Among the women the favourite was Mariamman to whom offerings were made for everything from success at work to safe motherhood.(44)

The devotion and loyalty of the coffee workers to their traditional faith is seen in the fact that the Christian missionaries with the force of the Establishment behind them, and with the opportunity of captive audiences on the plantations, achieved very little by way of conversions. In other parts of the country schools were the springboard of conversions but the schools established for children of coffee workers were few and far between, and never provided anything more than a very elementary education.

Missionary activity among the adult coffee workers was conducted by the Tamil Cooly Mission (later known as the Tamil Church Mission) and most reports of its activities have been coloured by religious fervour. The Tamil Cooly Mission, like the Planters' Association, was formed in 1854, after Dr. John Murdoch and the Rev. W. Knight had heard from some planters that there were Christians among the workers, and that these workers used to elect one among them to function as a catechist, or reader, at prayer meetings. Knight felt that paid catechists from Tinnevely, from where many workers hailed, could perform these duties more effectively, and some planters who agreed also promised financial assistance for the purpose.In the first year six catechists were recruited from Tinnevely. By 1858 there were 8 catechists and the Mission's income was Rs. 3,050. By 1868 the number of catechists had increased to 18 and the Mission's income was Rs. 5,830. By 1878 there were 42 catechists and the income was Rs. 17,310.(45)

The Rev. R. P. Butterfield in his biographical work **Padre Rowlands** states that the aim of the Mission in its initial stages was "not so much to reach the non-Christian as to shepherd Christians". Murdoch who was head of the seminary for the training of school masters, and Knight who was one of the secretaries of the Ceylon Missionary Society, appealed to the planters for funds and although many of the planters were Scotch Presbyterians they financed the work of the Mission which was on Church of England lines. The Rev. Septimus Hobbs who had worked for 13 years in Tinnevely was brought to Ceylon and he made Kandy his base for operations.

Hobbs in an account of the work of the Mission stated that:

> The greater part of the catechists' time is spent in visiting the different estates and preaching to the coolies. After being thus engaged for about ten days they return to Kandy to rest for a day or two, and receive further instructions from the Superintendent of the Mission. Each of them receives a list of the estates he is to visit on his next journey and sets out on another tour. Each catechist keeps a journal in which he records the principal occurrences of each day and these journals are read to the Superintendent when the Catechists come to Kandy.

Hobbs suffered a breakdown in health in 1862 and was succeeded by the Rev. Rowlands. Initially Rowlands preached through an interpreter but learnt Tamil and was

able to dispense with his interpreter. While many of the entries in Rowlands' diary are optimistic there are also entries which reflect pessimism. On 22 February 1863 Rowlands wrote : "It is sad to see how little the coolies upon Woodside seem to be impressed with the glad tidings of salvation". As there were no churches on the estates, preaching was done near the lines of the workers, while services for planters were held in the bungalows of planters, at Resthouses and sometimes even in courthouses.

The Tamil Cooly Mission, like many other Christian organisations in Ceylon, was soon riven by dissension. The split in this case was known in London as "The Ceylon Controversy" and in the words of Butterfield, it "divided the Island from one end to the other".

The trouble arose after Dr. R. S. Copleston succeeded Rt. Rev. Hugh Willougby Jermyn as Bishop of Colombo in 1875. Copleston was of the view that planting chaplains should be able to work in the vernaculars and should be the sole spiritual authorities for both English- and Tamil-speaking persons in their areas. At this stage however the Tamil Cooly Mission had exclusively Tamil congregations and their "type of churchmanship" differed from those of the English speaking congregations. The Rev. W. Clark, Superintendent of the Tamil Cooly Mission, withdrew the Tamil speaking congregation at Pusselawa and conducted services for them, not at the church, but at another building. Clark was supported in his action by some missionaries of the Ceylon Missionary Society and also by a number of planters. Copleston retaliated by withdrawing Clark's commission and also those of missionaries who supported him, and ruled that in future the activities of the Mission would come under the supervision of the Bishop of Kandy.

The planters who supported Clark appealed to the Archbishop of Canterbury in the U.K. and the Archbishop of Canterbury in association with the Bishops of London, Durham and Winchester issued an "Opinion" that was a compromise between the divergent views in Ceylon but Clark's licence was not restored.

Meanwhile Padre Rowlands was experiencing what he perceived as a lack of co-operation from the planters. In one of his diary entries he wrote :

> Perhaps the greatest trial of all arises from the indifference and unbelief manifested by many of our own countrymen. To be continually met with the objection that what you are doing is useless, that no results are seen, and that to make the Tamil cooly a Christian is only to make him "Twice as big a rogue as he was before" is very hard to bear.[46]

While many planters were satisfied with what was being done, others felt that the Mission had achieved almost nothing. Ferguson wrote that "The souls of the poor coolies are cared for as well as the health of their bodies - the Cooly Mission is doing good work among them",[47] but Major Edward Sullivan wrote that missionary activity among the coffee workers compared very poorly with those in other countries :

> My experience gathered from visits among the Indians of North and South America, the Arabs of Asia, and the natives of India and Ceylon, and supported by the testimony and opinion of unprejudiced persons whose long residence amongst them had made them acquainted with all their habits leads me to believe that scarcely one real convert whose belief is sincere and lasting annually rewards the labour of hundreds...[48]

Charles Henry De Soysa, a Ceylonese estate owner whose wealth was legendary was a Christian, and he too expressed disappointment over the work of the missionaries in the Central Province. In a letter to a friend dated 3 December 1855, De Soysa wrote that "If the missionaries in this Province were a little more active in spreading the Gospel in the interior, and endeavoured to teach them Christianity, the natives will, no doubt, turn, though gradually, a race of good and intelligent men". The "natives" De Soysa had in mind as the letter shows, were "the inhabitants of this province".(49)

To the workers themselves the visits of the missionaries would have been a welcome diversion from the routine of their daily chores. Being illiterate they would have had only a very hazy idea of what the preachers were talking about, but some of the missionaries were very good orators and they enthralled the workers with their eloquence. In a paper he read to the Colombo Missionary Conference, John Ferguson said a sympathetic planter had told him that although the catechists of the Tamil Church Mission visited his estate he doubted whether even one in every 100 of the workers understood what was being said. This planter however said that there was one missionary, a Mr. Thomas, who was himself the son of a missionary who had worked in the Tinnevely district before coming to Ceylon who

> Simply electrified both me and my coolies who were mustered to hear him. He had complete control of their tongue, modes of thought, and everyday ways, and his stories and illustrations moved them now to grins, if not smiles, and then almost to tears, while every man or woman among the several hundreds on the barbecue was keen not to miss a word.(50)

If the missionaries who worked in the estate areas had a very poor record as far as conversions went, it was also a fact that they took very little interest in the material welfare of the workers, as K. M. De Silva and Michael Roberts have shown. De Silva states that

> The response of the missionaries to the problem of Indian immigration, the most formidable social problem of the day, could hardly be described as energetic or enlightened. They displayed no deep concern for the physical suffering that this system involved, but concentrated exclusively on the spiritual welfare of the immigrants. This emphasis on spiritual salvation was, perhaps, a natural and wholly understandable one where nineteenth century missionaries are concerned but it reveals a certain rigidity of approach, a narrowness of outlook, and a deplorable lack of sympathy and understanding. It was not merely that they did not see, but many of them did not care to see.(51)

Michael Roberts has also shown that the lack of attention to the welfare of the Indian workers in Ceylon, was in contrast to the great interest shown in the Indian immigrants in the West Indies and Mauritius by British missionaries in those countries.(52)

In the eighties and nineties many planters refused to support the Tamil Church Mission on the grounds that it was moribund and could show no results by way of "real converts" among the estate population. Charles Gibbon answered these criticisms at a meeting of the Mission in Kandy. He said that no one could deny that they had been sowing the seed and they had to leave it "to God's own good time when the plant shall appear above the ground and begin to develop". Gibbon argued that the efforts of the missionaries had at least resulted in a state of tranquility among the workers in Ceylon.

"To what do we owe the peace among our coolies?" he asked, and went on to say "Here we have no strikes...no one knows the enormous amount of good done by our English missionaries in India and Ceylon." (53)

A very similar claim was made in a study of the work of the Mission when it marked its first centenary. Canon S. M. Thomas in writing about the work of the pioneers stated that "On a restricted scale they toiled with little popular applause, but when you take into consideration their moral power, quiet determination, sanctified common sense, a rare combination of sagacity and piety, their share in the shaping of human history has been great indeed". (54)

A little known contribution of the coffee workers to the state of religosity in Sri Lanka today arose from their devotion to the god Skanda or Murugan, in whose honour there has been a shrine at Kataragama in south Sri Lanka from ancient times. Gananath Obeyesekera states that while a Hindu presence had always been felt in Kataragama, it increased from the last century with the influx of the low caste **sudra** immigrants. "Most of the penitentiary and piacular aspects of Kataragama come from this source". Obeyesekera states that it was they who introduced the firewalking ritual which was adopted by the Sinhalese Buddhists after 1952, and the notion of direct possession by the deity which orthodox Brahmins did not accept. Being cut off from their home conditions the Indian workers found solace in the worship of their popular South Indian god Murugan or Skanda. "It was primarily their influence that set the stamp on the special kind of ecstatic and piacular religosity of Kataragama, which in turn helped infuse the Buddhist culture with the **bhakti** devotionalism of grass roots Hinduism. The cultural significance of **sudra** religosity on contemporary Sinhalese religion cannot be over estimated," states Obeyesekera. (55)

While the overwhelming majority of those who came out to Ceylon belonged to the so-called lower castes, and while caste considerations may have been a factor in the individual decisions of many to emigrate to Ceylon, it would be a mistake to see emigration to Ceylon purely as an escape from the rigidity of the caste structure in South India. There is evidence however that caste differences were not as strictly observed or enforced among the coffee workers in Ceylon as they were in the homeland. In Ceylon even a low caste worker could enjoy upward social mobility with the acquisition of wealth and this certainly happened among those who were kanganis.

As seen in Chapter Four, Carpen, the kangani whose autobiography was recorded by a planter was one of those who made money in Ceylon and decided not to return to India where he would again have been relegated to the low caste to which he belonged. It was really in the tea period that kanganis who amassed wealth went on to enjoy considerable social standing and advancement in the trade union movement and in public life.

William Sabonadiere stated that the planters generally preferred those of the lower castes who were hard working. One drawback with the low caste workers however was that they were heavy drinkers. While the high caste workers did not use the cooking utensils used by low caste workers and also refused to eat food that had been prepared by low caste workers, they did not object to living under a common roof in the same

lines. Sabonadiere states that there were cases of cohabitation among men and women of different castes but that inter-caste marriages did not take place.(56)

P. D. Millie however seems to have come across such marriages which resulted in the party belonging to the higher caste being downgraded to the lower caste. Millie refers to an incident in which a Kangani accused his wife, Meenatchi, of flirting with a man named Rangan. Meenatchi retorted "I am a woman of Vellala (a high caste) caste and spit on the name of Rangan. Rangan indeed - parayah (low caste) - parayah fellow - the very shadow of Rangan would contaminate my caste", she said. Millie stated that while the Indian workers openly spoke of caste these differences were not very different to those observed by the British who however called it "class". He also stated that caste differences which were relaxed on the estates in Ceylon were resumed once the workers returned to South India just as the British "left their religion at the Cape".(57)

As will be seen in the following chapters caste was one of the reasons why high caste workers were reluctant to go to hospitals even when they were seriously ill. At the Kandy hospital a high caste cook was employed to cook the meals for high caste workers. He also had to cook the food for low caste workers but refused to handle the beef which low caste men ate and the high castes did not.(58)

Caste consciousness among the workers had an amusing sequel when a planter attempted to use human excrement as manure for his plants. What happened was related by Arnold H. White in a prize winning essay on manuring. White stated that the planter who wanted to use the excrement as manure built substantial accommodation for his workers and divided the building in proportion to his coolies' castes "and did all in his power to make the plan succeed. But the pariah (low caste) coolies would persist in polluting the accommodation provided for the high castes who, in consequence, betook themselves to their ancient ways".(59)

A detailed analysis of the various castes among the estate workers which showed that low castes constituted 72 per cent of the workforce was made by William Clarke of Kandy in a memorandum to the P.A. when it prepared its submissions to the Government on the Medical Wants Ordinance. Clarke did not state how he had acquired his data but probably questioned kanganis on his own estate, and even possibly some on adjoining estates, for he described his findings in a letter to the Association as "a statistical account with notes, of the different castes employed on coffee estates".

In his classification Clarke used the letter L to denote low castes; M to indicate medium castes, and H to denote high castes.

	Proportion in workforce
L. Pariahs	30 percent
L. Pallars	26 "
L. Chakliars	16 "
M. Agambadiars	5 "
M. Kallars	5 "
H. Mettei Vellalars	3 "
M. Retties	3 "
M. Edeiars	2 "

	Proportion in workforce
M. Maravars	2 percent
Pullukkars	11/2 "
Kammalars (M)	
Goldsmiths	
Braziers	
Carpenters	
Blacksmiths	
Stonemasons	
M. Shanahs	1 "
H. Vellalars	1/2 "
H. Chetties	1/2 "
H. Kurumbars	1/2 "
M. Vannars	1/2 "
M. Ambattiars	1/2 "
M. Yeeluvars	1/2 "
M. Tattiars	1/2 "
H. Nayakkars	1/4 "
H.M and L. Canarrese	1/4 "
M. Valluvars	1/2 "
M. Panars	1/4 "
L. Kuruvars	1/4 "
M. Paravars	1/4 " (60)

Clarke's investigation into the caste structure among the coffee workers was unusual as the coffee planters do not seem to have taken much interest in the social lives of the workers except of course in their health. While many planters wrote reminiscences there are very few accounts of events such as births and marriages among the coffee workers in these books except in humourous vein. A. H. Duncan commended young couples who were at the muster ground on the morning after marriage the previous evening but this would have happened because Ramaswamy and Meenachchie who were all dressed up for their wedding had nowhere to go, except back to the lines, after the festivities. Duncan seems to have attended at least one wedding for in commenting on the bride's cosmetics he wrote of "the vile odour which appeared to rise in clouds from her".[61] Meenachchi's oriental perfumes obviously did not appeal to Duncan's occidental olfactory senses.

CHAPTER TWELVE

"CARTLOADS OF SKULLS"

Mortality in the Growth Years of the Coffee Industry

"One could fill two carts with the skulls of those who have been abandoned unburied on the road," wrote a planter about the mortality among coffee workers in 1843. The planter who wrote under his initials D.P. was referring not to the North Road but to the alternative route from Mannar southwards along the coast to Puttalam, and then to the hill country via Kurunegala. The reference to the sight of cartloads of skulls was in respect of the section of the route between Puttalam and Kurunegala. This planter was undoubtedly influenced by humanitarian considerations but he was also concerned about the effect that reports of such mortality would have on prospective migrants.[1]

There were many such reports in the forties. William Boyd even used the same words when he wrote that "cartloads of skulls might have been collected along the Great North Road showing the numbers of poor Tamils who had fallen victims to this scourge (cholera) aided in, but many cases, by starvation which had overtaken them in their panic flight to their distant homes on the overcrowded coasts of South India".[2] Three years after D.P.'s observations, another planter describing the route on the North Road between Mannar and "Dambool" (Dambulla), wrote that "Many a whitened skull tells of the weary march of the wayworn cooly".[3]

The Ceylon Agricultural Society itself made no secret of conditions that prevailed when it warned coffee planters that "unless some internal arrangement be made upon estates, higher authorities will assuredly intervene to compel the adoption of some system which shall exonerate the agricultural interest of seeing the roads choked up with the sick, the dying, and the dead".[4]

The sight of dead bodies figures in many of the books of the period. "The sight is so ordinary a one in Ceylon, especially on the roads the coolies frequent on their migrations to and from the mainland of India, that it scarcely attracts attention unless one's horse shies at it, and then one follows the example of the Pharisee of old of passing on to the other side," wrote Edward Sullivan who reported a happy ending in one case. A man he mistook for dead was only overcome by exhaustion and starvation, and recovered on being fed. Sullivan light-heartedly added that the man would not have been popular with his colleagues who had left him behind as "dead".[5]

Sir Samuel Baker described the death of a boy of 16 but this was only to illustrate his argument that contrary to popular belief leopards did feed on putrid flesh. Baker wrote that on reaching home one morning during a storm he sent some labourers to bury the body of a boy who had died some distance away. A few days later when riding past the spot he noticed that leopards had dug up the grave and consumed the corpse.[6]

Inquests were rarely held at that stage but if any inquiries were made from kanganis the reply was that the person in question had "died on the road". Millie wrote feelingly on the subject:

> Coolies have natural feelings and affections, often leaving aged parents in their native villages, depending on the wages which they hope to earn on the coffee estates. When the sad news reaches them - "died on the road" - or when the return gang are reported on their way back, friends and relatives came out to meet them and the question is asked "Where is my son?" to which the reply is given, "died on the road". It is heart-rending to hear the wailing and the lamentation raised by the relatives of the missing coolie. Yet he was only a "coolie"...
>
> Few gangs of coolies arrived on the estates without some deaths occurring on the road, but more took place after arrival on the estate, being worn with the journey and the sudden change of climate from the hot and dry one of the low country to the cutting winds and the heavy rains on the mountain ranges.[7]

Cholera was one of the main causes of mortality for the greater part of the coffee period but many of the deaths due to cholera were attributed to fever or diarrhoea which were symptoms of the disease.[8] Until the early nineteenth century smallpox had been a major cause of mortality but the disease was brought under control with the introduction of vaccine in 1802. Despite opposition to vaccination due to prejudice and fear, vaccination campaigns were carried out in the maritime areas. The last major outbreak of smallpox was in the Kandyan provinces in 1819 and 1820, with the death of 523 of the 931 persons admitted to Kandy Hospital in 1820.[9]

As the number of deaths from smallpox declined, those from cholera increased. The antiquity of cholera in Asia has been traced by R. Gallagher who refers to a description of its symptoms by a soldier in the army of Alexander the Great in India:

> The lips blue, the face haggard, the eyes hollow, the stomach sunken in, the limbs contracted and crumbled as if by fire; these are the signs of the great illness which invoked by the malediction of priests, comes down to slay the braves.

In the mid-fifteenth century the historian Gaspar Correra who was with the Portuguese army in India noted that "smallpox besides, there was another disease suddenlike, which struck with pain in the belly, so that a man did not last out eight hours time".[10]

Before, and after, the advent of the coffee workers, cholera took a heavy toll among the British troops stationed in Ceylon. Charles Pridham describing an outbreak of cholera among the 78th Highlanders in Trincomalee stated that the disease spread with "the cheerful falling victims no less than the desponding; the temperate as well as the drunkard, though the latter was of course the soonest victim to the fatal malady". Pridham attributed the spread of the disease to the fact that the hospital adjoining the barracks was ill ventilated.[11] It was at this stage that a medical expert told Admiral Sir John Gore that the Trincomalee barracks were "admirably adapted for originating cholera", and the hospital "for maintaining the disease".[12] One of the worst outbreaks of cholera among the British troops took place in 1846 when there were 6,338 cases of which 3,881 were fatal.[13]

British troops lived in isolated barracks unlike the coffee workers who were much more in contact with the native population on their journeys to and from the estates; on pilgrimages; and trips to markets, etc. People living in the North, North-Central and Central Provinces were most at risk of contracting cholera which they dreaded. The American missionary doctor, Samuel Fisk Green, who contracted cholera while serving in the North, but recovered from it, recorded an amusing story of how the people of "Caradive" (Karativu) once tried to send the cholera "devil" back to India:

> The people of Caradive loaded a raft with boiled rice and fruits, and by enchantments got the cholera devil to board it, and then towed it off to the mid-sea and left it to be driven to some shore or the other. They think the cholera was formerly confined to the adjacent continent, but in this way, it has reached this, and now they hope to get rid of it.[14]

The Government Agents in the Northern Province and in the Central Province constantly urged the need for precautionary measures. As early as 1844, Dyke in the Northern Province urged the need for a special hospital for cholera patients while successive Government Agents of the Central Province urged the need for better supervision over incoming groups of workers as the people of the Central Province regarded the presence of disease carrying migrants as "an unmitigated curse." [15]

The fact that Ceylon was an island insulated it from the worst outbreaks of smallpox and cholera on the continent but cholera was not entirely unknown in ancient times as there are references to such a disease in ancient Sinhalese writings. One of the earliest authentic accounts of cholera after the arrival of the Western powers in Ceylon is provided by Garcia da Orta who wrote in 1563. The Portuguese called cholera **mordeshi** a corruption of **morxi**. Dutch writers such as Baldeus, and other Europeans such as Rhyne and Daalmans also refer to a disease which was almost certainly cholera.[16]

That cholera could not have been experienced on a widespread scale until after the arrival of the migrant workers is seen in Dr. Kynsey's observation in 1878 that there had been no word in the Sinhalese language to describe it. The disease became known as **Jana-sanniya** which meant a water fit which was a reference to the purging that patients experienced.[17]

In some of the most severe outbreaks that occurred after the arrival of the coffee workers there were instances when almost the entire labour force of estates died of the disease. One such estate was Deegalle in the Dumbara district of which John Capper wrote;

> the effect of the outbreak was so great that field work on the estate came to a halt as those who were not ill were either engaged in caring for the sick, or burying the dead... In the end the disease swept away the whole labour force of the coolies on the estate and it became a serious question as to how the growing crop of coffee was to be gathered and cured.
>
> Deegalle had acquired notoriety as an unhealthy estate and so a fine piece of finesse was resorted to, in order to secure unsuspecting Tamils to the locality. The superintendent of a neighbouring estate who was young and ruddy-faced was sent to Matale and he obtained workers without difficulty. He then marched them

by a circuitous route to Deegalle estate where they were taken over by the Superintendent with "sunken eyes and hollow cheeks". Within a month the lives of half their number was forfeited and the rest were sore smitten with mortal fear.[18]

Some of the most severe outbreaks of cholera occurred when workers went on pilgrimages to Kataragama in the south of Ceylon to worship at the shrine of the god Skanda who was hallowed by both Buddhists and Hindus. "To the former," wrote S. Paranavitarana, "it is one of the sixteen great places at which the Buddha during his third visit to the Island sat in meditation. To the latter it is the abode of Skanda, the youthful and fiery god of war." [19]

A description of an outbreak of cholera at Kataragama by T. Steele, an Assistant Government Agent at Hambantota, near Kataragama, has some of the pathos and intensity of Plutarch who wrote "Oh happy posterity who will not experience such abysmal woe and will look upon our testimony as a fable".

> Regardless of the rites they had travelled so far to partake in; regardless of the closest ties of kinship and friendship, the panic stricken pilgrims fled for their lives, leaving in many cases their companions to perish by the wayside and spreading pestilence wherever they went.
>
> Like wilfdfire cholera spread from hamlet to hamlet, from station to station. It was piteous to see forlorn women forsaken by their husbands, their children dying beside them, wailing in all the agony of shortlived but incredibly passionate oriental grief and forcibly recalling the awful scene of a bereavement in scripture. In Rama was there a voice heard; lamentation and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children and would not be comforted because they were not.[20]

Coffee planters dreaded the approach of the festival as it meant that even those of their workers who returned, often came back infected with cholera or other diseases, which then spread on the estates.[21] Kataragama was by no means the only pilgrim centre which involved death and disease. The **Times of Ceylon** linked the Roman Catholic church to St. Anne at Talawila, in the north-west of Ceylon, with Kataragama in 1860, when it stated that as in previous years outbreaks of disease had occurred at Kataragama and Talawila. It stated that these two religious centres were the birthplaces of the terrible scourge of cholera and urged that there should be some curbs on "the riotous living and debauchery in honour of good St. Anne and the Heathen Divinity".[22] The pilgrims at Talawila would have been almost entirely from the native communities as the coffee workers were Hindus except for a very small minority of Christians.

There was a cholera hospital at Trincomalee Street in Kandy, and C.R. Buller, the Government Agent of the Central Province, stated that the presence of cholera - infected workers created "terror" among the permanent residents of the town. "Complaints have frequently been made about it," he wrote, "but at present there is no other building for the reception of such cases." Buller said the location of the building was also disadvantageous in that it was a great distance away from the residence of the Medical Sub-Assistant. He said a hospital was needed in closer proximity to the smallpox hospital but sufficiently apart from that institution to prevent the possibility of the inmates of one being infected by the disease of the patients in the other.[23]

Officials and members of the Kandy Friend-in-Need-Society founded in 1837 for the relief of distress among the poor and sick found themselves as the only organisation which could even attempt to alleviate sickness and disease among the migrant workers. Their appeals for funds went largely unheeded. In 1843 the Government gave the Society a niggardly grant of £ 40, and in 1844 this was increased to £ 50. An appeal to planters was supported by the Ceylon Agricultural Society which stated that it required only "a glance at the roadside in the neighbourhood of Kandy to be convinced of the frightful amount of disease and misery which prevails". Only six estates heeded the appeal for funds in 1843, and 16 in 1844.(24) The hospital which the Society had started for paupers living in Kandy was soon occupied almost entirely by coffee workers.

According to a brief history of the Society which appeared in a newspaper the number of patients admitted to the hospital between 1838 and March 1843 was 627. Between one-third to half of the coffee workers admitted to the hospital died soon after admission. Some died while being taken to hospital but death was only confirmed when admission was sought on their behalf. In 1841 the expenses by way of salaries, purchase of drugs etc. was £ 80 six shillings and one penny. In 1842 expenses were £ 140. 19 shillings and nine pence. In 1842 67 patients died, while 18 "deserted" being unwilling to accept western medical treatment. The large proportion of deaths soon after admission was attributed to patients being admitted in a condition when there was no hope of recovery. Henry Bird, the Secretary and Treasurer of the Society was quoted as saying "The mass of misery which the Society has enabled to relieve can only be known to those who have examined its proceedings or have occasionally visited the hospital".(25)

In 1845 there was a proposal that the Agricultural Society should establish a hospital but the **Observer** said the idea was ridiculous "not only from the utter want of unanimity and co-operation among the planters but from the impossibility of making the cooly comprehend the benefit, if any, that it would secure to him".(26)

Apart from the problem of a lack of funds, the Friend-in-Need Society also received very little co-operation from the Police, or Village Headmen, whose own fears of contracting disease made them shun any contact with sick workers in need of hospitalisation. J. S. Colepepper, the Superintendent of Police, wrote that :

> the whole of the Kandyans of the interior, the headmen included, have such a mortal aversion to shelter or assist any Malabar man labouring under any sickness that it is found difficult and inconvenient to the policemen to give to the perishing sick the required aid and assistance. The constables have also on various occasions experienced great opposition from the villagers to the executi n of their duties. The headmen of the place have not only winked at, but have refused to give them any assistance at all.(27)

With cholera becoming the chief cause of mortality the medical authorities issued instructions to all doctors on how to treat the disease. In January 1846, J. Burns, the Secretary of the Medical Board, issued a circular to doctors in which he prescribed two mixtures, with or without opium, and also a pill. A solution of ammonia was the main ingredient of the mixtures and doctors were also advised to make cholera pills out of 36 grains of opium and 48 of black pepper. The opium and pepper when mixed were to be divided into 25 pills. As part of the treatment hot bricks or bags of hot sand were to be placed against the spine and legs of patients and these were to be constantly massaged.

The **Observer** in reporting the instructions to the doctors stated that many people resorted to superstitious practices. Some victims of cholera used to eat earth from the grave of a reputed Roman Catholic saint, while others drank water from the temple of Kali in the hope of cures.[28] Meanwhile the Government increased its grants to the Kandy Society. In 1846 the grant amounted to £ 150 and in 1846 when there was a severe outbreak of cholera the grant was £ 317.[29] 1845 and 1846 were two bad years. In January 1846 the Governor, Sir Colin Campbell (1841 to 1847) informed the Colonial Office that there had been 4,447 cases of cholera of which 3,218 were fatal. He said the high rate of mortality was due largely to the reluctance of the victims to seek treatment and to act on the advice of the European medical assistants.[30] Campbell criticised the planters for being unwilling to contribute towards the cost of treatment of workers and other measures for their welfare. "I greatly regret to say that towards these humane objects the planters have not as a body contributed in a liberal proportion," he wrote. He said that individual planters were also not disposed towards being generous, and added that if the planters did not change their attitude it would become necessary to impose a special tax. "I am not without hope that a sense of their own interests will ultimately lead to a greater display of liberality on their part but should it not, it may be my duty to direct your Lordship's attention to the institution of a distinct assessment on coffee plantations for the protection and maintenance of immigrant labourers and thus remove the reproach which now applies to their neglect and abandonment," Campbell wrote in a despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.[31]

In January 1847 Campbell reported that Asiatic cholera had taken a heavy toll among the workers and that considerable expense had been incurred "in burying the numerous coolies".[32] While Campbell was critical of the planters, they, in turn, were critical of him, and maintained that the Government was not doing enough to induce the flow of coolies, and of neglecting the provision of hospital accommodation for sick workers. In the two last years of his term as Governor, Campbell had the benefit of advice from Sir James Emerson-Tennent who had succeeded Philip Anstruther as Colonial Secretary in 1845. When Tennent acted as Governor between the departure of Campbell and the arrival of Lord Torrington (1847 to 1850) he sent the Colonial Office two despatches damning the planters. K. M. De Silva writing about the second of these despatches states that "The brilliance of its argument and the brilliance of its language combine to make it one of the best half dozen despatches ever written by a Ceylon civil servant". Tennent was however selective in the choice of facts and De Silva says the despatch "concealed as many facts as it revealed".[33]

In commenting on the labour shortage in 1846 Tennent explained that the situation had been exacerbated by good harvests in South India and adverse weather which made it difficult for boats to bring workers across but the factors Tennent emphasised most were neglect of the workers and the cruelty of planters towards the workers. One crucial factor which Tennent did not comment on was the epidemic of cholera. Tennent's predecessor Anstruther, who was an employer of coffee workers, had tried to make out that the wages paid were even higher than they need have been thus obviating the need for any protection of the workers by the Government. Tennent was not in favour of State-sponsored immigration but he felt that protection of the workers' interests was necessary. Tennent accused the planters of not sending their sick workers

to "the hospitals of the Government", when in fact there was no Government hospital in the Central Province at that stage. The Government had made small contributions towards the expenses of the running of the hospital maintained by the Kandy Friend-in-Need Society but the only Government hospital in the district was an institution for British troops to which no civilians were admitted. Tennent also juggled with statistics of expenditure on medical institutions. He did not reveal that most of the expenditure was on the Colombo district, and that expenditure in the Central Province was for the native population as well.

While Tennent and the planters were agreed that the mortality rate among the workers was high, each side blamed the other for this state of affairs. The planters pinpointed the travails of the journey to the estates and the lack of rest houses and sources of drinking water. Tennent tried to make out that the workers reached the estates in fairly good health but that they were worn out and emaciated when they left the estates to return home and died on the journey back. Tennent cited reports from three officials in support of his views. It later transpired that there were other officials and disinterested persons such as the Bishop of Colombo who did not agree with Tennent's contentions, and that the planters were closer to the realities of the situation when they said that it was the rigours of the journeys to the estates that were the cause of mortality, or left the workers susceptible to disease and death. Tennent, as K. M. De Silva has stated, was arguing to a brief but there can be no quarrel with his main contention that the Government had an obligation

> to expedite their journeys by safe and healthy roads, to protect them from violence or ill treatment, to provide them with shelter when necessary and with medical (facilities)...when overtaken by illness, to afford them the protection of the law when defrauded or abused, to insist on their humane and becoming treatment when employed on the estates, and to ensure them security in the country with the earnings of their labour.

Tennent's despatch, says De Silva, may have been "biased, lopsided and tendentious", but there was no mistaking "the deep humanity that pervaded it". Tennent, as seen earlier, suggested a new category of officials to be known as Protectors of Coolies who were to be empowered to inspect and check on every aspect of life on the estates, but the Colonial Office attitude was that the planters themselves should protect the interests of the labourers which would be in their own interests as well.[34]

A Committee which Earl Grey appointed to report on Ceylon recommended several measures to ease the flow of immigrants. These included a service by steam vessel between South India and Ceylon and more resthouses and bazaars along the route to the estates. On the question of settlements of Indians, Grey and the Committee favoured such settlements mainly for agricultural development but no action was ultimately taken in this regard. Torrington, the new Governor, was briefed on the recommendations of the Committee but in the turmoil that followed the "Rebellion" of 1848 questions such as whether there should be settlements of Indians dropped out of consideration. Tennent continued to be influential under Torrington, and Torrington despite his general ineptitude, took some interest in the coffee workers. Within a fortnight of his arrival in Colombo he wrote to Earl Grey that the treatment of coffee workers had in many cases been shameful.[35] He followed this up with a despatch in which he stated that he had

heard reports which later proved to be correct, that many workers who had arrived too early for the coffee plucking season were dying of starvation. He stated that if such reports reached South India they would discourage workers from coming to Ceylon. As a measure of relief he ordered that many of the idle workers should be engaged in cleaning and dredging the Kandy lake.[36]

Events overtook whatever good intentions Torrington may have had. His incompetence can be seen in the fact that he asked Major Thomas Skinner, the Commissioner of Roads, to report on measures to ensure the inflow of workers. He did not consult the Executive Council and explained this action by saying "Everybody here has estates and are liable consequently to interested motives".[37] Torrington seems to have been unaware of the fact that Skinner himself owned over 1,000 acres of coffee. Some of De Silva's criticisms of Tennent have been challenged by I. H. Vanden Driesen who said that De Silva had judged Tennent "in rather summary fashion" and "not through an evaluation of his views". Commenting on De Silva's statement that the Ceylon officials "were not above providing just the evidence necessary to support an official argument, particularly an argument as weak as Tennent's" Vanden Driesen describes the remark as a "libel on the officials concerned". Vanden Driesen agrees with De Silva that Tennent made no mention of the cholera epidemic but says that De Silva's conclusion that Tennent's aim was to focus attention on the harsh treatment of the workers is a surmise which he considers "somewhat precipitate and rather unjust". In the course of his analysis of statistics and other data Vanden Driesen says "One can charge that he (Tennent) all too complacently accepted the official attitude to the labourer; one can charge that the tone of his despatch made much of very little, but one cannot complain that he suppressed facts, or was intentionally untruthful".[38]

De Silva is replying to Vanden Driesen's criticism reaffirmed his view that Tennent had been guilty of "tendentious reporting of the situation in Ceylon" and observed that "Tennent, in the space of less than four weeks had, on the basis of the same set of facts, came to two diametrically opposed sets of conclusions (on the question of Indian immigrant labour in Ceylon) to meet two different needs". De Silva says that Vanden Driesen has shown greater faith in the official statistics than Tennent had. "Indeed no one among the Ceylon officials of the 1840's had a greater contempt for official statistics of the day than Tennent himself."[39]

As seen in the previous chapter, British missionaries generally refrained from any criticism of the planters but one of the exceptional occasions was when the Rev. T. Atherton of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in an address to the South Indian Temperance Union at Madras in 1847, stated that only about one-third of the Indian workers who went to Ceylon returned home. He said that many of those who returned home had become drunkards in Ceylon and were a corrupting influence on their return. Atherton was criticised by the **Observer** and the **Ceylon Examiner** but in India the question of mortality among the Indian workers was raised in the **Bengal Hakaru** which erred however in stating that workers died on the march to the estates from the port of Trincomalee on the east coast whereas workers arrived in the vicinity of Mannar on the west coast. The **Observer** maintained that only about 1,000 workers had died on the route in the preceding five years. Two years later however the **Observer** said the rate of mortality among the workers was around 25 per cent.[40] **The Examiner** also published

statistics which lent credence to Rev. Atherton's statement but it repudiated the accuracy of its own correspondent's statement.

The actual mortality among the coffee workers was investigated in some depth by the **Observer** in October 1849. After the **Observer** had published the first of a series of disclosures, the **Times of Ceylon** made a half-hearted attempt at getting at least the official statistics by asking the Colonial Secretary to provide information on the mortality among the coffee workers. The Colonial Secretary replied that the clerks in his office were "so much engaged that extra clerks were employed for the routine business". **The Times** accepted the Colonial Secretary's statement that the clerks were busy "from morning till night (and sometimes also during the hours of darkness) in the selection of documents for the purpose of counteracting the gigantic conspiracy which has been organised both here and at home against the Executive of the Colony". This was a reference to the Parliamentary inquiry in Britain into the mishandling of the 1848 "Rebellion" [41] and it was left to the **Observer** to pursue the inquiry it had begun on its own initiative. The **Observer** referred to the question of mortality among the coffee workers in its issues of 1, 4 and 13 October, 1849. The **Observer** estimated that in the period 1841 to 1848 about 70,000, or around 25 % of the workers who had come to Ceylon had died of various causes. The **Observer** based its calculations on figures published in the official year books or **Blue Books** which showed that the total number of arrivals between 1841 and 1848 was 272,872. This figure was made up of 265,467 men; 5,155 women and 2,250 children. The total number of departures was 133,518, made up of 129,360 men, 2,639 women and 1,519 children. The number of departures was approximately half of the number who arrived. The **Observer** estimated that about 50,000 workers may have remained in Ceylon and that after making allowance for margins of error there were still about 70,000 to 90,000 unaccounted for. It took the lower figure of 70,000 as the approximate number who had died. This figure of 70,000 was around 25% of the total arrivals of 272,000. In its issue of 4 October 1849 the **Observer** drew attention to a much lower mortality rate in Mauritius where the deaths of 6,884 workers was about 10% of the total of 63,407 immigrants. On 13 October the **Observer** published the views of a correspondent who felt that the deaths on the plantations were about 12 per cent and that the balance were on the march to the estates.

In 1859 when A. M. Ferguson returned to the subject in **The Ceylon Plantation Gazetteer** he maintained that the figure of 25% was accurate. This was in reply to an observation by the Secretary of the Ceylon Agricultural Society who stated that many workers returned to India in dhonies and that their departures went unrecorded thus giving the impression that the deaths in Ceylon were much greater than they were in reality. Ferguson replied that even if the official figures were faulty one was still left with about 25% unaccounted for and presumed dead. De Silva in an analysis of the **Observer's** figures states that they were not challenged by the Government, or the planters, and had allowed for a wide margin of error. "Neither Ferguson nor the **Colombo Observer** was hostile to the planters, and in raising this issue they appear to have been actuated solely by disinterested humanitarianism," says De Silva.[42]

Some further light on the subject was shed by Michael Roberts in 1966 in a comment on Ferguson's estimate of 25% in which he says "the mortality computations of early years are of little value, though one can agree with Ferguson's general view that

the mortality in some of the earlier years of coffee planting was large". Among the points Roberts makes are (1) migrants arrived between May to September at Mannar or Talaimannar, but between November and April when Masters picked up immigrants their vessels were forced by winds to touch at points further south where the coast was not under Customs observation. (2) At Colombo until 1857 arrivals and departures were registered on verbal reports by masters. (3) There was considerable room for error in assessing the numbers who settled in Ceylon as the word 'settled' could be interpreted differently by different individuals. Roberts refers to Twynam's statement that from 1843 to 1850 mortality was high and was aggravated by epidemics of cholera and smallpox. As late as 1864 Major General O'Brien, Officer Administering the Government, told the Colonial Office that mortality among workers was considerable and that they even arrived in a weak and sickly condition.(43)

One of the few planters who went into the question of mortality was C. R. Rigg, in his series of articles in the **Ceylon Examiner.** Rigg stated that in the first eight years of immigration about 70,000 workers were "believed to have died" despite the medical attention provided by way of medicines and professional attendance. Rigg stated that the workers were fatigued by the journey and the rice they brought was often insufficient. The journey was through insalubrious areas and drinking water was scarce. Workers began work on the estates "with the seeds of fever in their constitutions" and in order to save money they lived on thrash and carrion. The **Examiner** while publishing Rigg's estimate criticised him for having given credence to a statement by "an over zealous advocate of the temperance cause, a Revd. missionary at the Madras Presidency". The paper recalled that the missionary had been criticised at the time, and had expressed regret for his statements. The missionary was of course Rev. Atherton.(44)

The figure of 70,000 was picked up and recorded by authors of books on Ceylon. A military officer who wrote a book on Ceylon published in two volumes wrote that "It has been estimated that in eight years 70,000 Malabar emigrants died on the coffee plantations of Ceylon".(45)

One of the main problems which planters and Government officials encountered in the early years of the industry, and even throughout the whole history of the coffee industry, was the fear and dislike workers had of being hospitalised. From the planters' point of view, sending a worker to hospital meant not only the loss of his services but also the services of the workers who had to carry the sick man to hospital. The patriarchal-minded planters felt that there were hardly any ailments which they could not deal with, and the reminiscences of coffee planters abound with stories laced with humour and exaggeration of how they dealt with sick workers. The workers themselves undoubtedly had a great deal of faith in their masters' ability to cure them of ailments. Sabonadiere says the attitude of the worker to the employer was - "Now I am in a foreign country. You are my father and mother and must take care of me".(46)

The workers' faith in whatever "medicine" the planter gave him was the subject of much planter lore. Frederick Lewis recalled how on one occasion after his father had run out of stock of medicines, he gave a worker who complained of a stomach ailment a mixture of salad oil, vinegar, pepper, mustard and Lea & Perrins sauce. The next

morning the worker arrived with his wife and children saying they all had the ailment of which he had just been cured.[47]

Castor oil, opium, chalk and ginger in liberal doses were prescribed and dispensed by planters according to Major Edward Sullivan who also wrote that planters sometimes called their workers by the diseases for which they had been treated such as "Sore Legs", "Fever", "Sore Head", "Dysentery" etc.[48] Castor oil seems to have figured in every planter's medicine chest. Writing in the **Observer** in 1843, a planter stated that there would be no need to send workers to hospital if the planter had a stock of castor oil, quinine, sticking plaster, blue stone, laudanum and the compound tincture of rhubarb.[49]

Commenting on a proposal to open dispensaries on estates, R. B. Tytler said the only dispensaries the worker needed were sago, arrowroot, Leibig's extract, occasionally a few cubits of cloth, dried fish, rice and "Carpentyle" (turpentine). Tytler said that when he went round his estate he found that very often the sick were too lazy or indifferent to even come to the door of the lines. Tytler said he had once heard a Aberdonian say that the only medicines a worker needed were "Caster ile and stickin plaster" and it was really quite amazing how few medicines a planter needed. Like Sir Walter Scott's blacksmith all he needed was "twa simples - a calomy and laudamy".[50]

While sauce - imported or homemade - was popular with the workers, planters experienced difficulty in getting their workers to take castor oil. A planter who signed as "Castor" advised colleagues that the only way to make workers drink castor oil was to threaten to withhold their rice if they did not take the medicine.[51]

Quinine was another regular stand-by of the planters. "If it cured in only half the cases in which it was applied, the Tamil cooly ought to venerate the memory of the Countess of Cinchon," wrote William Digby. Describing what he had seen on an estate Digby wrote :

> The preliminary to treatment was for the sickman, or woman, to show the tongue, then various punches about the region of the chest or lower ribs would be made (a dangerous procedure it would seem to the looker-on considering the proneness to diseases of the spleen which all Hindus display) finally inspection over, a strong dose of quinine dissolved by a strong solvent would be put in a wine glass, the patient made to tilt his or her head back to a fearful angle, and the contents poured down the open mouth. The same glass sufficed for fifty sick people. Often it happened that what was wanted by the sick cooly was what is known amongst our own people in England as "kitchen medicine" and the sight in that planter's breakfast room, when the medicine was over, was curious and amusing, if not altogether edifying.[52]

Arsenic was used in minute quantities in the preparation of medicines and any over-doses would inevitably have been fatal. In 1888 when the **Ceylon Literary Register** serialised William Boyd's **Autobiography of a Periya Durai** the Editor had a footnote about a coffee planter of whom a story was "related or invented" that having been told that a solution of arsenic was a cure for fever he killed 30 workers before he discovered the correct dose.[53] The story seems almost certainly apocryphal but arsenic was certainly used by planters and those who deputised for doctors. Lt. Col. James Campbell related how he found himself having to act for a doctor and being given a stock of

medicines which included a solution of arsenic to be given after calomel. "I, under Providence, performed wonders in the way of cures, or rather in arresting the progress of disease among men, women and children who attended daily in my long verandah to receive free from my own hand a certain number, according to what they looked upon, as my most precious drops, for I could not venture to entrust my dangerous and deadly bottle to that of any other person," wrote Campbell.(54)

Most planters claimed to be expert doctors but they drew the line at childbirth. J. L. Shand, Chairman of the Planters' Association was not being facetious when he testified at a meeting of the Medical Aid Commission that he attended to all the health problems of his workers except those involving childbirth or surgery.(55)

G. A. Talbot, a planting representative in the Legislative Council was among those planters who took an interest in the health of his workers to the extent of visiting the lines to attend to sick coolies. Talbot later told the Council that although the Medical Wants Ordinance made provision for doctors to treat workers on the estates no doctor could visit 50 estates in a day. (56) Many planters continued to treat their workers even after the enactment of legislation to provide medical attention on estates. A.H. Duncan said one advantage planters had over most doctors was that they could speak Tamil. "I have had cases returned to me as incurable and I myself have been obliged to cure the coolies, although according to the rules of the Ordinance I had no right to do so, a doctor being in the district" wrote Duncan.(57)

A. M. Ferguson in reviewing William Sabonadiere's book on coffee cultivation said experienced planters were adept in "the philosophy of smells" and added "Mr. Tytler of Doomberra (Dumbara) indulges largely in a species of pride which we should wish to see generally prevalent. This gentleman will take visitors over his numerous sets of lines and defy them "to **feel** a smell (as the Scotch with strict accuracy put it)." Ferguson noted that while a superintendent had to treat simple cases he needed to have "intelligence enough to know where cases are beyond his control, and conscience enough to give such cases at once the benefit of those splendid and well-regulated hospitals....so palatial in their beauty and airiness that we can imagine patients feigning sickness to remain in them". Ferguson then went on to refer in particular to "that truly magnificent hospital which the Government of Ceylon has provided, mainly for the treatment of coolies, at Gampola". To illustrate his own proficiency in "the philosophy of smells" Ferguson said that "the only odour possibly perceptible is that of flowers in the neat garden plots".(58)

The strength of the feeling among planters that they knew what was best for the workers was seen early in the seventies when the Planters' Association sounded its members on the representation to be made against the Medical Wants Ordinance. There were however some exceptional planters who admitted that some lives might have been saved if it had been possible to send the workers involved to hospital. One of the most candid was James Taylor, of Loole Condera, the pioneer of tea cultivation. "One way or the other," he wrote, "I have treated coolies, evidently seriously ill, myself, rather than send them to the hospital, or incur the expense of getting a doctor from Kandy to see them, who have died, and I have understood and felt sure after, that they could have been cured by a doctor." Taylor also admitted that the returns of deaths he had submitted had been under estimates. "On this place a considerable part of the deaths take place without

my knowing or being told. The coolies may or may not have got physic from me some time before. But with the multitudinous things of such various sorts that a Superintendent has to attend to, I likely never recollect of the case again."

W. R. Waller of Hinoya Estate was another planter who admitted that the planters were amateurs after all. Waller wrote that a planter with experience, a stock of medicines and Dr. Thwaites' valuable **Handbook** could undoubtedly perform a great deal of good. "But," he added, "I feel certain that many coolies are often suffering from diseases of the chest, liver, spleen, heart, lungs and bowels which the unprofessional man cannot know and he may give medicines which instead of curing may be accelerating the disease."

Walter R. Tringham of Mossvile was the most outspoken among the planters who responded to a questionnaire by the P.A. He ridiculed colleagues who thought they were as good as doctors and said such persons should be made to take a degree "or at least encouraged to pass an examination (public) before competent medical men; it would show the mere veterinary treatment the very best are capable of". He said it was fortunate that mortality on his estate was not high but the very fact that the lives of 300 workers on his estate were left "to a person so thoroughly ignorant of the effects of medicine as myself is disgraceful".[59]

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"FOUND DEAD. CAUSE UNKNOWN"

Mortality in the Boom Years

As coffee emerged from the doldrums in which it had been in the mid and late 1840's, and as the turbulence over the "Rebellion" of 1848 subsided after the recall of Governor Torrington, the coffee industry entered a new phase of growth and expansion.

The appointment of Sir George Anderson as Governor (1850 to 1855) generated hopes of stability, as Anderson had a reputation as an experienced administrator in India, where he had worked for 38 years, while he also knew the problems of migrant workers at first hand as he came to Ceylon after a short term as Governor of Mauritius.[1] In the event, Anderson proved a disappointment.

The Ceylon Agricultural Society was inoperative at this stage but the planter lobby and the newspapers clamoured for improvements along the routes taken by the coffee workers, and of roads in other areas as well. Anderson however had come to Ceylon with orders to exercise economies and the **Observer** expressed the exasperation the planters felt over the parsimonious policies followed by Anderson and Charles MacCarthy, the Colonial Secretary, when it wrote that the Governor and the Colonial Secretary seemed

> to have an equal antipathy to travel and a palanquin carriage drive round our principal towns seems to be the boundary of their experience on the Interior of the Island. To rest like a toad in a hole in Kandy or to walk from the Slave Island to Borella (in Colombo) will hardly afford these functionaries that knowledge of the wants, wishes and actual position of the planters.[2]

Anderson maintained that the roads in the Island were "in tolerably good order". The planters retorted that the condition of the roads was such that a man with a pole had to be sent ahead of a carriage to sound the potholes, "anything more than three feet being deemed dangerous".[3]

Anderson's term, says K. M. De Silva, marked the end "of a distinct phase in Government policy with regard to the immigration of Indian labourers. It was a phase in which **laissez faire** attitudes proved to be stronger than humanitarian considerations".[4]

The Planters' Association was formed towards the end of Anderson's term on 17 February 1854, and within a month of its formation the Association appointed a sub-committee to go into the question of more rest-sheds and provision of drinking water along the routes to the estates. The Committee reported that both facilities were badly needed and that suitable resting places with all the requirements of the workers could be built at a cost of £ 150 each.[5] Better facilities on the route were needed to induce workers to come and also reduce the rate of mortality. Will Rose of Ambalawa stated that the Malabars would not keep coming in, year after year, if there was no reduction in mortality, with workers sometimes dying within sight of the coffee estates, and then being "left

dead for days on end on our public roads". R. J. Mackay of Kinara said that owing to the lack of proper roads sick workers had to be carried by colleagues to hospitals in towns several miles away "in the rain as I have seen happen".[6]

The dynamism and energy displayed by Sir Henry Ward (1855 to 1860) was in marked contrast to the inactivity of his predecessor. One of the major infrastructural changes during Ward's term was that the health services, which until then had a military head, were placed under a civilian. In 1855 when the Legislative Council decided on the need for a civilian head, Dr. Charles Elliott, who had been Assistant Colonial Surgeon at Badulla before he became Editor of the **Observer**, applied for the post. MacCarthy opposed the appointment as Elliott had been a trenchant critic of the Government. Ward himself felt that the military could always provide a suitable head for the health services but Elliott continued his lobbying for the post on a visit to the United Kingdom, and with the matter being left to Ward's discretion he finally appointed Elliott in 1858.[7]

Elliott who was a lay preacher at the Baptist Church, in Cinnamon Gardens, Colombo, was a man with a strong sense of compassion. A friend recalled that his last sermon just before his death in 1859, had been inspired by the sight of a Tamil woman lying on a road with her two children-one of whom was dying.[8]

After Elliott's death, A.M.Ferguson who had bought the **Observer** became Editor. Ferguson's son Donald, served on the staff of the **Observer**, and was also Editor of the **Ceylon Literary Review** until he returned to Scotland in 1893. In 1861 Ferguson's nephew, John, came to Ceylon and his association with the **Observer** lasted for 55 years. Father, son, and nephew were dominant forces in the public life of the Colony and their publications including the **Directory** are the richest sources of information on the coffee, and later tea industries.[9]

In 1859 Ferguson raised the question of mortality among the coffee workers on which he had first focussed attention ten years earlier. Ferguson again maintained that the rate of mortality was around 25% and said that "Of one million Tamils who have come to Ceylon since the real commencement of the coffee enterprise in 1837 at least 250,000 have found graves in its soil". The disclosure was a serious reflection on the planters and the Government, and R.B. Tytler, Chairman of the Planters' Association wrote to the Colonial Secretary that "no time should be lost in contradicting a statement so fraught with prejudice to the best interests of the country, and the character for common feelings for humanity of the planters and the Executive of the Government".

Tytler denied that the mortality among the workers was excessive, and said he was prepared to prove that it was "at least as low as the mortality is among the Cingalese (Sinhalese) villagers in the interior". He estimated that in both cases the rate of mortality was about 3% which was "the average ratio of humanity". In any case, he said, the whole question was shrouded in uncertainty over the lack of reliable statistics with large numbers of workers leaving the country in native craft from places where there was no check on the numbers departing.[10]

While Ferguson drew attention to the numbers of deaths on estates Rev. Septimus Hobbs of the Tamil Cooly Mission drew attention to the large numbers of workers dying

on the roads even in Kandy town, where dead bodies were "simply thrown into a hole and covered over without ceremony, inquest, or inquiry of any kind".

Hobbs said that many workers did not die on the estates because when they were too sick to work they were turned out of the estate by the estate authorities who then reported to the Police that they had "Runaway". Hobbs urged that there should be some form of asylum for workers turned out of estates, and also some system of registration of deaths. "Deliver me from blood guiltness O my God" were the concluding words of a letter by Hobbs published in the **Observer**.[11]

Hobbs's charges were answered by Tytler, and another correspondent who seems to have hidden his real identity behind a sardonic pun by signing as "J.B. Graves".

Tytler in his reply dealt in detail with the mortality that had taken place among workers on several estates over a period of years and maintained that there had been an improvement in all cases. He said the "brutal" practice of turning out sick workers was not followed on estates with which he was familiar, and he felt it was not done elsewhere too.

"J.B. Graves" stated that inquests were held into cases of sudden death, but no inquests were held into deaths caused by illness, and where there were no allegations of foulplay. About burials he said he had been "informed by officers of the Police that the bodies were decently buried being first wrapped in a cloth, over which is a mat, and Government pays two coolies whose duty it is to bury the remains under the superintendence of the Police".[12]

Although Ward intervened very strongly in the case of the hospital maintained by the Kandy Friend-in-Need-Society he was generally diplomatic in his dealings with the planters as he needed their support for the Colombo-Kandy railway project which was supported by planters who would benefit directly from it, while those on estates far from the proposed rail link wanted money to be spent on roads, and not a railway.[13]

On the question of mortality among the coffee workers, Ward adroitly shifted the blame on to the kanganis and said the whole kangani system was "one of fraud and pecculation". He stated that while the Government had done everything in its power to reduce the hazards of the journey to the estates by providing shelters, hospitals etc. it still happened that workers were "decimated by sickness and fatigue", as the kanganis did not spend even one third of the money they had obtained as advances from the employers, in meeting the requirements of the workers on the march to the estates. He said hundreds of workers actually died of starvation. There were difficulties in taking legal action as agreements entered into in India could not be the subject of actions in Ceylon and vice versa.[14]

In an address to planters Ward did stress the need for fair treatment of workers even if only in their own interests. In an address to the Legislative Council on 19 December 1859 Ward stated that large numbers of workers were going to Mauritius and the West Indies in preference to Ceylon. There was uncertainty about care of the sick, wages, and the cost of living in Ceylon. "That there is something wanting in these no friend of the Colony will deny", he said.[15]

Towards the end of his term Ward became involved in an imbroglio with officials of the Kandy Friend-in-Need-Society which ended in a rather heavy-handed take over of the Society's hospital at Kandy.

In a despatch to the Colonial Office Ward stated that the institutions managed by the Society at Colombo and Kandy were supervised by well known persons, including high ranking Government officers, and most people therefore presumed that these institutions were well-run and well-managed. He had himself presumed that the hospital which the Society maintained for immigrant workers at Kandy was well-managed as "the excellence of the names connected with the Friend-in-Need-Society blinded me as to the possibility of its failing in care or attention". He said it was only as a result of a change in the surgeon-in-charge that he had come to know of facts which were really "appalling". He said a fundamental cause of the mismanagement of the Kandy hospital was that it depended on private donations which tended to fluctuate. The funds available were "often lowest when liberality was most needed". This had led to friction between the doctor-in-charge and the Committee of Management. The Government grants had been gradually increased from £40 in 1843, to £600 in 1859, but even this was insufficient to counter "the radical vices in the system". Another problem was that until the bifurcation of the medical services into civil and military sections, Dr. Charsley had combined both civil and military duties. After the division of the health services into two branches the management of the hospital had been left to a Mr. Pieres who had "used the name of the Government to protect himself from any interference by the Committee, and the name of the Committee to shield himself from Government responsibility". Dr. Johnston who had then taken over had reported to him that the Colony was spending £1,200 in year in maintaining the "most horrible and loathsome institutions that it had ever been his lot to fall in with under the name of a hospital". Ward stated that he had visited the hospital and even by "standing at the door" of each ward he saw that Dr. Johnston's observations were not an exaggeration.[16]

The Colonial Secretary explained in a letter to Rev. G.W. Sprott, Secretary of the Society, that the Governor had stood at the entrances to the wards during his visit as he had been unwell at the time, and had been medically advised not to risk infection by walking through the wards, or spending time at them. The **Times of Ceylon** reported that after his visit to the hospital the Governor felt that it was "a disgrace to any civilized community; a mass of filth and ordure and vermin, and uncleanliness of every kind, which rendered the atmosphere pestilential and recovery from the slightest wound or sore impossible, as gangarene would set in".

The Governor had also seen the graves in which "the victims of this frightful mismanagement were interred with such a case of want of decency that the ground was bleached with their bones-and he came away with the deep conviction that if these were the fruits of a combination between the Government, and the planters of the Central Province, for the relief of the immigrant coolies when sick, the labour upon which the collection of the coffee crop depends would soon cease to exist".[17]

Sprott in his reply to the criticisms of the hospital stated that although it had accommodation for only 20 patients it had been compelled to take in 115. If they did not permit overcrowding with sick workers the alternative would be "to let them die in the

streets". He stated that many patients were brought to the hospital by the Police when they were "in such a state of diarrhoea and dysentery as to have lost all power of retaining the contents of their bowels". He said the blame for this state of affairs rested largely on those who "turned deaf ears to frequent appeals for enlarging the hospital". He said the Governor had based his official acts on private reports and had made an ex-parte examination of the hospital.

As a result of Ward's criticism, the Committee of Management resigned, but Tytler who was a member of the Committee in his capacity as Chairman of the Planters' Association expressed confidence in the Committee in a vote of confidence which was seconded by Alexander Brown, another senior planter. Tytler made a forceful defence of the Committee in his speech;

> Who are the committee charged with the crime of this hecatomb of victims to their frightful mismanagement...? They are the Government Agent of Kandy as President. The Commandant of Kandy, a soldier covered with glory in the service of his Queen and country. The District Judge, the Police Magistrate, the Chief Cingalese, and the Chief Tamil Modliyars (Mudaliyars: high ranking native chiefs) Two Burgher gentlemen; Four clergymen including three Colonial Chaplains. Both the Bankers of Kandy and last (if not least) the Chairman and Secretary of the Planters' Association. Truly when indicted for the wholesale slaughter charged upon us we shall make a famous array in the dock.

The **Examiner** in publishing what had been said in defence of the Society, editorially called upon Ward to make **amende honourable** to the Committee which had resigned "who but for the ready sympathy of the public would have long remained under the stigma of Wholesale Manslaughter".[18]

Tytler had also written to another newspaper in defence of the Society and in that letter he said that while the condition of the hospital showed "lamentable deficiency" it had to be remembered that it was mostly the worst cases which were referred to the hospital - "many of them only to die and be buried". He stated that in any case the conditions at the FINS hospital in Kandy were "no worse than that of any other Government hospital for the same class of person".[19]

There were apparently behind the scenes discussions for when Ward met the Committee of Management in Kandy it was agreed that the Government would take over both the FINS hospital and another for Pioneer workers (Government employees). Ward said he realised that the task of maintaining the hospital "had outgrown the means of any private society" and only the Government had the resources to maintain it.

Ward said he could hardly regret the correspondence that had occurred as it had led to beneficial results but felt it was "due to the gentlemen concerned to say that no exertion on their part could have remedied the vices of a system which denied responsibility, and lack of sufficient means made it impossible to work with credit or satisfaction".

Ward visited the hospital after it had been taken over by the Government, and described it in glowing terms. "The establishment is now a model of cleanliness and order. The ventilation (is) good. The wants and comforts of the patients (are) duly

provided for. And the only defect is want of space which, fortunately, it is easy to remedy at a very trifling cost to the public." [20]

The new Committee told Ward that it was the lack of funds that had been the basic cause of the hospital's ills, and that it had acquired a bad reputation owing to the high rate of mortality which was due to the fact that the workers preferred "certain death upon an estate to removal to Kandy". Ward decided that the smallpox hospital which was in close proximity to the Society's hospital should be amalgamated with the FINS hospital to form a single institution worthy of the name of a hospital. In regard to medical attention for the workers it was decided that groups of estates should combine together to employ the services of Ceylonese medical officers trained in Colombo, Kandy or Jaffna. While the medical assistants would attend to simple ailments on the estates themselves all workers who were gravely ill would be sent to Kandy and a charge would be made from the estates which sent them for the medical services provided. [21]

In a farewell address to planters before his departure on transfer to Madras, Ward appealed to the planters to give their workers "kind and liberal treatment and good hospital treatment". He said he hoped to improve living conditions in Madras but, as seen earlier, he died before he could get down to work as Governor of Madras. [22]

Ward was succeeded by Sir Charles MacCarthy (1860 to 1863). MacCarthy had been Auditor General from 1847 to 1850, and Colonial Secretary from 1850 to 1860. He was the first and only Colonial Secretary to be appointed directly to the post of Governor from that of Colonial Secretary. While many Governors had experience of the Indian migrant workers by having served in the West Indies or Mauritius, MacCarthy had first hand experience of them at work in the Island. [23]

MacCarthy felt that there were misapprehensions about the extent of mortality among the Indian workers which could adversely affect the colony's supply of labour. In a despatch to the Colonial Office he stated that the difference in the numbers of those who arrived in the Island and those who returned to India was being regarded as the number who had died. He stated that in reality there were large numbers who had permanently settled in the Island, and he therefore proposed to call for statistics about the numbers of workers employed; the numbers of births on estates; and also the numbers of deaths. He said the planters themselves were keen on getting such information, and that the only point on which the planting member in the Legislative Council, Mr. Nicol, disagreed was on the need to give the cause of death when deaths were reported. MacCarthy said he disagreed with Nicol on this point as the knowledge that the cause of death had to be given in each case would result in greater attention being paid to the health of the workers. [24]

In 1862 the Legislative Council enacted Ordinance No. 17 of 1862 which was an Ordinance "To ascertain the proportion of mortality amongst the natives of India employed in agricultural and other labour in Ceylon". A sub-committee of the Legislative Council which considered its provisions reported that the problems involved were complicated. The Committee stated that the provisions of the Ordinance were likely to prove "delusive". It stated that a return calling for the number of deaths on a particular estate, during a particular month, and the number of workers employed on that estate during the month in question, could not provide sufficient data to calculate mortality.

Apart from the fact that the number of workers would have varied during the month, even the individuals who were counted in arriving at a particular number could be different persons. Thus the proportion between the average number employed, and the number of deaths, could never be correctly ascertained. The Committee recommended that the returns should give the number of workers employed on a particular day. This would not ensure a perfect return but it would provide more reliable data for calculating the proportion of deaths.[25]

The planters who had been in broad sympathy with the objectives of the Ordinance found compliance with its requirements to be "distasteful", and complained of the "inquisitorial" character of the legislation. The Ordinance never really became operative and the planters were equally uncooperative when legislation was enacted in 1867 for the registration of births and deaths, and the registration of all marriages other than Kandyan marriages.[26]

P.W. Braybrooke, the Government Agent at Kandy, stated that "a large proportion of deaths among coolies employed on estates, or travelling to or from the continent of India, are not reported at all to the Registrars". He said a circular had been sent to estate managers "but very few comply with the request, nor does there exist any effectual means of securing such returns".[27]

The extent to which the 1862 Ordinance was ignored is seen in the fact that when the Planters' Association commissioned Sir Richard Cayley, a lawyer, to prepare a draft ordinance that would consolidate the existing laws governing master/servant relations (Chapter 7), Cayley said he had left out, or left untouched, ordinances which did not directly concern master/servant relationships. One such ordinance was Ordinance 17 of 1862 to ascertain the proportion of mortality among Indians which he said was "practically a dead letter".[28]

In 1867 Governor Sir Herclues Robinson (1865 to 1972) informed the Colonial Office that it was impossible to ascertain the exact numbers of births and deaths on estates, but judging from the statistics that were available it seemed that both the birth rate and the death rate were around two per cent.[29]

By the mid-sixties conditions on the North Road were better than they had been earlier, but the numbers shuttling between India and Ceylon was also increasing each year, and the numbers of deaths remained high. In 1866 the official total of the number of workers "Found dead; cause unknown" was 172. The highest number of 72 had been reported from the Central Province while there were 56 such cases in the Western Province, and four in the Northern Province.

The Inspector General of Police, G. W. R. Campbell, recorded that in reality the figures were very much greater. He stated that most deaths occurred among "fever stricken Tamil coolies who have been overtaken by death while retracing their way to their homes on the coast of India". He said it was natural to suppose that if so many died between the estates where they had worked and the confines of the Central Province, a very large number must have died along the long and desolate road they had to traverse in the Northern Province. There would also have been many deaths in the neighbourhood of the points of disembarkation. "We have no evidence of this in the returns for the

Northern Province which contain as their death rate under this head the utterly disproportionate number of four. I cannot believe that these returns are correct," wrote Campbell.

Campbell also stated that "were the Village Headmen to do their duty, many of the poor creatures who perish by the wayside might be saved. The Police are constantly bringing them into hospitals but, few as the latter are, they do not discover even one in five of them. The villagers and the headmen in very many cases pay no attention to them at all".[30]

At Nuwara Eliya, one of the coldest towns in Ceylon, workers died of exposure. In 1867, A. R. King, the Assistant Government Agent, urged the construction of at least two sheds in the Barrack Square, and in the vicinity of the racecourse. "In June, July and August, the dead bodies of half a dozen coolies were found lying on the plains at different times and there was no doubt but that the deceased had met with their deaths through exposure."[31]

In the sixties and seventies, outbreaks of cholera not only resulted in several thousand deaths but also frightened prospective migrants into returning to India, and hampered development activities such as improvements in communications in the Island.

In July 1860 Andrew Nicol, the planter's representative in the Legislative Council, wrote to the Colonial Secretary about the heavy incidence of cholera on the North Road and of reports he had received that workers who were on their way to the estates had turned back and returned to India on hearing reports of cholera in the districts to which they were heading. He stated that "If (a) few hundreds of the many thousands spent on the Immigration Labour Commissioner had been applied to the amelioration of the route thousands of additional coolies would have arrived and many human lives saved".[32]

Charles La Froy, Artificer in Charge of Electric Telegraph Works at Anuradhapura, complained to the Assistant Government Agent that owing to an outbreak of cholera all the Sinhalese workers and half the Malabars had run away. "I regret very much to say," he wrote, "that I cannot induce the Singhalese to come back. I have offered as high as nine pence a day but I am told it is not likely that I can get anyone to work until after the sickness disappears from the Central Road."[33]

In order to minimize the spread of contagious diseases a system of dual control was introduced by which the Principal Civil Medical Officer was responsible for the supervision of the health of the migrants along the route, while the Government Agent of the Central Province supervised all other matters relating to the labourers.[34]

In 1865 there were 2,727 cases of cholera of which 1,555 were fatal[35] but the worst outbreak was in the years 1866 to 1867. In November 1866 there were 1,304 deaths. In December the figure rose to 2,271. In January 1867 there was a record of 3,287 deaths and in February the figure dropped to 1,767. There was a total of 16,298 cases reported with 10,210 deaths in this outbreak and the mortality rate was 68.8%.

The Government appointed a Commission of Inquiry which reported that it had been established beyond doubt that the cholera had been introduced into the Jaffna

peninsula directly by sea from India. Twynam in his evidence stated that cholera almost always existed among immigrants from India, and that as they proceeded to the Central Province, they infected persons with whom they came into contact at resthouses and all the roads. He submitted statistics to show that some villages in Mannar had been depopulated. "Year after year sickness has been introduced by the immigrant coolies and village after village has died out, or has been so reduced that only one or two families remain," he said in evidence.

The Commission referred to the various forms of treatment used in outbreaks of cholera and stated that one of the main problems was the prevalence of superstitious beliefs. "The religion of the largest proportion of the population leads them to the superstitious belief that cholera is a visitation from the Goddess "Amal" and that to attempt to arrest the evil by remedies would only excite the anger of the Goddess to a greater degree," the Commission stated. The Commission stated that at times the rate of mortality was so high that persons of the "lowest class" could only be induced to undertake burials after they were put into a state of intoxication. Often bodies were hurriedly buried in very shallow graves which were dug up by dogs and jackals which scattered the flesh and bones. The Commission urged the need for strict quarantine measures at Jaffna, Kayts, Point Pedro, Kankesanturai and Velvettiturai (all in the Northern Province) and recommended that Health officials who boarded vessels should be empowered to order the removal of any persons suspected of suffering from cholera to hospitals.[36]

Residents of Kandy continued to live in fear of cholera and the Kandy correspondent of the **Observer** provided a harrowing report of how persons suspected of suffering from the disease were removed to hospital;

> They are wrapped up in a cloth, the two ends of which are attached to a pole and carried through the centre of the town, and it not unfrequently happens that the patient is found dead at the end of the journey. At other times they are carried in an open frame suspended to a pole and quite exposed to the effects of the weather and to the gaze of the public. Surely a more humane method of conveying the poor wretches might be adopted.[37]

Governor Robinson had meanwhile taken action to strengthen the Government's powers to deal with outbreaks of contagious diseases by repealing Ordinance No. 10 of 1852 and enacting Ordinance No. 8 of 1866. Robinson explained to the Colonial Office that under the earlier Ordinance the Government could only taken action to prevent the spread of the disease after an emergency situation had arisen. Under the new Ordinance, the Governor could, with the approval of the Executive Council, take action when it apprehended any danger to public health. Robinson said there had recently been a case where the Government Agent of the Eastern Province, on hearing that there had been cases of smallpox among the crew of a **dhoni**, imposed restrictions on the movements of the crew. He had thereby prevented the spread of the disease but had acted beyond his legal powers in that case.[38]

The numbers of deaths and the rate of mortality due to all causes remained as confused as ever. In 1871 Robinson stated that it was unrealistic to attempt to gauge the rate of mortality between 1843 and 1868 as the statistics for the first fifteen years of this period had been very unreliable although there had been an improvement in the accuracy

of the statistics collected in the sixties. Ferguson who had earlier estimated that the rate of mortality was around 25% did a *volte face* and estimated the rate of mortality as low as four per cent. Ferguson now maintained that a very large percentage of the workers "remained permanently in the Colony" and that to compare the number of arrivals and departures gave rise to "exaggerated estimates of mortality". He also used the very argument which had earlier been used against his own estimates that native tindals bound for India picked up large numbers of workers at various points other than those at which departures were recorded, and that the number who left the country was therefore much larger than official figures indicated.(39)

Vanden Driesen has rejected Ferguson's estimate of four per cent and has stated that the refusal of the planters to send in returns as required under the 1862 Ordinance showed that they had discovered that "the death rate was higher than they had at first supposed and were... averse to giving it undue publicity". Michael Roberts in citing this quotation from Vanden Driesen's thesis **Some aspects of the History of the Coffee Industry of Ceylon with special reference to the period 1825 to 1885**, states that whether for the sixties or for the earlier period "it is difficult, if not erroneous, to take a particular percentage as the approximate death rate in the manner Ferguson and other contemporaries have done". In arriving at a percentage Robinson felt that the death rate in "recent years" had been not more than three per cent. His calculation was based on returns from 25 estates for the years 1869 to 1879, and on calculations by Twynam who, on the assumption that those who did not settle in Ceylon stayed on average for 3 1/2 years, arrived at a mortality rate of 2.5 per cent. Roberts has shown that Twynam's figure for the period 1841 to 1870 was 7.04% which if multiplied by 31/2 provides a figure near Ferguson's original 25%. Roberts also states that while immigrants did stay for longer periods in the 1860s than they had stayed earlier, there is no special reason why the average stay should be calculated at 31/2 years when it could have been 11/2, 21/2 or even 41/4.(40)

Robinson went into the question of mortality at some length in a despatch in February 1871 but the picture was no clearer then than it had ever been. Robinson said Twynam who knew more about immigration than any other official (he had by then succeeded Dyke as Government Agent in the North) had stated that the excess of arrivals over departures was not 41.9% but 26.3%. On the assumption that 17.3% settled in Ceylon permanently, and that the remainder stayed on average 31/2 years, the annual mortality rate would be 2.5%. On the question of arrivals and departures, Robinson stated that these figures were not a reliable guide to mortality. A large number of workers had settled in the Island but no definite information was available about them. There were others who had left, but who had not been included in the number of departures. Still others had come to Ceylon in country craft and had not been included in the figures of arrivals. Despite these complications it was his estimate that the death rate was about 3 per cent. He said the Planters' Association had collected statistics from 25 estates which showed that the death rate in 1868 had been 3.3 % and 2.8% in 1869.

Robinson said he agreed with Lord Grenville's remark that there had been "scandalous mortality" among the estate workers but stated that as long as only the "worst cases" among sick workers were sent to hospitals the rate of mortality recorded in the hospitals would necessarily be high. Grenville had specifically mentioned Matale, and

Robinson in reply stated that of the 399 persons admitted to Matale hospital in 1870 there had been 96 deaths which was 24 %. Of the 399 admitted, 185 workers had been brought from the roads, and there had been 64 deaths in this category. 21 of the 96 who had died had been brought from estates. Robinson said the figures in respect of Matale were also necessarily high as the town was situated in the centre of 120 estates which employed about 15,000 workers. It was also a transit town through which workers passed on their way from, or to India. The death rate was "large" but this was due to factors "beyond the control of either the Government or the Medical Department".[41]

In 1871 Ferguson returned to the subject of mortality by publishing figures which showed that over a period of 28 years there had been 1,625,023 arrivals and 1,003,840 departures. Ferguson estimated that of the 621,183 who had arrived in the Island and whose departure or return had not been registered, about 300,000 had settled in the Island. This left a balance of 321,183 who were unaccounted for. Ferguson said the whole of this number could not be put down as deaths, as thousands of departures had not been registered, and with the various measures taken to safeguard the health of the workers the final figure or rate of mortality would be "exceedingly low".[42] Ferguson made another rough calculation and arrived at the same conclusion in 1875. In this exercise Ferguson put the total number of men, women and children who had arrived from the earliest years up to 1874 at 2,000,000. Although the gap between known arrivals and departures left about 400,000, or 20%, unaccounted for, Ferguson said 20% was too high a figure for acceptance. "In any case, what with the ferry, the hospitals and rest sheds along the cooly route, and the provision of medical aid enforced on estates, the chances for life of the labourers employed in Ceylon are as good as those of any similar class in the world," he wrote.[43]

There was a storm in a coffee pot reminiscent of the Berwick row in the late sixties when the Colonial Secretary, Henry T. Irving, sent the Planters' Association the observations that had been made by Dr. W. G. Vandort, Assistant Colonial Surgeon at Gampola, on mortality among the coffee workers and sought its views on Vandort's remarks, and also on a proposal by T. W. C. Murdoch for the adoption of the practice in Mauritius of making rations a part of wages.

Vandort prefaced his remarks with the observation that he had made allowance for incorrect returns, and stated that he had also noted that according to the figures provided by the Immigration Board workers who came to Ceylon generally returned after spending about three to four years in Ceylon. Vandort stated that the statistics of the Immigration Board for 1843 to 1867 showed a yearly average of 57,856 arrivals and 33,595 departures with the annual difference between arrivals and departures being 24,261 or 41.9% of arrivals. Taking the total arrivals for 25 years viz 1,446,407, the departures in the same period were 839,837 and the excess of arrivals over departures was 606,510 or 41.9%.

Vandort disagreed with Ferguson's explanation that this large difference between arrivals and departures was due to settlement in the Island. "This explanation," he wrote, "cannot be reconciled either with the strong attachment evinced by Malabar coolies for their 'sheemie' or country, or with Mr. Ferguson's own figures elsewhere in his **Handbook** where the entire Tamil population is estimated at 750,000 of which only

250,000, or one third, are said to consist of immigrant coolies; thus leaving no less than 356,510 or 24.6% of the total arrivals unaccounted for." After saying that comment on the mortality rate of 1 to 4 was "needless", Vandort went on to say that even after making a large deduction for incorrect returns, there was no doubt that mortality among the Malabar workers was "exceedingly high".

Vandort stated that a large proportion of the deaths was due to causes which "a more elaborate system of Medical Police, beginning its supervision from the maritime districts of the Northern Province, and following these immigrants along the inland route to their several places of destination, together with a strict enforcement of sanitary laws in cooly lines in coffee estates, could easily prevent".

As seen in Chapter 11, Vandort had commented on the tendency of coffee workers to eat almost anything and everything that came their way, and he said these eating habits resulted in diarrhoea and dysentery. "Diarrhoea is of such common occurrence among the Malabars that they usually regard it as the normal condition of the bowels - any deviation towards health being considered a sign of costiveness," he wrote. He said that of the patients admitted to Gampola about three-fourths had diarrhoea as a complication.

After providing statistical tables of admissions, cures, and deaths, relating to diarrhoea, Vandort also provided data on dropsy, which he said was a sequel to diarrhoea, and also caused deaths, while a frequent termination of dropsy was gangrenous ulcerations. He noted that in addition to this cause, ulcers were "very common among Malabar coolies from their occupation, mode of life, and filthy habits - the most trifling abrasion being irritated, maltreated, or neglected till it ends in a formidable ulcer". Vandort said that habits of life were an important cause of disease. "The immoderate indulgence of his gross and sensual appetites, his want of cleanly habits, his improvident and careless disposition, his apathy and indolence render him an easy prey to disease."

Vandort drew a distinction between the condition of those who were newly arrived from South India, and those who had been in Ceylon for some years. He described those recently arrived from South India as "destitute of expression," and as being of "a dull heavy apathetic look". He said that "A great difference is perceptible in this respect between coolies recently arrived from the coast, and still new to the amenities of civilization, and those whose faculties have been sharpened and their intelligence roused by the genius of labour". He stated that the countenance of the latter category "mirrors the newly-awakened soul, and the consciousness of powers and capabilities, hitherto dormant and unused, stamps the physiognomy with an expression of manliness and intelligence which is never seen in the raw, uncivilized, newly landed cooly".[44]

The P.A. appointed a sub-committee to consider Vandort's report and submitted an interim reply to the Colonial Secretary. It also sought additional information from Dr. W.P. Charsley, Principal Civil Medical Officer. Charsley stated that while his officers could provide statistics showing the numbers of workers from coffee estates admitted to Government hospitals they would not be in a position to distinguish between those who were recently arrived, and those who had been in the Island for some time.[45]

The P.A. in its interim reply to Vandort stated that while Vandort based his conclusions on statistics of arrivals, departures, etc., which were correct, or at least approximately so, it had to be borne in mind that until recently such returns had been very imperfectly kept, and that no steps had been taken to ascertain what proportion of the workers stayed behind in Ceylon.

In its detailed response to Vandort's comments the P.A. stated that its own investigations had showed that the official returns on which Vandort's conclusions were based were very incomplete, and that the rate of mortality "was not at all excessive". The P.A. said it was remarkable that Vandort should not have known the untrustworthy nature of the official figures and that Vandort had, in any case, betrayed a very imperfect knowledge of conditions among the Indian coolies.

The P.A. stated that Vandort's description of the workers was "highly coloured and inconsistent; some of his conclusions are very contradictory, and not a few of his statements are exaggerated or incorrect" The P.A. stated that Vandort's comments about the improved condition of the workers who had experienced "the genius of labour" were inconsistent with other remarks about "vicious diet" and "excessive mortality".

The P.A. stated that it could not be responsible for "the brutish skull," the "lack of expression;" the "dull, heavy apathetic look," the "sensual propensities," and the "loathsome tastes," which Vandort had commented on as being characteristic of those who were recently arrived. On the other hand the planters could be credited with the "sharpened faculties," the "quickened intelligence," the "consciousness of power and capabilities hitherto dormant," as well as "the expression of manliness and intelligence," and other improvements which Vandort had noted among those who had been in Ceylon for some time. The P.A. made the most of the opportunity Vandort had unwittingly given it by stating that

> After making due allowance for the exaggerated terms in which the improvement the Indian coolie undergoes, by his treatment in Ceylon, is described, the fact is patent that his condition is most materially ameliorated during his sojourn in Ceylon. The fact is borne out by the constantly increasing tide of immigration which annually flows in to supply the large demand for coolie labour in our plantations. The coolies, be it observed, come here of their own accord, they leave their homes under no engagement for any particular term of service. They are free to go wherever they please, and to leave at 15 days' notice any service in which they may engage. For more than thirty years they have been coming thus voluntarily in increasing numbers to seek employment on our estates; and coffee cultivation which is entirely carried out by means of their labour, has doubled in extent within the last ten years. It is inconceivable that coolies, a great proportion of whom revisit their country nearly every year, would return and bring with them their families and friends if the rate of mortality were such as Dr. Vandort infers, or if their condition in Ceylon were to entail such a fearful loss of life.[46]

T.W.C. Murdoch, the Emigration Commissioner, also did not agree with Vandort's estimate of a mortality rate of 1 in 4. He said the mortality had to be divided over the period the workers stayed in Ceylon and if this was taken as 3 1/2 years then the rate of mortality would be 7.04% per annum. While disputing that the mortality rate could be inferred from statistics of arrivals and departures Murdoch drew attention to a statement by Governor Robinson in March 1867 that "many who originally came over

to work on the estates, have become settlers and have acquired landed property". Murdoch said provision had to be made for permanent settlement in attempting to arrive at statistics of mortality.

Murdoch said Vandort had touched only very cursorily on the hardships the workers suffered on the journey from Mannar to the estates. He recalled Governor Ward's representations to the Secretary of State for the Colonies that large numbers died of starvation on the route. He recalled that Ward had advocated a steamer service to overcome the perils of the land journey but he felt that even if a steamer service was established the penurious workers would not be able to afford the fares they would have to pay.

Murdoch stated that Vandort's remarks about the eating habits of the workers - "extraordinary and repulsive" as they were - corresponded with accounts that had been received from the West Indies regarding workers from Madras. He said the best solution to the problem of the provision of wholesome food lay in making the employers provide food which then became a regulated deduction from wages. In Mauritius the workers had always been fed by their employers and there had been no complaints. In some of the West Indies colonies rations were part of the wages for a limited period after the arrival of the worker as a sanitary measure. He admitted that the system was open to abuse and should therefore only be introduced as a last measure. Such a system would however be preferable to allowing the workers to eat garbage.

Commenting on the transformation that Vandort had perceived between workers soon after arrival, and after they had spent some years in Ceylon, Murdoch said "it would be too much to expect that the tastes and habits of a lifetime could be materially altered during a residence not exceeding three or four years".[47]

The planting lobby which was indignant over Vandort's remarks never forgave him. George Wall who was Chairman of the P.A. at the time told members of the Committee that Vandort's charges could and would be refuted. He said Vandort's experience was limited to Gampola, a town which was surrounded by coffee estates. The high rate of mortality at Gampola hospital was due to the fact that only the worst cases were sent to the hospital. G. D. B. Harrison who used to preside at meetings when Wall was unable to attend said that if the rate of mortality was as high as Vandort said it was, the question that arose was "Where do the deaths take place? Certainly not on the estates".[48]

At another meeting of the Association Tytler scoffed at Vandort's report as being the work of "a medical youth" who had aired his "English and professional attainments" in his report. He said the report contained things that were "new and true" in which "the true is not new, and the new is not true".[49]

The Vandort affair had not been forgotten seven years later when Hugh Fraser criticised "Burgher and native medical assistants" as being unwilling to go out on duty after dark, or in the rain, and who were generally "worse than useless".[50]

Vandort's criticism of the planters may have contributed to the curtailment of his career in the public service. After his death a friend recalled that the planters had been "at him," and he was therefore transferred to Matara in the south of the Island. There was

an outbreak of cholera at Matara, and Vandort according to this source "did what is dangerous, if not fatal to do. He said the Assistant Government Agent was to blame". His remarks were reported to the Attorney General. Vandort then quit Government service and took to private practice.[51]

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"INTO HOSPITAL TO DIE"

Mortality in the Twilight Years of the Coffee Industry

It would hearten the chronicler of the mortality among the workers of the coffee industry to be able to record that steps were taken to bring their mortality to something at least approaching the rate of mortality among other groups in Ceylon, in the latter, and final stages, of the history of the industry, but to make such a statement would be to fly in the face of the facts.

In the early seventies the Government finally introduced the long overdue Medical Wants Ordinance No 14 of 1872 but the Act as enacted was a compromise between the Government's belated recognition that something had to be done, and the fierce opposition of the planters who regarded any sort of action on the part of the Government as unwarranted interference in their domain. The planters fought rearguard actions against the Ordinance as well as subsequent amendments and bills.

There were inevitably some advances in medical science in the closing decades of the last century but the rudimentary state of medical knowledge even at the end of the coffee period is seen in remarks made by Dr. P.D. Anthonisz, in his Presidential address at the inaugural meeting of the Ceylon branch of the British Medical Association. Dr. Anthonisz said that in the preceding decades fevers had merely been divided into three broad categories. "Intermittent, Remittent and Continued Fevers" but "Now we are able by means of the thermometer and by careful observations to distinguish to a certainty the different kinds of fever." (1)

In the latter stages of the coffee period - as in the early years - the workers were reluctant to enter hospital even when they were gravely ill. It is noteworthy however that the coffee workers were not exceptional in this regard. In a survey of conditions in the North Central Province which was peopled exclusively by the Sinhalese, Governor Sir William Gregory (1872 to 1877) noted what he called "the superstitious dread, fostered by native quacks, which still prevails among the natives against the use of European medicines".(2)

A number of planters said they could do nothing about workers who resorted to "native treatment" (by practitioners of Sinhalese or Tamil ayurveda). James Wright said the problem was most acute on estates near Sinhalese villages as the workers preferred to go to "native quacks," or "devil dancers" (exorcists). James Davidson urged that stringent laws should be enacted against "sneaky blackguard natives who sponge about the lines".(3) H.S.O. Russel, a Government official, stated that sick workers went to a **parikari** whose sole panacea was medicinal pills even in cases of bites by venomous reptiles.(4)

There were formal and informal discussions among planters on whether they should compel workers to go to hospitals. W.R. Waller was probably expressing an extreme view when he asked "Why should we force this treatment on them against their will, and against their caste prejudices and customs. Do the Indian Government drag every man in India, who is ill, out of his house and clap him in a hospital when he is ill against his will? Are the Singhalese receiving this kind of treatment. If not, why should our coolies then be so bullied?" (5)

The Planters' Association did not officially advocate the division of wards in hospitals on caste lines but individual members of the Association advocated such action. Officially the Planters' Association urged the Government to organise a system of out-door medical relief for workers who were against treatment involving a stay in hospital. The P.A. stated that workers who were prejudiced against entering hospitals would be willing to attend outdoor clinics which would also benefit those whose ailments did not require hospitalisation.(6)

Dr. Henry Dickman, Colonial Surgeon in Kandy, whose views were sought, said outdoor treatment was provided at Kandy hospital to paupers from whom no charge was made, and that these facilities should not be extended to estate workers without a charge. He said estate managements sent workers to hospital for admission only when they were very ill, and that if outdoor treatment was to be provided to the workers for all ailments there would be a steep increase in expenditure on medicines. He said the reluctance of workers to enter hospital was nothing new but it was curious that workers had been more willing to enter hospitals in earlier times when conditions in the hospital were not so satisfactory. "Now that the Government has built, at a considerable expense, almost palatial buildings for them, Malabar prejudices appear to have become more intense, and opposition to hospitals more determined," he wrote.

Dr. W. P. Charsley, Principal Medical Officer, stated that the Association was asking the Government to provide a service which its members should provide. Apart from the heavy expenditure on drugs the provision of outdoor relief for estate workers would also involve additional work for Government medical officers on whose gratuitous services the planters had no claim. Charsley stated that there had earlier been a practice by which medical officers visited estates and attended on sick workers on payment of a small fee. With a plurality of subscribers this became an adequate return for the labour involved. Of late however the planters had abandoned this practice on grounds of economy and workers were in many cases "detained sick on estates under the treatment of the Superintendent until the case gets beyond his skill, when he is sent to hospital to die". Charsley said the solution was to follow the system in Mauritius where hospitals and medical officers were provided and were financed by rates levied by a special ordinance.(7)

The Planters' Association in reply stated that the system of periodical visits by medical officers had not been given up on grounds of economy but because it had been found that very little was achieved by such visits once a week, or sometimes once a month. The P.A. stated that what was really required was not periodical visits by medical officers, but daily attendance, for which however there were insufficient medical men in the planting areas. While the P.A. repeated its contention that workers disliked entering

hospitals owing to caste differences, Charsley maintained that fewer workers were actually being sent to the hospitals, and he said that this was proved by the fact that while receipts from charges for treatment of estate workers had varied between £ 25 and £ 30 a month (on the basis of 6d per worker per day) a few years earlier, the latest returns of receipts from estates in July 1871 was only £ 2. 10 shillings. He said that the nominal levy of 6 pence per day was "beneficence to a degree unheard of in other places in which immigration of Indian labourers had been permitted". The benefits which the Government had freely and generously offered were not being availed of by planters who attempted to treat workers themselves. Charsley hinted that the prevailing system led to the deaths of workers whose plight he described :

> He (the coffee worker) is suffered to be treated medically on estates, by perhaps young, inexperienced Superintendents until disease advances to a fatal stage. Further efforts becoming useless, he is then sent to a Government hospital inspite of all his alleged prejudices against hospitals, and in a stage of disease too late to save his life. This is shown by the heavy mortality exceeding even that which obtains among the wretched Tamil coolies picked up on the roadside and brought to hospital by the Police...

Charsley stated that the commonest ailments among workers were diarrhoea, dropsy, fevers and ulcers, and "it would be cruel, even if it could be done, to compel sufferers from such diseases to walk to the dispensary every day". Charsley added that in the case of outdoor relief the doctors would also have no control over the diet of the sick workers. He said the planters should be compelled to provide district hospitals with the necessary staff and equipment, as in Mauritius where employers of over 30 workers had to provide the necessary hospital, medicines and doctors. "Here," he stated, "from four to five hundred coolies are sometimes found congregated on an estate without any medical or sanitary provision other than a Superintendent is able to bestow." (8)

The P.A. replied that owners of coffee estates could not afford to provide hospitals on their own, and the whole system, if introduced, would become "a calamity to the country". The correspondence between the P.A. and the Government's medical officers which had begun in May 1871 seemed to be going on without end when the Colonial Secretary, Henry T. Irving, stepped in to convey the views of the Governor. In his letter Irving said it needed to be remembered that the hospitals in the hill districts had not been established solely for the benefit of the estate workers but for the general population. In the planting districts workers were treated for a charge of six pence a day which barely paid for even the subsistence of the sick worker. Very little use was however being made of the hospitals and the facility provided. Irving said the Governor agreed with the P.A. that the best possible system was daily attendance on estates, and the Government had in view a system by which the planting areas would be divided into manageable medical districts, each with a dispensary and a doctor, who would visit the estates every two or three days. Irving referred to the deliberations of a Select Committee of the Legislative Council which was considering the whole problem and the need for legislation.(9)

The Medical Wants Ordinance No 14 of 1872 which resulted from the recommendations of the Sub Committee was bitterly opposed by the planters despite the incorporation of some compromises and concessions to the planters. The Ordinance

provided for the division of the "Plantation area" into several districts, each of which was to be supervised by District Committees whose members were elected by the planters or proprietors of the estates. District Committees were permitted to formulate rules that would suit the requirements of their own areas, and the only overall supervision was to be by an Inspector appointed by the Government but on the recommendations of the planters, and the scheme was to be financed by an acreage levy. Infringements of the Ordinance were punishable by fines of £5. Births and deaths were made notifiable within 24 hours. The planters had opposed post-natal leave for women and the only obligation introduced under the Ordinance was that women were entitled to free rations during post-natal convalescence.[10]

Lord Kimberley, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, in his comments on the Ordinance stated that confusion would arise if the various Committees adopted "varying rules and arrangements". He suggested that for a start the Ordinance could be implemented in one or two districts, and then extended to the other districts once rules and standards which could be regarded as models had emerged. He said the Governor who had to approve of the rules formulated by the Committees would ensure that there were no marked divergences or discrepancies in standards.

In explaining the opposition of the planters to the Ordinance, Gregory stated that what the planters really feared was that medical officers would try to impress the Government with their own zeal and efficiency by sending in exaggerated reports of conditions on estates. Gregory said that to avoid such a situation he proposed to appoint physicians of "as high a character as I can obtain," and that if medical assistants sent in reports that were untrue, or exaggerated, such reports would be denied or corrected by the senior Medical Officer of the district.

Gregory said he could not agree with planters who wanted the health services on estates left entirely to them. He said there were some planters whose liberality and kindness was such that they would do much more than any law provided for, but he recalled that the "same language" had been used in his own country (Ireland) by Irish landlords when the Medical Charities Bill had been introduced. Gregory said he had been a Chairman of a Poor Law Union and it had been proved in Ireland that State supervision of medical relief had been a boon which could never have been achieved by a private agency. In Ceylon, and in respect of the coffee plantations, State intervention was more necessary than in Ireland because of the changes in ownership of estates.[11]

The feeling of anger which the Ordinance aroused among planters was expressed by the irrepressible R.B. Tytler when he said; "If only we could get to the bottom of all this. Whoever it is, if we could only get him and put him in the lake there (the Kandy Lake) who would say there was any harm in it? If it is the Indian Government, I say it is most unjust." William Martin Leake opposed the Bill in the longest speech he had made in a "stentorian voice". Leake who was the representative of the planters in the Legislative Council had urged that the Bill be dropped altogether but his motion received support only from its seconder.[12]

Writing about the Ordinance some years later a coffee planter, (A.H. Duncan) who signed his autobiography as "By Himself" described the Ordinance as "the greatest swindle ever perpetrated on a nation by any Government". He said it had resulted in some

estates being closed, and had caused "immense suffering to the poor coolies whom it is wildly supposed to benefit". Duncan claimed that he and colleagues had cured workers who had been sent away from hospital as being incurable, and also that planters had a better knowledge of the ailments of the workers than doctors employed under the Ordinance "A coolie believes in his own **durrai** (master) and has no confidence in a doctor fresh from England and unacquainted with a word of Tamil." [13]

A subtle form of opposition to the Ordinance which was noted by R. Masie, Assistant Government Agent at Matale, was that planters submitted incorrect returns and later described "the joke for the edification of their fellow countrymen". Masie seems to have been a conscientious public servant for he also pinpointed the deception to which kanganis resorted when they were questioned about missing workers. He said that in such cases the kangani gave whatever excuse came to his mind. In one instance a kangani admitted after three days of detention that a missing woman had been attacked by a cheetah (leopard). He said he had taken her to hospital but had not mentioned the fact through fear that he would be asked to go and bring her back. In another case, a kangani had said that a woman had returned to India with her husband. The woman was actually a widow and had been left behind as she could not keep pace with the others. She finally managed to reach Matale on her own.[14] The practice of making kanganis answerable for the workers they brought in had been introduced by Gregory on a suggestion by the Colonial Office. The Superintendent of Emigration at Paumben gave the kangani a list of the names of the workers in his party and this list was checked by an Inspector who knew Tamil at Dambulla, the last town before entry into the hill district. The Colonial Office had wanted legislation which prescribed penalties for kanganis found guilty of neglect, or the abandoning of workers, but Gregory felt that such action would have an adverse effect on the inflow of workers.[15]

While Gregory was under fire from the planters over the implementation of the Ordinance, he also received a number of suggestions and directives from Lord Kimberley, and later Lord Carnarvon, on effective implementation of the Ordinance, and on the need to improve conditions in hospitals owing to the high mortality among estate workers. The greater interest which Secretaries of State for the Colonies began to show in the administration of Ceylon at this stage is explained by some rapid improvement in communications between Britain and Ceylon which were connected by overland cable in 1868. In 1869 sea communication became quicker with the opening of the Suez Canal, and in 1870 the laying of a submarine cable between Britain and Ceylon was completed. Robinson had been the first to feel the greater interest Whitehall took in Ceylon affairs with this improvement in communications which was felt even more after Gregory took over.[16]

Commenting on a despatch in which Gregory had explained several factors that led to the high mortality among workers, Lord Kimberley stated that it was difficult to reconcile the mortality statistics submitted by medical officers with "the picture of the coolie presented by the Administrative Officers of your Government". Gregory maintained that a high rate of mortality was "perfectly compatible with the most favourable condition of the general health of the coolie". Gregory said that "Caste prejudices, dislike to be separated from his friends, and absurd reports as to treatment, indispose the coolie to resort to hospital as long as hope remains of drugs and charms

effecting a cure. Nor are the Superintendents of estates inclined to send away a labourer until they have exhausted their medical resources". Gregory did however stress the need for more hospitals as workers sometimes had to be carried for distances of 15 to 20 miles.[17]

In another of his numerous despatches on the health of the workers, Gregory stated that he proposed to leave the regulation of the health services "as much as possible in the hands of the planters themselves". He said he proposed to step in only if he felt the medical services in any area were inadequate. He said the Government was also retaining the right to appoint the doctors in charge of the various districts because the doctors would not be a check on the planters if they were appointed by the planters.[18] At the opening session of the Legislative Council for 1873 on 30 July, Gregory said that the report of the Principal Civil Medical Officer and his comments on the mortality among the workers was convincing proof of the need for the legislation they had adopted the previous year. "I trust ere long to hear that the provisions of the Ordinance are being universally and efficiently carried out. From the reports which have reached the Government I am glad to state that the planters have shown a ready and praiseworthy desire to give effect to the law," he said.[19]

The Medical Wants Ordinance of 1872 was amended within a year by Ordinance No 10 of 1873 which provided that the Government Agent, or Assistant Government Agent, of a district could recover the cost of treatment of sick workers at Government hospitals from the estates in which the workers were employed. If the estates failed to pay there was provision for the seizure of the estates or assets on them, to recover the amounts which had not been paid. Gregory informed the Colonial Office that the amendment had been introduced because difficulties had been experienced in some cases in recovering the cost of treatment of workers.[20]

Lord Carnarvon, like his predecessor at the Colonial Office, Lord Kimberley, also took a keen interest in the health of the coffee workers and went to the extent of condemning any preferential treatment for the planters on hospitals in estate areas. Arthur N. Birch, the Colonial Secretary, while acting for Gregory who was on leave, submitted statistics of mortality among the workers. Carnarvon in his reply to Gregory who had then resumed duties, went into details about the facilities on estate hospitals. He said that the hospitals seemed to lack baths and an adequate cadre of nurses. He said conditions seemed particularly bad at Kandy hospital where the death rate was abnormally high. He asked Gregory to inquire whether it was the drainage, or water supply, or some other deficiency which was proving so "injurious to the recovery of the patients".

Carnarvon stated that at Gampola where the problem of overcrowding was acute one whole ward had been set apart exclusively for the use of planters although the ward had never had more than one patient at a time. "It is showing undue preference for Europeans to maintain this large ward exclusively for one European, and as the hospital is overcrowded it should be divided and the space made available for native patients." Carnarvon wrote. Gregory was directed to specifically inquire into conditions at Matale hospital where the death rate was 25% and he was asked to introduce water filters at every Government hospital and prison, as filters would be "preventive of a large and dangerous class of disease".[21]

Gregory was wrapped on the knuckles when he stated that he proposed to introduce water filters at some hospital on an experimental basis. Carnarvon told him that although filters may be a novelty in Ceylon their advantages had "become a matter of common household observation in every part of the world". He was again directed to introduce filters in every hospital and also to look into the drainage systems in hospitals. "If a great measure of mortality in a hospital is due to bad drainage it is not surprising that the coolies only resort to them in the last extremity," said Carnarvon who added that improvements in the hospitals "might probably make the coolies less unwilling to resort to them".(22)

The first major review of the working of the Medical Wants Ordinance was made in 1875 by Dr. J.D.M. Coghill, who was Medical Inspector of the Coffee Districts. Coghill submitted two reports to the Colonial Secretary who submitted copies to the Planters' Association, which printed the reports in its **Proceedings** so that members could submit their views on the matters raised.

Coghill stated that there was a general impression among planters that the Government would not enforce some provisions of the Ordinance such as Section 21; Clause two, which provided for the establishment of sick lines on every estate as long as each District had a District hospital, and a District Medical Officer. Coghill stated that most of the existing lines on estates could not be converted into sick lines but even on those in which this could be done it would be quite inappropriate to have sick workers at one end, and healthy workers at the other. He said the Government should insist on compliance with the requirement that there should be a sick line on each estate except where the same proprietor owned two adjoining estates in which case one line for both estates would suffice. After recommending the size, lay-out, etc. of the proposed lines he said they should not be too far from the other lines in which workers lived. A small kitchen, male and female latrines, and living quarters for "a steady cooly and his wife who would act as sick attendants would complete the establishment". He said that as far as cooking was concerned it was very rare indeed for a worker to be so friendless as not to have someone of the same caste who would bring him food. He said such Cottage Hospitals as they could be called, would greatly reduce mortality among the workers as the natural conditions in Ceylon were more favourable than those in other countries in which Indian workers were employed;

> There are, more particularly in the higher regions, very few endemic causes of disease indeed. Beyond those arising from bad accommodation, contaminated water, the insanitary condition of the lines generally, and perhaps the penurious habits of the coolies themselves as regards the purchase of introgenous food. Cholera, paludial fevers, and dysentery which frequently decimate the Indian labourers in the other colonies of the East and West are comparatively unknown here, and when they do occur are very amenable to treatment; it will not be too much to expect a vastly decreased death rate from causes so remediable in the hill country ere long.

Coghill said the construction of each sick line or cottage hospital would cost around Rs. 50 to Rs. 100, and elderly workers who were more or less pensioners could be employed as attendants without extra cost to the estate management.(23)

In the year in which Coghill submitted his reports, Gregory informed the Colonial Office that the high rates of mortality at Kandy and Matale were due to workers being admitted to hospital "in the last stage of disease". In a subsequent despatch he stated that the workers themselves refused to go to hospital "so long as they have the strength and power of will". The planters on their part did not want the workers to die on the estates as deaths gave an estate a bad reputation.(24)

The high rate of mortality on the estates distorted the figures for the whole country, and in 1876, Kynsey, the Principal Civil Medical Officer, published statistics showing separate figures for all Malabars in the Island, and those on estates. Kynsey stated that the mortality rate for the "mixed races" in the Island was 6.73%. The death rate among Malabars was 20.09% while that of the estate coolies was 35.37% - one of the highest ever recorded. Kynsey noted that with the opening of more hospitals in the estate areas there had been a decline in admission of estate workers to the general hospitals and he hoped that with stricter enforcement of the Medical Wants Ordinance the admission of estate workers to the civil hospitals would cease altogether. He said estate workers were often taken to hospital "simply to die," with the hospitals serving the purpose of mortuaries.(25)

Kynsey's remark about the hospitals serving as mortuaries was taken up by Sir Muttu Commara Swamy, the Tamil member in the Legislative Council, after he had toured the plantation areas. He said he agreed with Kynsey that it would be more appropriate to send workers in the last stages of disease to mortuaries than to hospitals. On the other hand workers who had been sent to hospital at the outset of their illness had spoken well of the treatment they had received. He said some workers had told him that they were not sent to hospital unless they became really ill because their absence from duty would mean that the kangany would receive less "head money" calculated on the number of workers present at muster. Coomara Swamy said that workers with minor ailments could be treated in their homes, or in small hospitals within the estate premises. When workers were sent to the big hospitals in distant towns "the removal and the motion connected with it, and the exposure did more harm than good".(26)

As seen earlier there was a marked increase in the number of arrivals of workers in the mid-seventies owing to famine conditions in South India, and the authorities in Ceylon had to resort to several emergency measures. At Kandy the Friend-in-Need-Society opened soup kitchens where the staff tried to distinguish between those who were merely hungry, and those who really needed hospital treatment.

Dr. James Loos, who was Colonial Surgeon of the Central Province, opened a "House of Refuge" in Kandy and then another at Ramboda (in the Nuwara Eliya district) for workers or newcomers who were starving, or sick, or both. While there were sick and destitute workers everywhere, Loos noted that the Planter's Ward in Kandy was empty as no planter had been admitted in 1877. Loos stated that of 358 sick workers brought to the hospital, 207, or 57.82%, had died, while of the 162 sent from estates 41 or 25.30 per cent had died.(27)

While the death rate among the workers was soaring the Planters' Association called for a review of the Medical Wants Ordinance. In proposing a motion to this effect, J.L. Shand said the abnormally high death rate was due to an insufficiency of doctors.

He said there were about 350,000 persons in 22 coffee districts. Two or three districts had no medical officer at all, and the overall average was one European medical officer for every 16,000 persons. In Britain there was one doctor for every 2,000 or 2,500 persons. To achieve such a ratio in Ceylon would necessitate the levy of an assessment of Rs. 4 to Rs. 5 per acre which was "impossible," for the estates to pay. As for "native supervision" this had proved to be a failure as the medical assistants were "terribly deficient both morally and physically". They had therefore been compelled to fall back on what was "sneeringly called the patriarchal system" - the treatment of the coolies for simple ailments by the planters themselves. That, said Shand, was the only system what would work satisfactorily. The Government should make provision for cases of child birth and those involving surgery but the Government should not try to go beyond those.(28)

In 1878 Kynsey again referred to the deaths among those who were newly arrived from India. He said they arrived in "a state of extreme prostration caused by want of food, or the use of unwholesome food, not only incapable of supporting life, but also of effecting such an irritating effect in the system as to give effect to diarrhoea or dysentery which rapidly proves fatal". He said the Medical Officer-in-Charge of the Kandy hospital had stated that the digestive organs of the Malabars had degenerated to such an extent that the "blandest and most nourishing food was neither digested nor absorbed". He said this Officer had reported that the Police were also bringing in workers who had been turned out of the estates when they were unable to work.(29) Kynsey later advocated some form of screening of those who wished to come to Ceylon from India. He said that as matters were, "even the lame and the blind are allowed to come".(30)

Although Dr. Coghill had stated that the incidence of cholera in Ceylon was not as severe as in some other colonies, it was still a very real problem in the seventies, and Gregory pondered on the problem of the introduction of cholera by the immigrant workers in an address to the Legislative Council on 13 September 1876. "We are indebted to India for our labour supply and we obtain our cholera from the same source, for, in allowing free ingress to the cooly, we have hitherto been unable to shut out infectious disease," Gregory said, adding that they would have to keep "watch and ward" against this terrible invasion with greater care than ever."(31)

The Planters' Association urged the Government to direct the current of immigration away from the infected route to sea transport from Tuticorin to Colombo, where workers could be detained at a special camp for quarantine and examination. George Wall told members that he had met the Governor in this connexion but the Governor had expressed concern over "diverting a possibly infected current from the Northern route to the populous city of Colombo".(32)

In 1875 the health authorities had, by way of experiment, started a floating hospital in Colombo harbour but it wa given up through fears that the presence of persons with contagious diseases on the floating hospital could infect others in the harbour area.(33) Although this experiment was abandoned, Kynsey drew the attention of the Government to the fact that the bodies of workers who died at sea en route to Colombo were being thrown overboard to avoid detention of the vessels in Colombo. There had also been cases of estate workers being disguised as traders so that the vessels bringing

them would not be quarantined. He said that when persons who died of cholera, or any other disease, were thrown overboard at sea such deaths were not registered and what was even worse was that the persons who resorted to such action were unconcerned about the introduction of disease "into a densely populated City and province".[34]

During Sir James Longden's term (1877 to 1882) there were again suggestions that the stream of immigration should be halted, or at least suspended, but he told the Legislative Council that the "full stream of emigration" was essential to the prosperity of Ceylon. Action would however be taken to protect the permanent population against the spread of cholera.[35]

As in earlier times the incidence of cholera among pilgrims to Kataragama proved a problem, and Gregory had special legislation drafted to control pilgrimages. In his despatch to the Colonial Office seeking approval for the draft legislation, Gregory quoted the Inspector General of Police as saying, "It is better that it should cost the Government some hundreds of pounds than that hundreds of human beings should be left dead along the path of the returning pilgrims".[36]

From 1880 admission to Kataragama was restricted to permit-holders. Initially only 150 permits were issued but with the gradual decline in the number of deaths and the strict enforcement of sanitary measures the number of permits was gradually increased until the system of issuing permits was finally abolished in 1925.[37] The provision of pure water supplies to Colombo in 1877, and to Kandy in 1878, was a major factor in the elimination of the disease in the Western and Central Provinces.[38] In a review of the incidence of cholera during the coffee period, Dr. J.L. Vanderstraaten estimated that there were 73,431 deaths due to cholera between 1841 and 1885.[39] As seen earlier the closure of the North Road was a crucial factor in the control of cholera, and this was accompanied by the opening of a Detention camp at Ragama where migrants arriving by sea at Colombo were screened for cholera, smallpox, or other infections diseases. In commenting on the closure of the North Road, Governor Sir Joseph West Ridgeway (1895 to 1903) stated that the Mannar route had been a form of "natural quarantine" in which the residents of the North were "unnecessarily sacrificed". He stated that between 1891 and 1898 alone, about 500 villagers in the Mannar district had died of cholera but there had been no deaths after the closure of the Mannar route.[40] In 1900, Dr. Allan Perry, Principal Civil Medical Officer said the country had been freed at last from cholera as there had been no cases reported at all in 1899, whereas in the preceding 30 years there had not been a single year in which cholera "was not present in a more or less severe epidemic form in some part of Ceylon".[41]

A much lesser problem than cholera which was also introduced by the migrant workers was anchylostomiasis, or hookworm. The problem did not attract much attention in the coffee period when deaths from it were attributed to diarrhoea, dropsy, or debility which were symptoms of the disease. It was caused by soil pollution due largely to the absence of latrines. Soil pollution also caused ulcers on the legs which was another common ailment during the coffee period.[42] In 1899 Dr. Perry stated that "the disease, like many others in the Island, is brought over from India by the Malabar coolies in whom it is almost a natural conditions to house an intestinal parasite. The ravages of the disease

lie in the sequelae and a very large death rate exists from the profound anaemia which results from this affection".[43]

In his last address to the Legislative Council on 7 May 1877, Gregory stated that while the Medical Wants Ordinance had done some good it had not been as effective as it might have been;

> I was never sanguine that the experiment would be successful though I naturally hoped that it might be, and that the Government may thus be spared the necessity of taking on itself a work of so much responsibility and difficulty. At present there are many indications that the planters are becoming desirous of placing the cooly medical relief in the hands of the Government. They find the attendance on the Medical Committees to be a serious tax on their time; they complain that the object of the Ordinance is not properly carried out, and that the time of the Medical Officers is taken up in private practice instead of in attendance upon the labouring population.

Gregory said the Government was not anxious to take on new burdens but, "if the Committees desire to transfer the administration of cooly medical aid to the Government, it will no doubt be accepted, and I confidently believe that the results of one general system, with continuity of management and strict supervision of the medical staff, will tend to render this Ordinance less onerous to planters, and far more beneficial to cooly immigrants, than it is at present".[44]

The Planters' Association which had consistently opposed the Ordinance renewed its opposition after Sir James Longden (1877 to 1883) succeeded Gregory. J.L Shand even claimed that the Ordinance was "a source of increased disease and death among Indian labourers" for whose special benefit it was framed. Shand denounced the native medical assistants as "one of the curses of the Ordinance", and as being "the very scum of creation" (The minutes of this meeting state that Shand's remark evoked cries of "Oh" and also "great laughter" and "Hear, Hear.") He said the mildest words he could use to describe the medical assistants were "ignorant and indolent". Describing conditions that had prevailed before the introduction of the Ordinance Shand said;

> In the old ante-Medical Ordinance days the man would come to the planter's bungalow among the rest of the sick for the day, and when it was seen what was the matter with him, a liberal portion of salts or castor oil would set him right again next day. Now what was the case? The man had the horror of the doctors and the hospital before his eyes, and concealed his slight illness until, aggravating the symptoms every day by the same meals, dysentery set in. Then the medical assistant was sent for... and gave his order that the coolie be removed to hospital; a sack was procured into which the half-dead coolie was put; two bearers then jolted him roughly over the rocky road; and the hospital reached, the framework of skin and bone was emptied on to the floor; and there he lay another victim to an ill-digested scheme, presumably designed for his benefit, and a sacrifice to unwise Government interference.

Shand said that for any scheme to succeed the Government had to take the planters into its confidence, because it was they who knew the habits and prejudices of the workers, and they were as anxious as the Government, or anyone else, about the health of the workers.[45]

While the planters were dissatisfied with the Ordinance, Dr. Coghill was dissatisfied over the large number of workers who were dying without even being seen by a medical officer. Coghill prepared a report which gave a detailed breakdown of the districts which showed the numbers of deaths and those who had died without medical attention. Of a total of 2,646 deaths, 1,554 workers had died without being seen by a doctor. Coghill stated that in almost every such case the explanation of the Medical Officer had been "Not seen, because not reported". Coghill also stated that the returns of births and deaths submitted by the Superintendents were "utterly unreliable".(46)

The hospitals constructed for sick workers were in many cases nothing more than wattle and daub sheds with roofs made of thatched coconut leaves and Coghill was at the receiving end of complaints from the doctors in charge. In 1879 Dr. J.R. Vanderhoeven, the Ceylonese doctor in charge of the hospital at Matale East, said it contained just three rooms, 15 feet by 12. The rooms were dark, leaky and very cold. "To keep out the cold raw wind the inmates have the doors closed and consequently have to sit in the dark. I have found the patients shivering and blue-black from cold", Dr. Vanderhoeven wrote.(47)

Dr.Gratiaen, a Ceylonese doctor in charge of the Gampola hospital, stated that patients were being brought to the hospital in a state of extreme emaciation and debility, and died within a few days. The only food they could take was rice well boiled as a **cunji** (gruel) and no amount of medicine, attention, or nourishment could save them.(48)

Dr. P.J. Lawrence of Hunasgiriya said the existing facilities should be described not as "medical aid", but as "medical want". Dr. Coghill in his own comments stated that stout English blankets should be provided for the patients. "It is cruelty not to do so", he wrote, "and it is not more expensive in the long run than the wretched useless cumbles which are now used".(49)

Meanwhile a five-member Committee with F. B. Templer, a civil servant as Chairman, and C. J. R. Le Mesurier, another civil servant as Secretary, had been appointed to review the working of the Medical Wants Ordinance. The Committee noted that there had been no review of the working of the Ordinance since Dr. Coghill had submitted his views in 1875, and that there had been strong criticism of the Ordinance in both official and unofficial quarters in 1876 and 1877. The Committee stated that the strongest criticism of the Ordinance had been by the Planters' Association which had passed a resolution asking the Government to remodel the Ordinance as it was "costly and vexatious to ratepayers, and a source of increased disease and death among the Indian labourers for whose special benefit it had been framed". The Committee stated that the difficulties in the way of formulating any scheme that would satisfy all parties were insurmountable. "The requirements of the several coffee districts," it stated, "are so many and so conflicting; the caste prejudices of the coolies are so strong; and both master and servant are so intolerant of interference between them; the difficulty in obtaining tried and efficient medical men is so great; and lastly the cost of any really effective scheme is so prohibitive, that it would seem next to impossible to suggest any course which would at the same time meet the wishes of those immediately concerned by it, and yet be so comprehensive as to meet all requirements."

The Committee stated that the Medical Wants Ordinance had failed because it had been introduced prematurely. Medical assistants and dispensers had not been obtained, and the machinery for carrying out the implementation of the Ordinance had not been provided. The Ordinance had been intended to supplement the voluntary system, then in operation, but those entrusted with the care of the workers felt that they were to be relieved of their responsibilities. In the case of the workers they found that they were not to be treated in their own lines, as before, but were liable to be sent to hospital. They therefore concealed their illnesses until they were beyond treatment and cure.

The Committee recommended (a) that the coffee districts be divided into medical districts; (b) that existing districts should be rearranged by a Committee of the Planters' Association; (c) that each district be given the option of being brought under a voluntary scheme, or of being brought under the Government, in which case the Government would fix minimum rates of assessment.

Commenting on a suggestion made by Dr. Kynsey that there should be screening of workers before they were allowed into the country, the Committee stated that "The Indian Government would very probably not permit the rejection of the sick and the feeble at Indian ports; it would interfere with the freedom of the coolie by compelling him to go to hospital when sick, and it would thereby perhaps endanger the free flow of immigration into the Island; while its great expense is prohibitive".(50)

In opening a session of the Legislative Council, Governor Longden said that of 65 witnesses who had appeared before the Committee, 30 thought that the Ordinance had operated more or less satisfactorily, while 35 felt that it was unsatisfactory. The medical witnesses had wanted the Government to undertake the entire responsibility for the health of the workers. The Committee had recommended a voluntary scheme which would however have safeguards to ensure the proper care of the workers. Longden said the fullest scope would be provided for voluntary action but means would be provided to supplement such voluntary services where necessary.(51)

In moving the repeal of the Ordinance on 26 November 1879 in the Legislative Council, the Colonial Secretary stated that the whole scheme had not worked very well. Estates had been divided on a geographical basis and if a river ran through an estate, access from one to another was difficult despite their contiguity. The scheme had been handicapped by a shortage of funds. The Committees had tried to build hospitals and bear monthly expenses out of incomes which left no balance for some items of annual expenditure. There were difficulties in the collection of the assessments and the planters did not take much interest in a scheme that was not their own. The Government had therefore decided to restore the voluntary principle and the Committees would be allowed to take the initiative of summoning meetings whenever necessary. Generally the Committees would function on their own and the Government which would undertake the collection of the assessment, would otherwise step in only when necessary.(52)

The planters who were opposed to any form of "interference" by the Government opposed the legislation even though it was a significant concession to them. R.B. Downall, the representative of the planters in the Council moved that the Bill be read nine months hence - a parliamentary tactic of expressing opposition. He said that although the Government had spent large sums of money it had very little to show. He said that if

Ramaswamy was asked for his views he would say that it had been for the benefit of the doctors. He said that one doctor had been on leave 10 months in the last 18 months. Downall also alleged that native owners had evaded coming under the scheme by dividing their estates into blocks of less than 10 acres each, and giving each block a different name, as estates under 10 acres were exempted from the scheme. He said that as a result out of a total estate population of about 360,000 estate workers only between 110,000 to 120,000 came under the scheme and he urged that provision should also be made for the others. Although a favourite joke among planters was how they had treated their workers with sauce, Downall claimed that a Government official had done precisely this. He said that when workers in a Government labour gang suffered from dysentery the officer in charge treated them with chlorodyne. When he asked for a fresh stock he was told that there was no financial estimate to provide him with more stocks. He therefore treated his sick workers with Worcester sauce with very good results. Amid laughter Downall said that if a planter had done such a thing it would have been reported to the Government and there would have been a great deal said about it.

Ponnambalam (later Sir) Ramanathan who had just succeeded Sir Muttu Coomara Swamy as the Tamil member in the Council, presented a very different picture of the situation in his speech. Ramanathan said there were 39 coffee districts with a total of 1,357 estates on which between 275,000 to 300,000 workers were employed. There were 21 medical districts with an average of 65 estates, and 15,000 workers. No doctor could look after 15,000 workers and as a result the doctors confined themselves to the Superintendent and his family. The "coolies" were left to die at the rate of 60 per 1,000 which was three times as much as the normal mortality.

Downall replied that the rate of mortality among workers in the Government Public Works Department was also 60 per 1,000. Downall was successful in his opposition to the Bill in that the Governor said that if he withdrew his motion about the Bill being considered in nine months' time, the Government would postpone consideration of it to another session. At the closing of the session the next day the Governor paid a tribute to the planters saying "On many estates I have seen with great satisfaction the care that is taken of the coolies".(53)

In the dying years of the coffee industry, as in those of its birth and growth, coffee workers continued to be "found dead" not only in the coffee districts and along the routes taken by them but also, in the last stages, even in the Western Province, and Colombo. The overwhelming majority were workers who had been turned out of the estates when they were too sick to work.

In 1878 the Planters' Association faced charges that its members were turning out sick workers "to die of starvation" from no less a person than the Colonial Secretary. On 14 January 1878 the Colonial Secretary wrote to the P.A. stating that the Inspector General of Police had produced daily reports of workers who had been found sick and destitute on the roads after they had been sent away from the estates. "In many instances, "the Secretary wrote," if the statements of the sufferers are correct, the coolies have been turned adrift by the kangani, when the kangani must have known that they were not in a fit condition to work, and that, unless speedily relieved, they must die of starvation". The Secretary stated that while some of the statements made by destitute workers may have

contained an element of exaggeration, reports of such action by the kanganis had also been received by the Government from the Principal Civil Medical Officer, Dr. Kynsey, the Assistant Government Agent at Matale, Williams, and the Secretary of the Friend-in-Need-Society at Kandy, Henry Byrde. The Colonial Secretary furnished the P.A. with extracts from reports received from Kynsey, Williams, and Byrde.

Kynsey had stated in his report that mortality among Malabars being admitted to the hospitals was "enormous". The workers had stated that when they fell ill they were forced to leave their estates by the Kangani. Kynsey suggested that Superintendents of estates should be made responsible for ensuring that their kanganis acted more humanely by directing the kanganis that no worker could be made to leave an estate without the knowledge of the Superintendent. Kynsey said he understood that if a Superintendent made inquiries about a missing worker the kangani's reply was that the worker concerned had left of his own free wish.

Williams, the A.G.A. at Matale, stated that many of those who were dying on the roads had come to Ceylon already enfeebled by famine and disease. Those who obtained employment soon broke down in their health and were then turned out by the kangani. Even in the case of those who had worked for some time their scanty savings, if any, were absorbed by deductions for rice and other advances. "They were set adrift to get back to India if they could; or to die on the way. This is the ever recurring story repeated in answer to inquiries made of these people," Williams wrote. Byrde stated that most of those who sought help at the F.I.N.S. were at "death's door". Their story invariably was that they had been ill for some time; been unable to get rice, and were then turned out by the kangani.

The Colonial Secretary stated that the Government was aware that there had been an exceptional excess in immigration in recent times, and the Government would try to provide work for those to whom employment could not be found on the estates. He said "it would be a matter of great regret, if the present system under which coolies are allowed to remain on estates without work, until on their discharge they not infrequently die on the roadside, or are removed in a moribund condition to the civil hospital, is allowed to continue". The Secretary stated that the remedy was in the hands of the planters and the Governor hoped the planters would co-operate in applying it. "All that is necessary," he stated, "is that the planters should keep themselves personally acquainted with the state and condition of all the labourers in their employment, and in the case of those who are sick, give timely notice to the district doctor and see that they are treated, or removed to hospital, while there is still a chance of saving their lives."

The P.A. in its reply stated that it was unfortunate that the new Governor (Longden) should have had such a grave charge against the planters presented to him so soon after his arrival in the Island. The Association stated that it would like to draw the Governor's attention to statements made by his predecessor (Gregory) "as to the care and attention that have always been paid by the planters to their workers," and added that the Governor would be able to satisfy himself personally on this score when he visited the estate areas. The P.A. stated that it had foreseen the distress that had arisen, and had warned the Government of problems that would arise when indifferent labour had to be replaced once the usual labour managed to get into the Island and offered its services.

The employment of inferior labour had involved serious loss and as the A.G.A. at Matale had pointed out it could not be expected that "owners of estates should continue for months to support useless individuals". On the question of whether workers were actually dying as a result of being turned out of the estates the Association stated that

> The Association whilst admitting that some cases of the existing distress may have been occasioned by the above cause yet feels sure that a large percentage of the immigrants in question have never really been entered on the roll of any estate but in the miserable condition in which they landed in the country some months ago, have been wandering about Matale, Kandy, and other towns begging an existence and trying to get out of a country many of them are not accustomed to, and have not succeeded in. The Association feels sure it will be borne out in stating that no old servant on any estate has received the treatment the Government has alluded to.(54)

In June in the same year C. A. Murray, the Assistant Government Agent at Nuwara Eliya, one of the coldest districts in the Island, who had been moved by the plight of destitute and dying workers, tried to interest the Planters' Association in homes of refuge he had established, but without success. Murray wrote to the P.A. that it was "truly piteous" to witness the condition of many workers in the district. He said that although Police patrols went round in search of workers in distress such work could only be carried out in daylight hours. In a period of three days, Police patrols setting out in the morning had come across the bodies of four workers who had died at night. "They were probably left in some boutique in the day time where they could not be seen by the patrols, and had struggled on by night to overtake their own gangs which have come on before and have dropped down and died in the attempt," Murray stated. Murray said he had opened two houses of refuge at Hakgala and Tahugala and appealed for blankets for the workers as he had seen some of them with only a piece of cloth around their shoulders.

The Secretary of the P.A. circulated copies of Murray's letter to the secretaries of the District Associations from whom it received a cold response. G. Wharton Brown of the Uda-Pusselawela Association, said that their funds did not permit them to send any donation to the A.G.A. of Nuwara Eliya for the purchase of blankets, and even if this was done it was in the nature of the workers "to take advantage of, and abuse, any benevolent scheme set on foot for their benefit". John Campbell of the Haputale District Association, stated that they could not supply blankets to workers whose names were not on the estate books considering "the heavy sums demanded by and advances, to kanganis for bringing the coolies over from India". Campbell said that while Murray deserved thanks for his humane endeavours it was quite likely that "of some of the coolies found dead, many have been on their way to, and not from the coast".(55)

H.S. Saunders, the Chairman of the P.A. met the Governor privately in this connexion, and referred to this interview at the next annual meeting of the Association. He said the Government could easily have ascertained from the workers in the hospitals the names of the estates from which they had allegedly been discharged. The estate proprietors could then have sent kanganis to identify the men, and no doubt satisfactory explanations would have been given either why the men left on their own, or had been discharged. No such action however had been taken. Saunders said he had told the Governor that the planters were bestowing their usual care and attention on their workers.

He was applauded when he said "In no colony, or in their homes even, are the coolies treated with more consideration than they are by the planters of Ceylon".[56]

Dr. Dias the officer in charge of the Civil Hospital at Kandy who shed light on the rate of mortality at this stage disclosed that of the total of 1,156 persons who had died at the Kandy hospital in 1878, 1,036 were Malabars. Dr. Dias stated that most of those coming to Ceylon had suffered in the Indian famine and were in a state of chronic starvation when they were brought to the hospital. Apart from the fatiguing journey to the estates many had also contracted malaria on their way to the estates. "If this happened on the road they were abandoned; if on the estate, they were sent away by the kanganis. When thus abandoned, or sent away, they had frequently to undergo acute starvation for varying periods, in some cases extending to as long as three days till they made their way to a hospital, or falling exhausted on the road, were carried into hospital by the Police." Dr. Dias stated that of the 1,306 Malabars who had died, 662 or 63.89%, were "persons from 20 to 40 years of age or in the prime of life".[57]

With such acute distress in the hill country many of the destitute persons found their way into Colombo and refugee camps were established in the city, and at Ragama, six miles north of Colombo. A Relief Committee was appointed and funds were collected to repatriate destitute persons to India after they had been given food and clothing. The Inspector General of Police, G.W.R. Campbell felt that the repatriation schemes savoured of unfair treatment. "What I doubt is the policy of letting the Indian Government think that while we derive from India the maximum benefit of its hundreds of thousands of coolies we throw back upon it the burden of the few hundreds who have broken down in our services." The Governor said he did not agree with Campbell's view and felt that the Indian Government would not object to the repatriation of a few persons at the expense of the Ceylon Government.[58]

In his **Administration Reports** Campbell stated that 607 persons had been "found dead" in 1878, and 353 in 1879. Of the 353, 19 bodies had decomposed to an extent that made it impossible to give the cause of death. The other 334 were "destitute Indian coolies; a large proportion of whom had been driven over by the Indian famine in a very impoverished condition". They were either on their way to the estates, or were leaving the estates after loss of employment. Owing to the influx of Indians in distress in Colombo, the Colonial Secretary set apart a building at Maligakande (in Maradana, Colombo), where destitute persons were provided with food, clothing and shelter until arrangements could be made to send them to India. In 1878, 465 Indians were enabled to return to India this way, and the Government increased the strength of the Police to round up destitute persons.[59] A second home for destitute Indians was then established at Ragama, and the Police were authorised to prosecute persons found wandering around Colombo as vagrants if they refused to be taken to Ragama.[60]

In 1880 Campbell reported that 316 persons were "found dead" and once again the majority were those who had "died of sickness on the wayside". Campbell then went on to make the extraordinary statement that death in sunny Ceylon was not such a dreadful business after all. "Death in Ceylon", he wrote, was "not so dreadful as it sounds in England where the atmosphere of an ordinary bedroom is less genial than the open air

throughout the greater portion of Ceylon". He said that the workers on their way back to India "slip painlessly out of life in the place where they have lain down to rest or sleep".[61]

Campbell had been in the British Army in India before he was appointed Inspector General of Police in Ceylon. He had been awarded the "Mutiny Medal" for his services as an Adjutant in the Gujerati Koli Corps in which he acquired a reputation for "great severity".[62]

A revised version of the Medical Ordinance which Shand had demanded should be postponed for nine months was finally tabled in the Legislative Council ten months later in October 1880 with the Colonial Secretary explaining the delay as being due to the need for consultation with all concerned. This Ordinance, No. 17 of 1880, was denounced even more vehemently by Shand and other planters than the earlier draft. "Faced with this Ordinance the planters showed their true colours as well as some unscrupulous opposition in argument," says Michael Roberts. The acreage assessment was abolished but in its place the Government introduced export levies of five cents on every hundred weight of coffee, tea, and cocoa, and 10 cts per cwt in the case of cinchona, Three years later the export duty on coffee, tea and cocoa was also raised to 10 cents per cwt. The planters maintained that the revenue needed for the scheme should come not from an export levy but from an import duty on rice.[63] The Government was against raising the necessary funds through an import duty on rice on the grounds that the estate workers consumed only one third of the rice imported, and that two-thirds of the population would therefore be paying to finance a health scheme for one-third of the population.[64] The planters maintained that the sanitary conditions among the estate workers compared favourably with those of any other section of the population and that an export levy on the products of the estates would adversely affect the agricultural interests of the country. They said the funds necessary for the Civil Medical Department should be met from general revenue to which the workers contributed.

Dr. Coghill's adverse comments on conditions on the estates were described by Shand and other members of the P.A. as "gross slander," and "a libel" on the planting community. Shand said it was necessary to place some of Coghill's remarks on record and read out the following extract from a report by Coghill;

> A cooly falls sick, works as long as his kangani can keep him at it (for the sake of the head money) then stays in the lines living on the by no means liberal charity of his friends, which is soon exhausted; he is then turned off the estate or left to starve and by accident he is found in a dying condition with the sloughing of the corneae from starvation, and he is at this stage sent to hospital where life is prolonged by food and stimulants for a few days.

Shand said he had read this extract only because it was likely to "exercise some influence beyond the Island". In Ceylon everyone from the Governor downwards knew that the planters had "at least the ordinary humanity and regard for their own interests," which the report indicated they lacked. "We know our interests which are identified with those of the coolies, and I am convinced that anyone who has had an opportunity of seeing the conditions of the coolies on the estates will not attach the slightest credence to what has been said," Shand declared. G.A. Talbot, a former Chairman of the P.A. said that "if they returned to the patriarchal system... the planters would take as much interest in their coolies and do everything they could as they had done before".[65]

In their opposition to the Ordinance the planters often stressed the importance of the contribution to the prosperity of the Island made by the workers and themselves. At a meeting on 28 December 1880, Shand said that "if it were not for the presence of the Tamil cooly, Ceylon would still be but a second-rate naval and military station". Referring to the argument that the estate workers were exempted from an annual poll tax of Rs. 1.50 cents used for the maintenance of roads, Shand said that it cost the workers much more than Rs. 1.50 cts. to come to Ceylon and very much more than six days of weary travel down the North Road before they reached the estates. (Those who could not pay the tax of Rs. 1.50 could commute by working six days on the roads) Shand said the estate workers contributed much more to the welfare of the country than the poll tax derived from the Sinhalese, and they had a right to demand equal rights. Another member, Arthur Young referred to the Governor personally and said it was necessary to remind him that "if not for Ramaswamy" he would still be in Demerera (where he had been Governor) and would not be receiving a salary of Rs. 80,000 annually. A.E. Wright described the Government as "imbecile". He said it had increased the salaries of officials by 20 per cent, when salaries of planters had been reduced 50 per cent, owing to the difficulties the coffee industry was facing. H.G. Mackenzie said they should carry their battle to the Home Parliament and should also consider requesting that Ceylon should once again be made a part of the Madras Presidency as it had been during the earliest years of British rule.(66)

In 1881 the Government considered the substitution of export duties with a levy on estates on the basis of the number of workers employed on each estate. The planters opposed this scheme as well. Shand said that under the proposed scheme they would have to submit monthly returns of the number of workers employed. "The system of inquisition proposed to be resorted to, is hardly compatible with a Christian country in the nineteenth century" he said.(67)

The Civil Medical Ordinance No. 17 of 1880, was amended by Ordinance No. 18 of 1881, despite opposition from the planters. The Colonial Office had been kept informed of the vitriolic comments on the Governor, and the Government, by Sir James Longden, and the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Kimberley, deplored the hostile and vehement criticisms of the Government by the planters. Commenting on the "threats" of the planters Kimberley, said "I think it is a serious matter when a class of Englishmen for whom a great deal has been done by the Government, and who are not called upon to discharge any new obligation, openly declare that they will do their best to evade and defy the law".(68) The planters carried on regardless.

At a meeting of the P.A. in February 1881 the planters accused the Government of oppression. "We now have the misfortune", Talbot said, "to be oppressed by a Government which appears not to be willing to give us any assistance at all. They don't admit the planting enterprise to be the backbone of the country. They seem to take a delight in mulcting us and sitting upon us at every chance".(69)

There were a number of changes in the Medical Ordinances and in the methods of financing them in the early eighties. Ordinance No 18 of 1881, was amended by Ordinance No 9 of 1882 which became operative on 1 January 1883. Under this Ordinance estates were grouped into districts each of which had a central hospital and

dispensary. In the employment of doctors, preference was given to those who could speak Tamil. In opening a session of the Legislative Council Longden said he hoped the Medical Department would recruit graduates of the Ceylon Medical College who not only knew Tamil but also understood "the manners, the feelings, and even the prejudices of the coolies..." (70)

The P.A. continued its campaign that the medical facilities in the hill country should be financed from general revenue and not through taxes on the producers of agricultural exports. The Government pointed out at this stage that while the cost of working the Medical Ordinance was Rs. 134,032.05 cts, the receipts from estates under all heads including the export duty only amounted to Rs. 30,021.33 cts. The loss of Rs. 104,010.72 cts. was met from general revenue. The number of estate workers treated at seven hospitals was 1,161, while the number of patients other than estate workers at these hospitals was 294, so that four-fifths of the expenditure was on estate workers. The planters however never missed any opportunity of criticising the Government both in serious, and humourous vein. In 1885 H.A. Gilbert told a meeting of the P.A. that he knew of a woman who was on the verge of childbirth but the doctor summoned diagnosed her case as "Pneumonia". Commenting on the paper work the Medical Ordinance involved, Gilbert said "We want Secretaries of estates, instead of Superintendents". George Wall, then Chairman of the P.A. once again described the Medical Aid Ordinance as "one of the grossest pieces of injustice ever practised upon a community," and said he had difficulty in speaking temperately about it. He said he would not find fault with members who used any expressions provided they were not unparliamentary. (71)

As late in the coffee era as in 1888, the Governor Sir Arthur Hamilton Gordon (1883-1890) told the Legislative Council that legislation for the medical care of the workers was not being implemented satisfactorily. Inspections were not being made; the provisions of the Ordinance were not being observed, and penalties for non-compliance with the provisions of the Ordinance were not being enforced. He said it might be more advisable to replace the special legislation for the coffee districts with legislation that would cover the entire island including the rural areas, which would include the estates. (72)

Official statistics towards the end of the century showed that as in the past the mortality among the estate workers was much higher than that of the rest of the population. In 1893 the District Mortality Commission headed by P.A. Templer recorded that between 1891 and 1893, the average mortality among estate labourers in hospitals was 20.87% which was double the death rate in hospitals generally, while the mortality rate among the mixed races (excluding the estate workers) was only 7.42%. As in the earliest years, the estate workers were still reluctant to go to hospitals and the Commission divided these reasons into the following; (a) Separation from friends; sometimes aggravated by the distance of the hospital from the estate; (b) Caste prejudice, especially with high caste persons refusing to eat food prepared by low caste persons; (c) Fear of dying in hospital. There was a notion that workers were sent to hospital when they were about to die; (d) the workers dislike of living in large, clean, well ventilated rooms, which were so unlike the conditions in the lines.

Witnesses before the Commission agreed that the high rate of mortality was due to admissions at a very late stage of disease. Most witnesses felt that the use of force in taking sick workers to hospital was unjustifiable. The Commission found that bowel diseases were the chief cause of mortality and that these were aggravated by ayurvedic treatment; failure to recognise illness at an early stage, and unwillingness to adopt dietary restrictions during treatment.

Witnesses before the Commission expressed different opinions on the ability of the estate workers to withstand disease. Dr. Gratiaen of Kandy felt that the Sinhalese had more stamina than the estate workers and were better able to resist disease. Dr. Carberry of Matale said he did not agree that the Sinhalese were hardier than the Indian Tamils. He said the Sinhalese had a better diet but were very susceptible to pain, and succumbed more readily to surgical operations Dr. Wijesekera of Gampola said that if a Sinhalese and an Indian Tamil went to hospital at the same stage of a disease, the Sinhalese had a better chance of recovery as he was constitutionally stronger than the Indian Tamil.(73)

The estate workers who came to Ceylon were all from the Madras district and studies in British Guiana showed that workers from Madras had a much higher mortality rate than those from Calcutta. This difference was attributed to the workers from Calcutta being of a higher caste than those from Madras and to the fact that those of the higher castes were more discriminating in their choice of food than those of the lower castes.(74)

EPILOGUE

'This epilogue is also an epitaph. The precise number - leave alone the names - of the Indian coffee workers who died in Ceylon will never be known. The approximations in the last three chapters of this book are, at best, informed estimates. The ghastly rate of mortality did not however presage the demise of the coffee industry. This, as seen in Chapter One, was due to leaf disease, and as verdant tea bushes grew where coffee trees had blossomed earlier, it was from the same reservoir of humanity in South India that the planters drew their labour.

I. H. Vanden Driesen has estimated that the South Indian Tamil community in Ceylon "numbered well over 200,000 persons by the end of the coffee era".[1] Demographic studies based on data from the decennial censuses which began in 1871, show that while the natural increase in population between 1871 and 1901 was 489,459, the migration increase was 676,106.[2] Those were the years in which the monoculture of tea replaced that of coffee.

As in everything in the history of a nation, there was both change and continuity. While tea replaced coffee as the country's main export, the plantation system with its ghettos of workers, and the plantation economy continued almost intact.

The slight improvement in the manner in which labour was treated, and in the living conditions of the tea workers, were due more to social and material progress, and less to a conscious, or deliberate, adoption of liberal or enlightened attitudes. These, and other aspects of the lives and deaths of the tea workers will be the subject of a sequel to this book on the tea workers in colonial Ceylon.

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CHJ.	Ceylon Historical Journal
CJHSS.	Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies
Despatches.	Correspondence between Governors of Ceylon and Secretaries of State for the Colonies in London
JRAS.	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Sri Lanka)
PPA.	Proceedings of the Planters' Association. Published annually from 1855
SLNA.	Sri Lanka National Archives
SP.	Sessional Paper

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The cruelties inflicted on workers on plantations from Java to Alabama, or from Cuba to Australia, defy summary. In every country in the world the history of the working class is awash with blood. How did the workers on the coffee plantations of Ceylon fare? ..... (Page 85)

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Allegan said "The Master took off the deceased's cloth and kicked him in the private parts. Deceased passed water and excrement".. Pilkington had then called the bungalow servants and told them, "This dog is shamming; remove him to the veranda and pour water on him"..... (Page 90)

* * * * * * * *

Death is the thick black streak that darkens the pages of this book. The coffee workers came to Ceylon with their chattels in the hope of escaping the grinding poverty in which they lived in South India, but for many of them-at times one in four- Ceylon became their charnel house. (Page XII)

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If history is delayed justice, then verdicts of "Guilty" have to be entered against most of the Governors of Ceylon in the coffee period; the kanganis, and the planters ..... (Page XII)

* * * * * * * *

Even nature was cruel to the coffee workers. Death rode in the frail craft in which they faced the hazards of the "Black water". Death was only a step behind the workers on the weary 150-mile walk from the hot and arid plains of the North Western Province of Ceylon to the cold and wet hillsides of the coffee estates. Death struck in the shape of a slithering snake in the undergrowth, or through the claws and jaws of a man-eating leopard .....(Page XIII)

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The statistics of the shortage of women begin to bleed when the problems that flowed from it are considered. Prostitution; venereal disease, and infanticide were the chief consequences of the lack of women (Page 97)

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